

MAN AND HIS WORLD: BIBLICAL AND MELANESIAN WORLDVIEWS

Fr Theodoor Aerts

[In the original printed version, the bibliography, and endnotes 9 to 15, were omitted from this article. They were later published in *MJT* 6-1. They have now been restored to this article. In addition, many authors' names were cited in the text or endnotes in the original article, for which the reference details were incorrect or were missing. Where possible, reference details have now been corrected or added. However, despite a thorough search, the reference details for three remaining authors, to which citations refer, could not be determined, and they appear in the bibliography just as authors only. – Revising ed.]

People who are familiar with the existence of distant planets and galaxies, and who are used to seeing, via satellite transmission, what is happening on the other side of the globe, need some mental changeover to replace themselves in biblical times. Yet, in everyday life, they still use biblical language when they speak about “the end of the world” (cf. Is 5:26), about “the rising of the sun, and its going down” (cf. Mal 11:1), and about “stars falling from heaven” (cf. Apoc 9:1). This is natural, and spontaneous, because all these expressions derive from external observation, and from the immediate appearance of things. They represent, also, the scientific insights of an age past.

I THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

1. Some Ancient Scientific Views

Scientific knowledge is often present in the Bible, starting already with the geographical location of the “garden of Eden” (Gen 2:8). It is used to be said that Eden was the name of the country, in which this garden was located, and suggestions were made to place it somewhere on the west bank of the lower Euphrates. Today, exegetes rather connect the word “Eden” with the Sumerian term *edinu* (wilderness, flatland), and believe that the Greek Old

Testament was correct in interpreting the whole expression as “a garden (Greek παράδεισος (*paradeisos*)) of delight”, for which no particular place should be contemplated. In other words, the concept would be related to similar ideas of Mesopotamian mythology. The same is also true of the notation that, from this garden, started four streams, to water the earth. The Tigris and Euphrates are easily identified, but the two other streams – Pishon, near the land of Havilah, and Gihon, encircling the land of Kush (Gen 2:10-14) – are not found in their neighbourhood, and reflect, possibly, rivers known from Egypt. We have then, once more, an apparently geographical, but, in fact, a half-mythical localisation, in which the more important point is that life-giving waters streamed out of Paradise, the place of the tree of life, as is again known from Babylonian mythology.

A wider knowledge of the world is found in the “table of nations”, which explains the people of the earth, starting from Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 10:1-32). This lists sums up the historical and geographical knowledge available to the scribes at Solomon’s court, and gives us the widest-ever frame of reference found in the Bible; it clearly falls short of embracing the whole-inhabited world.¹ Hence, the “Solomon Islands”, so familiar to us, must be sought near Israel, within the limits of the earth known in the ancient Near East.² The only conclusion, which can be drawn of the table “of nations”, is that, even though many of the genealogical links affirmed are hypothetical, it nevertheless gives us a sum of ancient geographical knowledge, as kept in some scholarly circles at the time of king Solomon. The popular views, at that time, were surely more limited than that.³

Natural science has left its traces, too, in scripture. Quite incidentally, it is said, for example, that snow and rain returned to heaven (Is 55:10), where the clouds dissolved in rain (Judges 5:4; 1 Kings 18:45) to water the earth. The same benefit derives, also, from the dew of heaven (cf. Deut 33:13, 28). Again, the rivers flow to the sea (Qoh 9:13), sometimes explained as the moon,⁴ is a clear sign the weather is about to change, and will become pleasant again. Such a down-to-earth view contrasts sharply with the view expressed by the Babylonian epic of creation, where it is said that the god Marduk suspended “his bow” in heaven, after defeating his rebellious god-mother, Tiamat, and those who supported her (Enuma Elish

[publication details unknown] 6:82-94: ANET 69:514). If this particular myth inspired the biblical story of the flood, and its aftermath, we would have our first example of de-mythologising a pagan god tale, under the influence of the Israelite belief in the one God Jahweh. However, this may be, the rainbow has, in fact, become the sign of Jahweh's benevolence, and of His promise not to destroy the earth any more (Gen 9:13), while the earlier example of the returning rain is used by Isaiah to explain the life-spending function of the word of God (Is 55:11). Again, the regularity of sun and moon (cf. Ps 72:5; 89:37), cold and heat, winter and summer, etc. (Gen 8:22), are seen as reliable signs of the same faithfulness and reliability of Israel's God.

2. The External Appearance of Things

Most of the time, we should not suspect any scientific pretensions, but merely a description of what is directly observed, and a statement of what is inferred from it, without further reflection. A worldview, as something unified and scientifically secured, is not available; even a Hebrew word denoting "world", or "universe" is missing⁵, although, in the later books of the Bible, we meet the Greek term *κόσμος* (*kosmos*), as, for instance, in the following philosophical statement that God's hand "from formless matter created the world" (Wis 11:17). The typical Semitic view merely takes together what one sees, that is "heaven and "earth" (Gen 1:1), or, from the time of Solomon onwards, "heaven and earth and sea" (Gen 49:25; Ex 20:4, 11). The dual expression, combining two opposites to include everything, is very common in the Bible⁶. It would, therefore, not be significant enough to prove a specific "dualistic" outlook. Analogous remarks might be made concerning the tripartite division (Ex 20:4; Ps 115:15-17), which some authors understand as defining a three-storeyed universe, with water below, heaven above, and the earth in between, but which often can be seen on a mere literary level, without implying much speculative thought at all⁷. In fact, the Semites did not have a single systemic view of the universe; they used a multiplicity of approaches, according to the circumstances. Comparisons with Egyptian myths would allow us to find not only (two) bipartite, or (three) tripartite divisions, but also, by distinguishing, for example, sea and underworld, or the different superimposed heavens, a universe with even more divisions. For our purpose, we keep the common tripartite division.

