

CASE STUDY: THE IMPACT OF THE MIDDLE SEPIK RIVER PEOPLE'S CULTURAL PRACTICES AND SPIRIT- WORSHIP ON THEIR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Melanesian churches today lack genuine Christian worship, conducive for the presence and power of God to be manifested among His people, to transform lives, and to grant physical and spiritual blessings to the church.¹ The absence of the power of God brings adverse effects, which are evident in the behavioural problems in the attitudes and character traits of church members. This absence of the power of God results in nominalism, which, in turn, produces conflicts that churches face, resulting in disunity, disloyalty, and unfaithfulness to God and the church.

The author specifically dwells on his people group called the Iatmul language-speaking people, as a case study on their culture and worship of spirits.² Their cultural practices, in the worship of spirits, bear a

¹ "The Melanesians are dark skinned, frizzy-haired people, who live on Pacific Islands to the north and northeast of Australia. Together with the Papuans, they form the Oceanic Negroid division of humankind. The Melanesians live in part of coastal New Guinea, especially in the Southeast, and in most of the Solomon Islands, the New Herbrides, New Caledonia, and Fiji", *The World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago IL: Field Enterprise Educational Corporation, 1976), p. 656.

² Iatmul is the largest tribal group, and it has the greatest cultural influence among the people of the middle Sepik River area in Papua New Guinea. The Iatmuls are made up of 36 villages, divided into three groups by dialect and location: Iatmul Nyaula, Iatmul

negative effect on their Christian worship; and they may be representative of many related cultural practices throughout Papua New Guinea and the rest of Melanesia.

There are four sections in this article. The first section is about cultural practices. The second section is on spirit worship. While the third section deals with the negative effects on Christian worship. The fourth section dwells on biblical and Christian worship. The article concludes with a critique and recommendation. Before discussing the first point of this article, it is appropriate to define culture.

DEFINITION OF CULTURE

“Culture is a total human pattern of lifestyle that man adopts within a given society, whether rural, urban, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. It includes man’s outlook on life’s spiritual values, social institutions, customs, languages, and lifestyles.”³ What people believe, and hold onto as absolutes, come from powerful influences within the cultures and societies in which they live, from the crises they experience, and from heredity.⁴ These factors shape a person’s behaviour and responses to certain situations and circumstances in life, as dictated by his worldview.⁵

Palimbeis, and Iatmul Sawos. They are strategically located, according to their geographical, migrational links, and dialect groups. The Iatmul tribe is under the Wosera Gawi District. The Iatmul language-speaking people are dwellers in the Middle Sepik River. As referred to by ethnographer Gewertz Deborah, “the Iatmul dominate other societies of the region, much as the river does topography. They are the headhunters described by explorers and missionaries as fierce, proud, and treacherous, and regard themselves as the first people of the Sepik”, Dedorah B. Gewertz, *Sepik River Societies* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 8-9.

³ Robin Keeley, et al, ed., *Lion Handbook of Christian Belief* (Tring UK: Lion Publishing, 1988), p. 30.

⁴ Heredity means inheritance of chieftain status, through matrilineal and materiel land rights, and names from the father or uncles varying from societies. It may also mean passing on of physical or mental characteristics from biological parent to child. Keeley, et al, eds, *Lion Handbook of Christian Belief*, p. 31.

⁵ Noebel defines “worldview” as any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God and the world. Thus, it is a way of viewing or interpreting all of reality. It is an interpretive framework, through which, or by which, one makes sense of the data of life and the

The first section discusses the cultural philosophies and practices of the Iatmul.

CULTURAL PRACTICES

Three major areas characterise the mental, physical, and emotional approaches in the attitude of an Iatmul toward circumstances and situations in life. The first is the concept of big-man mentality, the second is the *wantok* system, and the third is the payback system.

BIG-MAN LEADERSHIP OF IATMUL

Definition

Casper To Vaninara describes a Melanesian big man as one who has personal power, becoming a man of renown, a generous man, and a central figure, and not a chief, who inherits his position by right of birth.⁶ In Iatmul culture, however, one can achieve big-man status through hard work, or from heredity.

Practice

Firstly, big-man status in Iatmul is acquired through heredity. The system is not hierarchical, like the Polynesians; nevertheless, a son of the clan leader is identified as the next big man. The son of the big man in the clan gains recognition and automatic inheritance of wealth, power, and status. He does not have to work hard, or possess any special qualities, to gain recognition; he gains the title through inheritance. He assumes clan and tribal leadership responsibilities in physical and spiritual matters. These involve settling social, moral, and spiritual conflicts within the community, and between tribes.

John Paul Chao describes heredity in Papua New Guinea as minority tribal practices that have developed social and political ranking in a number of tribal groups in the coastal areas. These include Mekeo,

world. David Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religions Worldviews of our Day and the Search for Truth*. (Eugene OR: Harvest House, 1994), p. 8.

⁶ Casper To Vaninara, "Living Theology in Melanesia: The Big Man Aspect", in *Point* 8 (1985), p. 143.

Orokolo, Purari, Koita, and Motuans, the Manam of Madang, and the Wageo and Murik of Sepik Province. Moreover, the Trobriand Islanders and the Kalauna of Goodenough Island in Milne Bay Province, the Arawe of East New Britain Province, a few coastal groups of New Ireland Province and North Solomons Province.⁷

However, Iatmuls do not practise hierarchical leadership, led by a chief, like the others in coastal areas. The Iatmul believe that, in practice, heredity attributes much to a person's behaviour. The use of the pidgin language phrase *em stap long blut* (it is all in the blood) best describes things they believe are passed from father to son. For instance, if the father was a cheater, a thief, or a womaniser, then the son becomes the same. In this culture, blame for much of the bad things a person does is attributed to factors relating to heredity.

Secondly, an Iatmul acquires big-man status through hard work, and the ability to lead others in organising village activities and settling disputes. They also compete in tribal warfare, and the use of sorcery and magical powers, in demonstration of superiority over neighbouring tribes. Thus, the tussle for identity as a big man has a price to pay, in constant warfare, and killing by magic. You must kill to be a big man, or be killed instead.

On the other hand, in the Taute and Bun cultures of Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea, the aspect of a big man is quite different altogether. Their emphasis is on social equality, and not allowing a particular individual or clan to be elevated over others in wealth and power.⁸ Moreover, the Banaro and the Ilahita Arapesh cultures of Sepik Province practise leadership led by a council of elders instead of a big-man leadership.⁹

⁷ John Paul Chao, "Leadership: Hereditary Leadership in Melanesia", in *Point 5* (1984), p. 128.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁹ Chao, "Leadership", p. 133.

In the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, one achieves big-man status through hard work and personal skills, which attract followers among his kinsmen and neighbouring groups. An aspiring big man successfully organises activities in tribal warfare and village ceremonies. He is gifted in public speaking, and in other important skills that enable him to become a big man.¹⁰ The position and status held is only temporary, because there is the possibility of another rising to the position, when one fails to maintain wealth, power, and recognition of status, or if one falls from favour with the community. On the other hand, heredity leadership is transferable to the next of kin, to the son of the deceased, or brother.

The most common form of political leadership in Melanesia is the big man. There is no fixed political office. However, few men maintain heredity status for a big-man leadership. Most big men are recognised through their personal success in acquired wealth and mastered skills. The practice of being a big man impacts the Iatmul culture, as does the *wantok* system.

WANTOK SYSTEM

This section discusses the definition, shortcomings, and reciprocity within the *wantok* system.

Definition

Wantok, in the Papua New Guinea Pidgin language, means “one talk”. Mary MacDonald defines the *wantok* system as, “the bond of people, speaking the same language, belonging to one tribe, and sharing common values”.¹¹ Bartle defines the *wantok* system as the “Melanesian insurance and social security system that one invests in and profits, in a time of need”.¹² In other words, the system becomes an insurance policy, and a security system, creating open dialogue, obligating the other for

¹⁰ Neville Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of PNG*, Point 29 (2005), p. 30.

¹¹ Mary MacDonald, “Melanesian Communities: Past and Present”, in *Point* 5 (1984), p. 220.

¹² *Ibid.*

return favours when the need arises. Therefore, *wantoks* stick together, sharing mutual respect, trust, and desires for meaningful relationships, and a sense of belonging.

Practice

Wantoks depend on one another for protection from enemy attacks, and in the needs of daily life. The *wantok* system, in a practical sense, is a reliable and trustworthy concept. Nevertheless, the *wantok* system has two sides to it. On one hand, it is beneficial to the Iatmul people. Negatively, it encourages corruption and nepotism among Iatmuls. The *wantok* system has its practical negative effects when someone takes advantage of the system, in favour of their *wantoks*, and neglects his responsibilities to church, government, and country, as a whole.

The obligation to assist a *wantok* becomes a priority before obligations and loyalty of service to any organisation. For instance, if a *wantok* asks to use a government-owned vehicle for personal reasons, one is culturally expected to allow him to do so. This causes corruption, a major problem in Papua New Guinea.¹³ Some people use the *wantok* system to gain support from others to increase their personal power and big-man status. The *wantok* system also incorporates the mentality of giving and receiving.

GIVE-AND-RECEIVE MENTALITY

Definition

Giving and receiving is a two-way system, whereby one is culturally obligated to return a favour. These favours include giving of material things, assistance in work, defending another, supporting and sponsoring one another's interest. Thus, it is an important concept and aspect of life for an Iatmul as a Melanesian.

Bartle described Melanesian life as governed by the theme of "reciprocity". Giving and receiving provides equality and harmony in

¹³ Kevin Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions* (Brisbane Qld: Harvest Publications, 1986), p. 107.

life: a demonstration of an exchange partnership between two peoples or groups. The relationship between the two parties is strengthened through the exchange of goods given and received. The system of reciprocity is further seen as “economics” in Melanesian society, where the giving and receiving becomes a form of trade. The sharing of surplus items becomes an investment to cash-in in time of need in the future.¹⁴

Practice

Iatmuls give and receive, as a way of preserving surplus food. Giving to a *wantok* leads, in turn, to receiving from that *wantok*. The system serves as security and investment for future benefit.¹⁵ For example, a Melanesian, given a plate of food, is obligated to return the plate with food at some point. It is embarrassing to return an empty plate; thus, it has become an ethical principle in practice. Not only is the *wantok* system influential in Iatmul life, but also is the practice of payback.

PAYBACK SYSTEM

Definition

Payback is based on the attitude of revenge in Iatmul culture – the philosophy of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth – a part of human nature practised to its extremes. Bartle explains payback in Papua New Guinea traditionally as a law, or a system, which functions as a control. It operates as an equalising factor to prevent one tribe from dominating others. In other words, it creates fear of retaliation in the event of inflicting pain and suffering to others. The system balances the tendency of tribal groups to dominate others.¹⁶

Practices

Payback, in practice, is defending one another, and, if needed, dying for the cause. Culturally-bound obligations are to defend the pride of the tribe, fight for superiority, and prove dominance. It is standing up for

¹⁴ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

one another in good times and bad times – a commitment, trust, and dependence, expected from an ideal Iatmul.

The aspect of payback killings involving tribal fights in Papua New Guinea varies from coastal areas to the highlands. Iatmul, living in the coastal areas, involve payback killing, through magical powers, sorcery, and witchcraft, and, to a lesser degree, confrontation in a physical battle. However, in the highland's culture, it involves brutal killing and cold-blooded murder in tribal warfare. The payback system hampers physical, spiritual, and social development of the lives of people. The payback mentality, and the *wantok* system, dictate actions toward physical, emotional, and spiritual encounters experienced in life, as does spirit-worship.

SPIRIT-WORSHIP

Iatmuls worship spirits to pay homage for favours shown, and for reconciliation and redemption. They faithfully worship spirits, and are bound by traditional rules, beliefs, and practices that govern community and relational activities of life. Iatmuls – surrounded by spirits, witchcraft, curses, magic, and other supernatural forces – are obligated to respond positively to the hostility of spirits. Therefore, Iatmuls offer sacrifices, in the form of rituals and celebrations of worship, to propitiate and honour spirits.¹⁷ Marilyn Rowsome states that anyone trying to understand the Melanesian mind must think of spirits.¹⁸ This is true, because all aspects of Iatmul life involve spirits.

Iatmul, as animists, worship spirits, believe in dreams and visions, and have complete faith in what the spirits can do. The practice of spirit worship is a lifestyle, and a part of everyday activity. Magical words are uttered for guidance, assistance for a good catch, and on a hunting and fishing trip, for a good yield of crops, and for protection during travels

¹⁷ “Propitiation is the act of atoning for sin or wrongdoing (especially appeasing a deity)”, *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, 4th edn, s.v. “circular”.

¹⁸ Marilyn Rowsome, “Spiritual Powers in Paul's Writings: an Adequate View for Mission in Melanesia”, *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-2 (1993), pp.37.63.

through enemy territories. Mary MacDonald describes magic, involving sorcery and healing, as symbols relating beliefs and rituals as a quest for a rich and abundant life for Melanesians. It is the forging of symbolic links between different experiences of human beings that bring significance in life.¹⁹ As a result, Iatmul's every daily activity of life is spirit-driven and magic-orientated.

The spirits they worship have spiritual hierarchies and well-organised structures. Each clan has its own head spirit (*Sugundimi Wagen*). The head spirit is supreme over all, and governs the spiritual affairs of the clan. The chief magician represents the physical involvement. There are two aspects of the worship of spirits, which are discussed next. The first is the category of spirit personalities, and the second is the practice of spirit worship.

CATEGORIES OF SPIRIT PERSONALITIES

There are three categories of spirits: the head spirit (*Sugundimi Wagen*), the ancestor spirits (*Niaik Gwaark*), and a high god (*Nyagonduma*). Lesser spirits also exist (refer to diagrams in Appendix One and Appendix Two). David Burnett describes the lesser spirits as having greater and lesser powers, bound up with human experiences. These spirits are either powerful spirits, or relatively insignificant spirits of the forest, river, or field, who may cause nuisance to humans.²⁰

Head Spirit (Sugundimi Wagen)

The head spirit, *Sugundimi Wagen*, governs the spiritual affairs of each clan, with assistance from the chief magician. This spirit assumes two roles, centralised among the clans. Firstly, he employs elemental spirits, situated in different geographical locations. Secondly, he controls the clan, and demands sacrifices, for the breaking of ethical laws in the clan.

¹⁹ Mary MacDonald, *Symbols of Life: An Interpretation of Magic* (Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1985), p. 8.

²⁰ David Burnett, *The World of Spirits* (London UK: Monarch Publications, 2000), p. 37.

Sugundimi Wagen employs and oversees elemental spirits operating with various titles, yet under his control. Three elemental spirits are the river spirit, *Wanjimauk*, the jungle spirit, *Wunjumbu*, and sky spirit, *Sigundimi Niawi*.²¹ Bartle describes elemental spirits as, “spirits of nature that inhabit trees, streams, rivers, mountains, caves, and swamps. These spirits are generally referred to as evil, and easily offended”.²² Iatmuls obey taboos to avoid angering these spirits.²³ Thus, in the village, bush, or river, Iatmuls are careful not to break taboos in relation to these spirits.

The river spirit, called *Masalai* in Papua New Guinea Pidgin, dwells mainly in the rivers, lakes, and sea, but has influence over rocks, and some areas of the land. This spirit rules the inhabitants of the river, and manifests itself in the form of an alligator and snake – varying by geographical locations.

The jungle spirit, *Wunjumbu*, is thought to live in tree houses, invisible to human eyes. Shrubs and bush ropes – thick and crowded on trees in nearby bushes – are believed to house the spirit.²⁴

The sky spirit, *Sugundimi Niawi*, governs the air – as far up as the black clouds – and controls the weather. When heavy rain and high flooding is experienced, this spirit is called upon to bring calm and normalcy.

²¹ Sherman described these spirits as principalities within the demonic kingdom referred to as territorial spirits. The word “principality” has two parts: “prince”, a leader with a title, and the suffix “pality”, which has to do with both geography and demography. Geography is the study of land areas, and demography is the study of how people are grouped in societies. The term “principalities” reveals a most significant aspect of Satan’s approach to planet earth, deploying his troops (demons) according to a world map. Dean Sherman, *Spiritual Warfare: How to Live in Victory and Retake the Land* (Seattle WA: YWAM Publishing, 1995), p. 101.

²² Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, pp. 42-43.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The Iatmul hold myths about this spirit marrying and having human children. It is normal practice for the magicians from clans of Iatmul to call upon these spirits to mobilise and assist in tribal warfare. If adequate help is not received, it is because of some unsettled matters, seen as barriers in the relationship between the spirits and the clan concerned.

Therefore, Iatmul worship different spirit personalities, according to functional roles played, and titles held, in the spiritual hierarchy. Each spirit is responsible to relate to man, as seen fit, according to traditional laws practised.

The head spirit, *Sugundimi Wagen*, demands sacrifices of pigs and chickens to propitiate for broken taboos. The spirit causes people to fall ill, even killing people, if adequate sacrifices are not offered. Therefore, adherence to his demands is very important, thus maintaining a relationship and open communication channels. The worship and relationship with *Sugundimi Wagen* is as equally important as the worship of ancestor spirits (*Niaik Gwaark*).

Ancestor Spirits (Niaik Gwaark)

Bartle describes the ancestor spirits, “as the remembered dead, sometimes referred to as the living dead, ever present among the living, and a part of the clan”.²⁵ Iatmul believe that ancestor spirits are with them, and that they whisper in communication, as they go about everyday activities. Most of the successes and failures of life are believed to be results of the anger or goodness of ancestor spirits. When an Iatmul kills a pig, spears a crocodile, catches many fish, or gathers a good harvest, he attributes it to the goodness of ancestor spirits.

In protection against invading hostile spirits, Iatmuls keep substances of magical leaves and bones of ancestors in the house roofs, and buried in front, and under the stairs, of the houses, for protection, to safeguard lives. They have great faith in these substances as reliable sources for warning and protection from enemy attacks and curses.²⁶ The *Sugundimi Wagen* and *Niaik Gwaark* spirits relate and interact with humans, while the higher god spirit does not.

²⁵ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 42.

²⁶ Sikin Kundambuk, Iatmul tribe, Kandinge village, Headman Ghama clan, Wosera Gawi District, Wewak, East Sepik Province. Interview by author, January 13, 2006.

Higher God (Nyagonduma)

The belief in a higher god is an area that is untouched, and held sacred, by Iatmuls.²⁷ The name *Nyagonduma* means “sun god”. *Nya* refers to the sun, and *gonduma* is a person or god responsible for controlling the objects in outer space. Unlike the *Ande Yagl* of the Kuman, and *Neno kande* of the Simbu, who relate to man, this spirit isolates itself from human activities.²⁸

Nyagonduma is different from others, in nature and characteristics. This spirit is responsible to bring light upon the earth, and is described as a clean and righteous spirit, without fault against man. Not much is known about direct sacrifices offered to this spirit, because of the sacredness of things forbidden to public knowledge.²⁹

Different tribal groups within Iatmul hold creation myths, regarding the birth of this high god. Iatmuls believe that, in the beginning, before the creation of the world, there was a primal sea with no living creatures. The first creature that appeared was the primal crocodile. This crocodile sprang up from the bottom of the sea, causing the sea surface to foam. A little piece of earth formed as the water turned, going around in a circle.³⁰ A dog spirit, *Koruimbangh*, made the earth bigger by running around until an opening appeared, from which all living creatures, including the first human beings, came tumbling out. The crocodile then opened its mouth wide, causing the jaw to split into two pieces. The lower jaw fell, and became the earth, and the upper jaw became the sky.³¹

When the earth had originated, there also came a female snake called *Ndumagwanimbhk*. From her urine arose her first son *Nyagonduma*,

²⁷ It is sacred, because life is at stake, should others know about secret and sacred things, as discussed later in the Covenant-Orientated section.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁹ Iatmul tribe, Simark clan headman James Gawi of Kandinge village, interview by author, January 11, 2006.

³⁰ Jurg Wassmann, *The Song of the Flying Fox* (Boroko PNG: National research Institute, 1991), pp. 83-85.

³¹ *Ibid.*

also referred to as the sun. The mother spirit, *Ndumagwanimbhk*, represents a particular snake in the swamps of the Iatmul, often adored, and worshipped for her part in the birth of her son, responsible for the rulership of outer space.³² Not only is the character of Iatmul patterned and shaped by the worship of spirits, but there are also practices of, and reasons for, spirit worship.

PRACTICES AND REASONS

Iatmuls have lived to witness the devastations caused by natural disasters, accidents, sickness, and death – thought to be the result of their failure to please the gods. Therefore, they feel obligated to appease the spirits for peace and resolution of misfortune. The Iatmuls, consequently, have developed practices of worship and sacrifices.³³ The worship of spirits is discussed in the following two sections. In the first, worship is event-orientated, while in the second, worship is covenant-orientated.

Event-Oriented

In event-orientated worship, primal events are recited and sung in songs. There are two general reasons in event-orientated worship. Firstly, men relate to spirits, through events, according to the myths held. In one aspect, spirits are honoured and worshipped for their part in creation myths. For instance, in death ceremonies, the Iatmuls praise and worship the spirit *Kabaak*, the primal crocodile, and *Koruimbangh*, the dog involved in the formation of the earth. The death ceremonies include *Minjango*, a major ceremony, and *Kitagamak*, a minor one. These events orchestrate reconciliation with spirits, and propitiation of some unsettled matters. Sacrifices of animals and betel-nuts are offered during these ceremonies, and songs of praise and worship are offered.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Paul G. Hierbet, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1999), p. 143.

³⁴ Two kinds of songs are presented: *Sagi kundi* and *Grasak kundi*. The song *Sagi kundi* involves praise and worship. *Grasak kundi* is a lament, sung of the dead, and events of the past, sung with emotion and shedding of tears.

Moreover, there are several versions of songs that depict the role of these spirits in clearing the way for the clan founders on their journeys in primal times. In addition, the involvement of these two personalities in the existence of life and migration, and formation of tribal groups, are recited in other versions of songs.³⁵ These spirits' names and activities are memorised by heart, and sung in celebrations and commemorations, paying tribute and honour to spirits. Knotted cords are also used as timelines to recall and stimulate memories, to explain myths and events that took place many generations passed.³⁶ This is eternity written in the hearts of men, where people continue to recall and recite myths in songs, knotted cords, and totems.³⁷

Secondly, spirits are called upon in initiation and other ceremonial rituals. The skin-cutting ceremony of an Iatmul takes a period of three to four months. This involves the ritual of skin-cutting on men's backs and breasts. The scar resembles, or is totemic, to the skin of the primal crocodile, depicting creation myths. In this event, young men are taught myths and manhood, in preparation for marriage and adulthood.³⁸ Event-orientated worship leads to covenant-orientated worship, where spirits are honoured in worship.

Covenant-Oriented

All clans in this culture are responsible to different head spirits, each known by name. Myths of the spirits are maintained by succeeding

³⁵ Wassmann, *The Song of the Flying Fox*, p. 68.

³⁶ Knotted cord is made out of young shoots of trees known as *Hibiscus tileacus* (*mansi*). It is about six to eight metres long and three centimetres thick. Knots, small and large, are tied at regular intervals. Six to 22 knots always follow, into which a dry piece of betel-nut shell (*bangrah*) is woven. The first portion of the cord contains fewer small knots. Knotted cord is always owned by the important man of a group, who has inherited it directly from his father, or indirectly from his father, through his mother's brother.

³⁷ A totem is an emblem, symbol, or picture, consisting of an object, such as an animal or plant.

³⁸ Iatmul tribe headman, Godfried Saun, Kandinge village. Interview by writer, January 9, 2006.

generations.³⁹ Moreover, clans and families hold secret myths of past relationships, and obligations covenanted with spirits. Each clan has secret names about its origin, and it is forbidden these be told to others. The threat of annihilation by death of the extended families of one ancestor is imminent, in the event of the secret name made known to others. The death predicted is like cutting off the umbilical cord of existence of the complete family connection to life, thus causing the death of all.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is the responsibility of every clan leader to maintain secrecy, dialogue, and openness in offering sacrifices, to maintain the spirit relationship. The spirit, in return, provides protection from other hostile spirits that are a threat to one's existence. The Iatmul find this a law of ethics, in safeguarding one's salvation and redemption. Thus, covenantal relationship with the head spirits is an integral aspect of life, maintained throughout generations.

Thus far, the beliefs, activities, and practices that contribute to how Iatmuls react and respond in attitude and character toward certain situations and circumstances in life have been presented. Now, the next section focuses on the negative effects on Christian worship, produced through these beliefs and practices.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

There are two negative effects of the Iatmul cultural practices and spirit worship on Christian worship: nominalism and syncretism.

PROBLEM OF NOMINALISM

What is nominalism among Melanesian Christians? Bartle describes nominalism as practising religion without receiving nurturing and growth in discipleship. Christian values have not made any significant impact on the daily lives of these people.⁴¹ Nominalism is a big problem in the lives of Iatmul Christians, as observed in the author's village. The author, during his internship ministry in 2004, witnessed three crusade meetings,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World*, p. 71.

organised in his village. The guest speaker was the regional superintendent of the village church. Over 100 people were baptised in a single day. During the Christmas break the following year, the writer visited his village, only to find that most of those baptised had gone back to the world, and joined the lists of nominal Christians.

One may ask where the real problem lies for so-called Christians to quickly shift their allegiance from the God they so ceremoniously followed to their old way of life. There are three problem areas: the dynamic, animistic religion; the pragmatic religion; and the lack of nurturing and discipleship training after conversion. Darrell Whiteman writes that, “Melanesian contact with Europeans meant adopting religious rituals, which led to abundance in life with steel tools, luxury goods, and superior technology”.⁴² Thus, this change of perception, with high hopes, makes Melanesian and Iatmul religion dynamic, as discussed below.

Dynamic Religion

The first problem with Iatmuls becoming nominal Christians is that their traditional religion is dynamic, in the sense that it is open to change – although the outsider may view it as closed. Life has always been changing, from the adoption of Christian religion, and other forms of religious practices, to education and religious training. Kewai Kero supports the idea that Melanesians are open to change, trying out different rituals, as an important part, seen as a means to an end. In addition, their openness to change introduces other religions or cultic groups.⁴³ Iatmuls are just like the rest of the Melanesians, trying out different rituals, by different religious and cultic groups, in search of a better life, wealth, and experiences. The Iatmuls’ dynamic religion also integrates pragmatism that effects such a bearing on their attitude to Christian worship.

⁴² Darrell Whiteman, “Melanesian Religion: An Overview”, in *Point 6* (1984), p. 95.

⁴³ Kewai Kero, “Nominalism in Papua New Guinea”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 14-1 (1998), p. 58.

Pragmatic Religion

The second problem of nominalism is pragmatism. “Pragmatism is the attribute of accepting the facts of life and favouring practicality and literal truth.”⁴⁴ This describes a religion that is practical, bringing results. Iatmuls, coming out from an animistic background, constantly shift from one ritual to another, seeking a better life, called *gutpela sindaun* in the Papua New Guinea Pidgin language. Hence, the key element of Melanesian religion is pragmatism. This is a religion, which is always looking out for results and experiences.⁴⁵

Iatmuls shift allegiance and loyalty to God with the expectancy of results in material gains, or a quick answer to prayers. They want to see power encounters, and miraculous signs and wonders, in order to continue their allegiance and relationship with God. However, when such are not evident, they are posed with questions on what went wrong. This results in their leaving to try out other rituals, or returning to the old, thus becoming nominal in their Christian faith. When dealing with a dynamic and pragmatic religion, the problem here is lack of nurturing and discipleship training.

Lack of Nurturing and Discipleship Training

The third problem of nominalism is lack of nurturing and discipleship training. Iatmul Christians lack true knowledge in the Word of God. The local churches do not have properly-trained Bible teachers to teach and instruct converts on the principles of Christian living. In other words, there are no discipleship training classes conducted to nurture new converts, concerning their newfound faith. Consequently, this results in the lack of understanding of the principles of Christian living. Converts cannot tell the difference between truth and error, and always move about in confusion, seeking answers to their quest for an abundance of wealth in life. Therefore, Iatmuls become nominal Christians, because of their dynamic and pragmatic religious belief systems, and lack of nurturing and discipleship training for new converts. Nominalism influences lives

⁴⁴ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 4th edn, s.v. “circular”.

⁴⁵ Kero, “Nominalism”, p. 58.

of Christians in churches, in misdirected Christian worship, as much as syncretism.

PROBLEMS OF SYNCRETISM

Syncretism is the attempt to reconcile diverse or conflicting beliefs, or religious practices, into a unified system. It is a dynamic principle, done either intentionally, or unconscious movement of assimilation.⁴⁶ Syncretism in the Milne Bay Province, as Ledimo Edonie states, is Christians praying to God to cause the spirits to provide for them magical charms for hunting, fishing, and a good harvest, while professing the Christian faith.⁴⁷ However, in the Iatmul culture, syncretism is consulting the spirits of the dead, through mediums, while professing and practising Christian rituals. Two points are presented next. Firstly, a mixture of beliefs; and, secondly, use of cultural forms and symbols.

Mixture of Beliefs

Syncretism, in this sense, can mean two things: firstly, in the event of getting the Christian message across, missionaries, cross-cultural workers, and church planters assimilate Christian faith with culture, or other belief systems. Secondly, so-called Christians compromise their faith, lifestyles, and rituals with other belief systems.

Firstly, churches today face the universalising of the particulars of the Christian faith. This means mixing Christian faith with culture, or other belief systems, for the sake of peace, and the universal concept of many religious practices leading to one God.⁴⁸ Nicholls comments that, “universalising the particulars of the Christian faith . . . is the principle of reductionism. It attempts to regress from historical fact to ideal or timeless truths. The Jesus of history becomes the ideal cosmic Christ.”⁴⁹ Hence, a mixture of belief systems devalues the power of the gospel, and

⁴⁶ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualisation: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1978), p. 30.

⁴⁷ Ledimo Edonie, “Syncretism in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 16-2 (2000), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Nicholls, *Contextualisation*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

makes Christianity just one of the world religions. Thus, it puts God under a microscopic analysis, and confines a big God to something small. Men cannot analyse God and put Him under some scrutiny; God can only be adored and worshipped.

Secondly, Iatmul Christians compromise their faith with other religious belief systems. They consult mediums and other spirit powers to experience healing, when their faith in God fails to produce results.⁵⁰ In view of this practice, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou term syncretism as “split-level Christianity”. This is professing faith in Christ, but living lives, using traditional practices, because they do not find effective answers in the church to meet their problems of illness, misfortune, and fear of spirits.⁵¹ Others practise Christianity as high religion, but, in private, hide from the missionaries and pastors. They continue practising many of their traditional ways, appropriating beliefs and practices associated with animism.⁵²

Nicholls terms “the joining together of concepts and images at the depths of worldview and cosmology, and of moral and ethical values”, as theological syncretism. This involves theological concepts, assimilated into cultural practices, becoming more damaging to the Christian faith.⁵³ Thus, missionaries and evangelists unconsciously assimilate Christian faith with culture, in their enthusiasm and endeavours to convey the gospel of Jesus Christ, hence, falling into syncretism. The falling into syncretistic belief involves use of substances and forms of culture elaborated below.

Use of Cultural Forms and Symbols

Iatmuls use cultural forms and symbols as a means to bridge belief systems to complement Christian faith and worship. They use cultural

⁵⁰ One may be a church deacon or a church elder, but when a prayer for healing of cancer, or for deliverance of other demonic oppressions in the family fails, then other sources are consulted.

⁵¹ Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, pp. 90-91.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Nicholls, *Contextualisation*, p. 31.

elements, like *kundu* drums, *garamuts*, and bamboo flutes as instruments in worship. In addition, lyrics of songs, sung to spirits are used to compose songs to worship God. One may ask if it is right to use the instruments and lyrics consecrated to the worship of spirits for Christian worship? In answer to this, Nicholls suggests that the church, seeking to express its life in local cultural forms, faces the problem of cultural elements that are either evil or have evil associations.⁵⁴ Thus, elements that are false or evil cannot be absorbed into the Christian faith and worship without falling back into syncretism, a great danger to churches in all cultures.⁵⁵

Moreover, churches fall into the uncritical use of cultural symbols and practices, often resulting in the confusion of Christian and pagan belief practices.⁵⁶ Hence, those lacking the knowledge of the Word of God can easily turn to falsehood and cultism, and follow false religions. Therefore, certain elements of traditional forms and symbols that are evil, cursed, and demon possessed, require redemption and sanctification for use in Christian worship.⁵⁷ Next, the meaning of true worship is drawn from the worship practices in both the Old and New Testaments.

BIBLICAL AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

“Worship” is a noble word. The term comes from Anglo-Saxon “weorthscipe”, developed into worthship and then to worship. “It means ‘to attribute worth’ to an object”, or refers to an action of a man in expressing homage to God for His worthiness.⁵⁸ The *NIV New Bible Dictionary* describes worship as, “ascribing to His supreme worth, praise and worship”.⁵⁹ From a theological point of view, worship constitutes the gospel in motion. It is celebrating God’s great acts of salvation. In worship, God communicates to the worshipper His salvation and healing.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Theodoor Ahrens, “Grace and Reciprocity”, in *Point 26* (2002), p. 55.

⁵⁸ Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (London UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), p. 10.

⁵⁹ *NIV New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 1250.

The person then responds with faith, praise, prayer, thanksgiving, and a life of service.⁶⁰

Worship sets the gospel in motion, from Genesis to Revelation, and tells of the promise of salvation that God had made that He fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4-5).⁶¹ The next section outlines biblical truths regarding worship in the Old Testament, and the introduction of true Christian worship in the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

Five items will be presented on the Old Testament teachings. These include a brief history on worship, tabernacle and temple worship, false and true worship, and the results of God's presence.

Brief History on Worship

Men began worshipping God from the beginning of history. Adam and Eve had regular fellowship with their God in Eden (Gen 3:8). Cain and Abel gave the first clear act of worship before the time of Moses. They worshipped with the fruits of their labor as thanksgiving, and showing gratitude to their God.⁶² Seth's descendants called on the name of the Lord in worship (Gen 4:26). Noah built an altar to the Lord for a burnt offering (Gen 8:20). The Patriarchs erected altars and made sacrifices, wherever they settled, in their worship in thankfulness and appreciation of God's many blessings (Gen 8:20, 12:7-8).⁶³ God appeared to

⁶⁰ Robert Webber, *Worship in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 14.

⁶¹ All scripture quotations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

⁶² Cain brought his offering of fruits from the ground as a sacrifice and worship to God. Abel brought his offering from his flock, and of the fat thereof. God responded by accepting Abel's worship, and rejecting the offering of Cain (Gen 4:1-6). The important thing to notice is the response of God towards their worship, and God as the focal point and centrality of their worship. James Innell Packer, Merrill Chapin Tenney, and William White, eds, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 397.

⁶³ Jacob erected a stone monument, used as a pillow, setting it as a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. He called this place Bethel, or God's house, because there he met with God (Gen 28:18-22). Patriarchs also designated sacred trees and sacred wells

Abraham, when he stopped at the oak in Shechem, and he worshipped Him (Gen 12:6).⁶⁴

Tabernacle and Temple Worship

Moses inaugurated a new period in worship practices for the Israelites, in the plans he received for a new worship site, with an altar housed in a tent (Ex 27:1-3).⁶⁵ Tabernacle worship involved rituals, where animals were sacrificed for the atonement for sin (Lev 17:11; 23:27). Lawrence Boadt describes the tabernacle as a desert sanctuary, where God's presence dwelt among His people (Ex 25-28), and a meeting place of God with Moses and his elders (Num 10:24-30).⁶⁶ Hence, the presence of God in the tabernacle was evident, indicative by the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle (Ex 33:7-10).

False Worship

The Israelites worshipped the false gods of their neighbouring countries, when practising mixed marriages, and in disobedience to their God.⁶⁷

to remind themselves of what good things God had done for them at particular places and times in their lives (Gen 12:6, 35:4, Deut 11:30). The patriarchs practised the use of earthen and stone altars for sacrifice and worship, until God sanctioned these through Moses (Ex 20:24-26). God sanctioned a new kind of worship site, through Moses, with the plans and structural details of a new tabernacle for sacrifice and worship, where the presence of God dwelt. The key features in this worship were the sacrificial system, and specific patterns to be followed in the conduct of elements involved (Num 28-29). Packer, Tenney, and White, eds, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 397.

⁶⁴ "Abraham built a shrine at the oak of Mamre near Hebron (Gen 13:18), and at Ai (Gen 12:8). Still later, he planted a tamarisk tree near an altar in Beer-sheba (Gen 21:33). His son, Isaac, worshipped in the same place." Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York NY: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 266.

⁶⁵ Moses returned from Mount Sinai, not only with the ten commandments, but also the plan and structure of the kind of temple, in which God desired to dwell (Ex 27:1-3). God gave specific instructions to be followed, in the structural plans of worship, according to His revealed truths, and not plans and devices acceptably convenient to men.

⁶⁶ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 268.

⁶⁷ They worshipped Ashtoreth of Phoenicia and Baal, a false god of Phoenicia (Judg 2:13, 1 Sam 7:3; 31:10; 1 Kgs 11:33). In addition, they worshipped Baal of Peor and Chemosh, gods of the Moabites, and Dagon, the god of the Philistines, Packer, Tenney,

Israel worshipped images and other objects, including the golden calf Aaron had made (Ex 32:4; Deut 9:16-18; Ps 106:19). They worshipped heavenly bodies, in the form of teraphim, images, and household gods (Gen 31:19; Judg 17:5).⁶⁸

A. W. Tozer describes Cain's worship as false, because it was worship from an unregenerate heart without repentance; his sin was not atoned for before his sacrifice. He needed to experience cleansing by the blood of the lamb, before worship took place.⁶⁹ This speaks of the necessity of cleansing before worship in the lives of God's people. They failed miserably to worship God from the heart (Deut 6:4-5), because of sin, even though He kept reminding them (Is 29:13). Although Israel failed many times, and worshipped false gods, God still wanted to restore true worship among His people, by instituting events.

True Worship

True worship in the Old Testament meant offering the first fruits from Israel's harvest, presented before God (Deut 26:1-10). They ascribed to the Lord the glory due His name, brought offerings, and came before Him in worship (1 Chr 16:29).⁷⁰ Moreover, worship is an act of glorifying God; it fulfils the purpose for which man was created, an activity of eternal significance.⁷¹ Therefore, worship is a direct expression of man's ultimate purpose for living, to glorify God, and fully enjoy Him.⁷² God brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness, not only to

and White, eds, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville NY: Thomas Nelson, 1980), p. 680.

⁶⁸ *The NIV Thompson Chain-Reference Bible* (Indianapolis IN: B. B. Kirkbride, 1990), p. 1612.

⁶⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg PA: Christian Publications, 1961), p. 16.

⁷⁰ Packer, Tenney, and White, eds, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 399.

⁷¹ In Isaiah, God calls everyone by name, which He created for His glory (Is 43:6-7). Paul uses the same terminology, when he said those who first hoped in Christ have been appointed to live for the praise of His glory (Eph 1:12). Scripture is clear that God created humanity for the praise of His glory.

⁷² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1003.

worship Him, but also to bless them with the blessings He had promised to their ancestors.⁷³

Results of God's Presence

Finally, the presence of God meant four things to the Israelites: God's redemption, revelation, preservation, and judgment. Firstly, God, through Moses, redeemed Israel from their oppression and slavery in Egypt with awesome power and mighty acts. In addition, He delivered them from numerous threats and attacks from their enemies throughout their journey to Canaan (Ex 5:1-15:21).⁷⁴

Secondly, God revealed Himself through miraculous provisions, and mighty acts of deliverance. The revelation of God was through the symbols of the pillar of cloud, smoke, fire, and lightning. In addition, they heard the thunder, the voice of God, and felt the earthquake. God revealed Himself as a powerful and mighty God that they ought to fear and reverence Him (Ex 13:20-22; 24:9-18; 20:18-21).⁷⁵

Thirdly, God blessed them with manna and quail, in other words, He preserved them from thirst and dehydration (Ex 15:22-27), from hunger (Ex 16:1-36), from annihilation (Ex 1), and defeat by their enemies (Ex 17:8-16).⁷⁶

Fourthly, God's presence, for the Israelites, also meant judgment, when they fell into sins of idolatry and disobedience (Ex 32:7-10).⁷⁷ God's

⁷³ This was in fulfilment of a promise made to Abraham to give his descendants a land, a people, and a great nation (Gen 12:1-3).

⁷⁴ Dan Anderson, "Exodus, Redemption, and Revelation" (course manual, Banz: Christian Leaders' Training College, 2006), p. 14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Anderson, "Exodus, Redemption, and Revelation", p. 15.

⁷⁷ God's presence means blessings, and, at the same time, judgment, when disobedience and sin is evident in the lives of His people. Starting from Eden, when God walked in the cool of the evening, Adam and Eve hid, because they sinned (Gen 3:8-11). The presence of God meant strength to Samson the Nazirite (Judg 13), and sin meant departure of God's presence in his life, resulting in defeat and destruction (Judg

presence means blessings, and, at the same time, judgment, when disobedience and sin is evident in the lives of His people. Adam and Eve hid from the presence of God, when they realised that they were naked (Gen 3:8-11). Moreover, for Samson, the departure of God's presence in his life meant judgment, defeat, and destruction (Judg 16:20-21). David realised the implications of sin, and the departure of God's presence, when he prayed to God not to take cast him away from His presence, and taking away His Holy Spirit from him (Ps 51:10-11). The presence of God means judgment is swift, and punishment and the consequences follow.

God's presence, and the powerful acts in the Old Testament, all pointed to the reality and eternal presence, and mighty resurrection power of Christ Jesus, present today, through the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

The Old Testament covenant promises of priesthood, sacrifices, and temple worship were temporal, symbolic, and outward acts of rituals, or forms of worship. The new covenant then supersedes and fulfils the old, in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A new meaning to worship was instituted (John 4:24-25; Heb 9:11-15). Jesus introduced a new and living way to God (Heb 10:19-21; John 4:23-25). Three items of worship are discussed below: false worship, true worship, and the essence of God's presence.

False Worship

There are two characteristics of false worship. These are the problems of formalism, and a lifestyle of compromise. Firstly, formalism is merely outward form and lip service, seen from the lives of the Pharisees on part of their hypocritical, legalistic expectation of life, and enforcement of God's law on others, while their hearts were far away (Matt 15:7-9). Many today get involved with the businesses of life with displaced

16:20-21). In addition, Moses radiated God's glory (Gen 34:29-35), whilst for those disobedient, fear and trembling (1 Sam 5, 6).

priorities, as seen from the church in Ephesus that lost its first love (Rev 2:1-5). In addition, Paul warns of judgment for those who partake of the Lord's Supper without breaking free from sinful lives (1 Cor 11:28-30). Thus, God only accepts sacrifices of worship and praise, when hearts are right before Him (James 4:8, Ps 24:3-4).⁷⁸

Secondly, false worship is indicative in the lives of so-called Christians and churchgoers, with their lifestyles of compromise, sin, and immorality. Their indulgence in acts of a sinful nature and immorality (Gal 5:19-20) implies using the name of the Lord in vain (Ex 20:7). Consequently, it leads to disloyalty, unfaithfulness, and nominalism.⁷⁹ Rayburn states that all types of non-Christian worship are expressions of Satan's attempt to draw away worshippers from God.⁸⁰ This is because Satan desired, from the beginning of time, to be the object of worship, but failed to be like the most high God (Is 14:14). He even sought the worship of Jesus, and tempts Christians in the same area today (Matt 4:9). Therefore, it is necessary to understand true worship, and the object to which worship is directed.

True Christian Worship

Grudem observes that if genuine worship is lacking in churches, one should explore how to experience much more of the depth and riches of worship. Worship, he stated; "is a natural response of the believing heart to a clear awareness of God's presence".⁸¹ Thus, it should be a natural response of every Christian to worship God, as an expression of thanks for His love and mercy. Nevertheless, how can true worship be offered to God?

Jesus inaugurated a new kind of worship, in His statement to the Samaritan woman, that true worship is in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

⁷⁸ Packer, Tenney, and White, eds, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 400.

⁷⁹ *The NIV Full Life Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 680.

⁸⁰ Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 104.

⁸¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1011.

Two main elements are involved in the expressions of true worship, the worship of God in the “spirit”, and the worship of God in “truth”.

Firstly, the expression to “worship in the spirit”, has more than one thought conveyed by theologians. Some interpret it to mean worship in the realm of the spirit. Others say it is the worship of God by the human spirit communicating with the spirit of God, while others state worship to be through the Holy Spirit. David Peterson states that, “the primary reference in John 4:23-24 [to worship in the spirit] is not to human spirit, but to the Holy Spirit, who regenerates us, brings new life, and confirms us in the truth (cf. John 15:26-27; 16:13-35)”.⁸² However, Grudem says that worship of God is not in the spirit, but in the realm of the spirit, the involvement of physical bodies and minds in spiritual activities (Rom 12:1).⁸³ On the other hand, Rick Warren asserts worship in the spirit refers to the spirit of man, and not the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴

The author of this article agrees in principle with the three views expressed above. However, he understands all three to mean the same, where the worshipper worships God, whether through man’s spirit, God’s Spirit, or in the realm of the spirit. The important aspect of all views is that Christ is the central focus and the object of worship.

Worship in the spirit involves elements of man’s body, including soul and mind. The soul involves the emotions and will, and the mind involves the intellect, where man worships with the clear knowledge and understanding of God, expressing his heart (Ps 84:1-2). The Holy Spirit of God enables man to worship, with the use of the body as a living sacrifice, an act of spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). Man, a spirit being, sinful and self-centred, cannot worship God by his own effort (Eph 2:18;

⁸² David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1992), p. 99.

⁸³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1011.

⁸⁴ Warren further expanded that man is made in the image of God, a spirit being that resides in the body communicates with God’s Spirit. Thus, worship is man’s spirit responding to God’s Spirit, Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 101.

Rom 8:26). He needs the control and direction of the Holy Spirit to worship God in Spirit.⁸⁵ The presence and manifestation of the Holy Spirit is evident, through Christians exercising the spiritual gifts, entrusted by the Holy Spirit to edify the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7-12; Acts 2:42-43).⁸⁶

Secondly, worship in truth is accurate worship, by the revealed truth from the Bible, and not through men's own imaginations of God, through limited knowledge, which is idolatry. Men cannot worship God with physical effort, or by doing good works, like some religions, but with revealed truth from the Bible (Rom 8:26-27).

Robert Rayburn says that, just as Jesus declared He worshipped the Father in Spirit, through the third person of the Trinity, the same applies to worshipping the Father in Truth, through the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, who is the Truth (John 14:6). This means believing Christ, in the fullness of His being, and His work as the incarnate Son of God, both as the man, Jesus, and God's Anointed One, the Christ (John 1:1, 14).⁸⁷ Hence, worship in truth is Christ-centred, exalting His name; a worship based on the true knowledge of God, knowing God personally: His attributes and characteristics, and the acknowledgment of His worth, greatness, holiness, and awesomeness (Phil 3:3).⁸⁸ True worship is not something man invented, but, rather, it is the outpouring of his heart, as a

⁸⁵ The spirit and soul of man, as influenced by the Holy Spirit, worships God, and has communion with Him. Spiritual affections in fervent prayers, supplications, and thanksgivings, form the worship of an upright heart, in which God delights, and is glorified (John 4:24).

⁸⁶ *The NIV Full Life Study Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 680.

⁸⁷ Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship*, p. 112.

⁸⁸ Moreover, worship includes the elements of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, a new covenant Jesus made with His blood (1 Cor 11:23-26). In addition, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are sung in worship, and all seek the face of God in prayer, as worship, confession of sin, reading of scripture, as one vital element, and tithes and offerings as worship (Lev 27:30-31; Mal 3:8-10). The manifestation of the Holy Spirit adds uniqueness to the elements involved in true worship of God (Acts 2:42, 46, 47; 20:7, 11).

response, after a realisation of the attributes and character of God.⁸⁹ Tozer describes worship as a “lost jewel” that is missing in the church, requires searching, discovering and restoration. Worship is described as the “chief end of man, the very reason to have been created”.⁹⁰ Therefore, true worship is identifying and rediscovering the lost kind of jewel that is missing in the lives of individual Christians and churches today.

THE ESSENCE OF GOD’S PRESENCE

When true worship of God takes place in a church, two things are evident: the presence of God and the judgment of God. Firstly, when Christians truly worship God in Spirit and in Truth, Jesus promised His presence will be with them (Matt 18:20). True worshippers, with sincere faith, are promised their prayers answered, guidance of the Holy Spirit into all truth, and sanctification by His Word and Spirit (John 17:17-19). Hence, the boldness to proclaim Christ’s message (Acts 4:31).⁹¹ Therefore, in the presence of God, there is fullness of love, joy, and peace, forgiveness of sin, and upright living in serving Him (John 14:27; Rom 5:1; Gal 5:22). Seeing the essence, Christians should desire the presence of God in their lives.

Secondly, the power and presence of God means dealing with sin and judgment over the lives of people. The Holy Spirit convicts His people of sin, and unrighteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Sinners, present in the worship service, would be convicted of their sin during worship services (1 Cor 14:22-25).⁹² Consequently, the experiences in the death of 70 men of Beth Shemesh (1 Sam 6:19-20), the falling into pieces of the idol god Dagon, and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), are classic examples of God’s presence and dealings with sin in people’s lives destroying falsehood. Therefore, the presence and glory of God can

⁸⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1011.

⁹⁰ A. W. Tozer, *The Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church*, p. 5.

⁹¹ *The NIV Full Life Study Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 680.

⁹² *Ibid.*

either expose sin, or bring judgment, or spiritual blessings and prosperity to the church and individuals.

CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATION

This section analyses three points: including cultural practices, spirit-worship, and reasons for Christian worship, followed by a recommendation.

CULTURAL PRACTICES

The cultural practices of Iatmuls, with their worldview and lifestyle, must be transformed and translated into Christian principles and lifestyle. Cultural mentality and practice must never be allowed in worship and the attitude toward God. The practices of spirit-worship, dependency, and manipulation of spirits must not impact the attitude toward Christian worship. Today, many Iatmul and Melanesian Christians practise Christianity with a concept of worship in order to receive blessings from God, with the give-and-take mentality of culture. In addition, they worship and serve God to become rich and popular among their people, and to be recognised as a big man. Moreover, others worship God with the idea of manipulating God, as they do to the spirits. They pray to God with lists of demands that must be answered immediately, or they shift to try out other rituals to find immediate results. This is the very core of the problems in Iatmul culture, and in Melanesia, today.

What does the Bible say regarding these attitudes and approaches? The attitude of Iatmuls to worship should not be to receive blessings from God, because this is a selfish and self-centred attitude to worship. It is a drift toward formalism, where man keeps the outward form in wanting to worship God, but losing the meaning of true worship, because his heart, mind, and thoughts are far away (Is 29:13; Matt 15:7-9). Christians must forget the idea of worshipping God in order to get rich and popular. This, again, is a false kind of worship, because it involves self and pride, the main intent of the heart. The Bible states that God resists the proud heart, and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). He detests all those with proud hearts, and promises to punish them (Prov 16:5). Christians

should, instead of being proud, be willing to work in harmony (Rom 12:16), and practise love, giving God an acceptable worship (1 Cor 13:4). Moreover, man cannot manipulate God in whatever he does, with the intention of cheating Him, and then live a different kind of life. The Bible says a man reaps exactly what he sows (Gal 6:7); Malachi expresses a curse applicable to the one who cheats God (Mal 1:14).

Thus, we see that Christianity cannot be a faith, other than what the Bible reveals about it. Christians cannot exercise worship of God in the same manner as the traditional worship of spirits. Neither can one have a mixture of another religious faith with Christianity, which is syncretism. One must be very careful about the danger of syncretism, because it reduces God to the value and worth of a false god.

SPIRIT-WORSHIP

The Bible forbids consulting mediums, and having access to the spirit world, and the worship of spirits. Iatmul's ideas about well-being, misfortune, and evil must be transformed by clear biblical teachings, as much as their understanding of the nature of God. Abraham lived in his father's culture until God called him out and away from his tribe and father's household to a new place. There, God taught and transformed him to adapt to a new culture and lifestyle (Gen 12:1-3). Moreover, God transformed the worldview of the Israelites, in preparing them to enter the Promised Land, and later towards Christ's coming (Ex 20).⁹³

Therefore, under no circumstances should men consult the spirit world, whether out of fear, or by cultural practice. God wants all men to worship Him, not out of fear, obligation, or a duty, but out of a free will: showing love, gratitude, and appreciation, with hearts full of praise and thankfulness.

⁹³ Another factor is that God condemns the beliefs and practices of magic (Ex 9:11), witchcraft (1 Sam 15:23; Gal 5:20), and divination (Deut 18:10).

REASONS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Today, many Iatmul people, or Melanesian people, do not know the value of worship, and the importance of a relationship with God. Some confine worship to Sunday Services, where songs are sung, the scriptures are read, and other Christian rituals are conducted: where worship is attending fellowship, and being involved with spiritual activities. All these may be a part of worship: however, worship is more than this.

Iatmul Christians ought to know now that man was created to worship God (Eph 1:11-12; 1 Pet 2:5). The highest and greatest purpose for man is to be alive is to know God personally, and to worship Him. When men truly worship God they will come to discover the original purpose for being created, and the source of joy, fulfilment, and satisfaction (Rev 1:6; 4:11). One must take note that man's greatest and most important reason for living is to love God with their whole being, and worship Him only (Ex 25:3-5; Matt 4:10; 22:37-38).

Hence, worship is reverencing God's presence, committing oneself to His program, and acknowledging total dependency on Him. It is confessing sins, declaring God's power, and a sure hope and destiny in Him. Moreover, the perspective of worship should not be a matter for Sunday services only, but a lifestyle, whereby, everything one does must be seen as worship, because worship encompasses man's entire life. Man is instructed to offer their entire bodies as a living sacrifice, in an act of spiritual worship (Rom 12:1).

What is wrong with man in not worshipping God in the prescribed manner today? Sin is one factor, that is, man has become self-centred since the fall (Gen 3), and cannot worship God appropriately. Apart from the sin factor, and man being self-centred, he is attracted to idolatry. Man gives his time and devotion to other things of this world, which take the place of Christ in his heart. Moreover, man has the tendency to drift toward formalism, where he keeps the outward form of worship, yet not having any meaning to his actions (Is 29:13; 15:7-9). The first and second commandments instructed Israel not to have any other gods, or make graven images, but love God from their hearts, and worship Him

alone (Ex 20:1-6). Hence, humankind, with its various cultures, has violated these commandments, by worshipping idols with divided hearts and disobedient lifestyles, which are hostile to God's laws.

However, Christ came and restored lost worship, shifting man's attention back to a God-centred life (Eph 1:7-14; Gal 3:13-14). Therefore, man can now freely worship God, expressing in life the worth of God the creator. Hence, we must worship with a deep response of the heart in thanksgiving, praise, and adoration to God, rather than mere outward ceremonies and rituals (Ps 51:16-17; 100:1-5).

RECOMMENDATION

The Iatmul church must firstly differentiate and establish what spirit-worship and cultural practices are. They must then identify the developed behavioural problems in attitude and character traits of their congregation, which are hindrances, because of spirit (animistic) worship. In addition, the problems of a dynamic and pragmatic religious background, and culture-tainted worldviews, which bring negative effects to Christian worship in forms and practices, must be scrutinised.

Finally, there needs to be reflection on the true biblical teaching of Christian worship, and what it means to truly worship God from the heart, in spirit, and in truth, and worship in a way acceptable and pleasing to God. Therefore, it is the intention of the writer for all who read this article to address these problematic issues in their respective church denominations. The identification of these problems would then enable the churches to correct the very problems that exist in churches, which hinder church growth, and the success of Christian ministries. It is God's desire to dwell among His people, and to bless the churches to experience His bountiful blessings.

CONCLUSION

Culture and spirit-worship characterise behavioural problems in attitude and character traits that result in nominalism and syncretism. These lead to the problems, evident in the churches in disunity, disloyalty, and unfaithfulness to God and the church, as presented in this article.

The implications of cultural practices and spirit-worship must be seen as hindrances to true Christian worship. The practices of idol worship, formalism, falsehood, and pretence, which are evident in so-called Christians' lives, result in false worship. Consequently, the true worship of God is missing in the life of churches, and it is apparent in the absence of the presence and power of God.

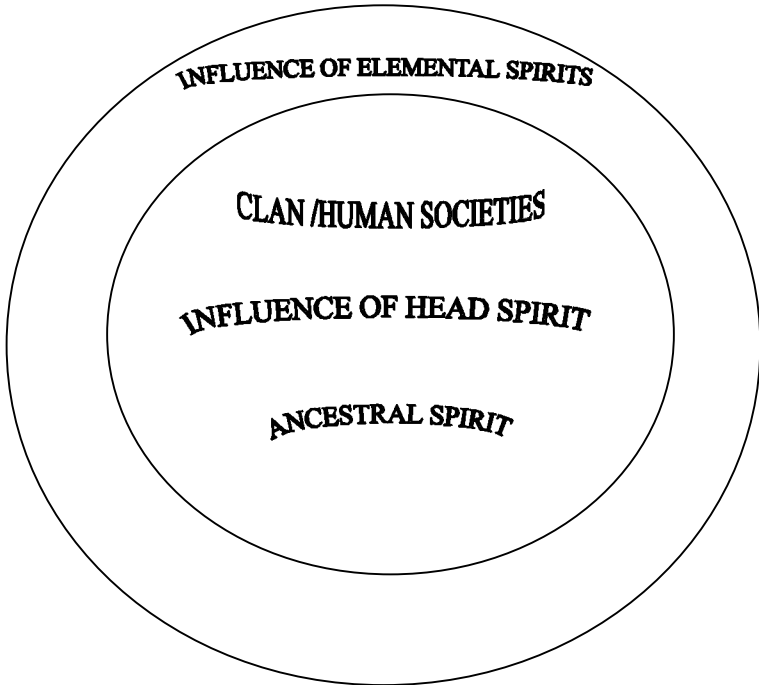
These have been the reasons churches and Christians are ineffective and unproductive in their ministries and church growth. As seen from the understanding of God, initiating His saving events in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and His desire to dwell among His people, it is vital and necessary to allow God to take His rightful place in the hearts of believers today.

Hence, the presence of God means the manifestation of the power of God and all spiritual gifts in operation. In addition, all churches, and individual Christians, need to experience the blessings and power of God in their lives, for transformation, sanctification, and boldness, to be effective witnesses for Christ. Thus, the church needs the presence and power of God, to enjoy Him forever, which is the chief end of man, and to be in touch with God in fulfilling His will.

APPENDIX ONE

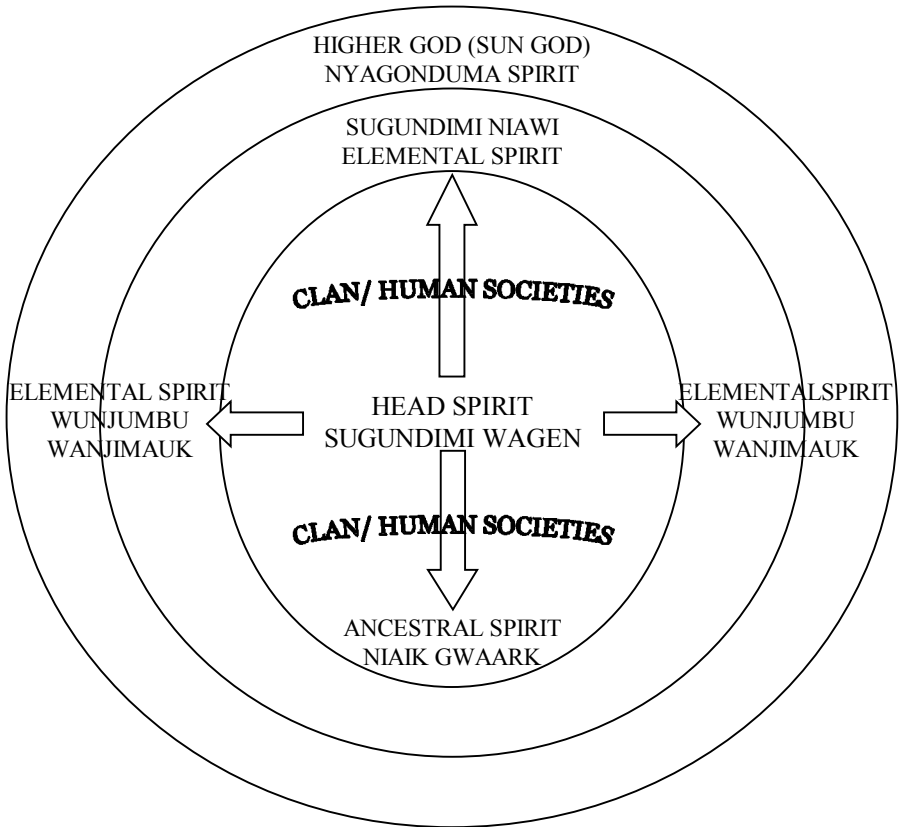
Iatmul Spiritual Structure and Influences over Human Communities

Sun god Nyagonduma



APPENDIX TWO

Iatmul Spiritual Hierarchical Structure and Control



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