(1) The impression of having the sky as a ceiling above one's head is expressed in calling it "something flattened" (Gen 1:6), like a thin sheet of iron (cf. Ex 39:3), although it might be likened to a Bedouin's tent as well (Is 40:22c). Such a sky needs to rest its "edges" (Ps 18:6) upon some distant mountains, which are "the pillars of heaven" (Job 26:11). From the experience that the sky touches all around the horizon, it was naturally inferred that the earth itself was round surface (cf. Is 40:22a).

There are, however, some texts which reflect known Babylonian myths, e.g., the view that the earth has four sides (Is 11:12; Ezek 7:2); pagan mythology assigned to each of these sides another protecting divinity. Of the latter polytheistic belief, however, we do not find any traces in the Bible. According to a few passages, there is a "heaven of heavens", or a "highest of heaven" (Deut 10:14; Ps 148:4), which, once more, mirrors a Babylonian view of three or seven superimposed heavens, an idea, which later Jews picked up, especially in the non-biblical books written between the Old and New Testaments, such as 2 Enoch (cf. 8:7-22), and others.

(2) As to the flat earth, one view is that it floats or rests upon the world-sea (Hebrew תְּהוֹמֹת (*tehōm*)), which, in primal time, covered the whole earth (Gen 1:2; Ps 105:6), and which still surrounds it on all sides, only filled with some distant islands (cf. Sir 43:23). To explain, however, that the earth does not move, it needs a foundation, or "pillars", which, during a mighty storm, might even be laid bare (Ps 18:15). No thought is given, though, to what would support the world foundations themselves.

In this geography, fits also the expression of a "navel of the land", which is used once to refer to the hills near Shechem (Judges 9:37), and, another time, to Jerusalem, built upon Mount Zion (Ez 38:12). If for a moment, we disregard the different periods to which these two texts belong, the double use would suggest that different traditions have used the same expression for their respective central places, which, in this case, are a mere 50 kilometres distant from one another. This would underline how very limited each of these societies did draw its own limits.

Another earthly place with mythical associations is the "mountain of the Lord" (Is 14:13), located in the recesses of the North. A historicisation of

this one-time Phoenician, or Syrian, idea is found in Ex 3:1, where this applies to Mount Horeb or Sinai (see also Ex 19), and, again, in Ps 48:3, where the image is transposed to Mount Zion in Jerusalem⁸.

Not always is the earth seen as floating or fixed, there is also the rare view of the earth as a building, perfectly measured out (Job 38:4-5), which finds, again, its parallels in Babylonian texts, and, in the scriptural analogy of the underworld, as a city with gates.

(3) The third element, besides earth and sky, is the underworld (Hebrew שְׁאוֹל (*sh'e'ōl*)), which is just under the earth's surface (Num 16:28-34), or even below the nether sea (Ps 24:2), from which the springs sprout forth. This is "a land of murk and deep shadow, where dimness and disorder hold sway, and light, itself, is like the dead of night" (Job 10:22). Again, שְׁאוֹל (*sh'e'ōl*) can be seen as a city with strong gates (Job 38:17; Is 14:17), as was done, already, by the Babylonians.

Within this general cosmological frame, other phenomena find their place. The earth quakes, when its pillars are shaken (Job 9:6), and the rain and hail fall down, when the sluices of the respective storerooms are opened (Gen 7:11; Job 38:22; Ps 148:4). Sun and moon are the great lamps hung against the firmament (Gen 1:16), or also running their heavenly course from east to west, and then proceeding under the earth, to resume, again, the same function (cf. Ps 19:5, Qoh 1:7). Since experience shows that man does not need to see them to have light, the Bible grants the light an independent existence (Dan 3:73), and has it mentioned in Gen 1:3-5, before even the luminaries themselves are decorating the vault of heaven (Gen 1:14-19).

3. The Different Functional Roles

The cosmology, here described, has no importance of its own, but is part of a functional view of the universe. If there is any unity, then it is because God, who "transcends heaven and earth" (Ps 148:13), has made everything, including those elements of nature, which the pagans venerated as their gods⁹. In connection with this view, it will not be surprising that, especially, the elements are in God's hand. So, it is said that the thunder is "the voice of the Lord" (as in Ps 29, which is possibly a borrowed Canaanite hymn), or that lightning is the arrow of His bow (Ps 18:14), or the scourges

of His whip (Job 9:23). However, with the growing awareness of Jahweh's transcendence, it was also felt that the Lord was not in the wind, not in the earthquake, and not in the fire, but that He was different from all these impressive manifestations of the nature (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-12).

As to the main divisions of the universe, sky, earth, and underworld, a definite functional view is adopted. Heaven is simply the place of God (Is 66:1; Ez 1:1), although He is not confined to it (Ps 115:3; 139:7-12), from there, He looks down upon mankind (Deut 26:11), and, from there, He will reveal Himself (Gen 22:11). Jacob saw, even in a vision, that there were steps leading up to heaven, as if the place was a divine palace (Gen 28:12, 17). The nether world is a kind of counterpart of heaven, as appears from the parallelism between the "gates of heaven" and the "gates of death", this is the proper place of those who are deceased, where they live on as mere "shadows" (Hebrew רֶפְאִיִּם (*rēphā'im*)).

Different, again, from these two distant places, is the earth, which is the place of the living (Ps 115:16), here man can be fruitful and multiply, and here seed-bearing plants and trees are made for him (Gen 1:28-29). This earth is divided according to the man's needs: there are the arable land (Hebrew אֲדָמָה (*adamah*), from which אָדָם (*adam*) = man, is taken: Gen 2:7), the inhabited country side (Hebrew תְּבֵלָה (*tēbēl*); cf. Prov 8:26; Is 18:3; Ps 9:9), the steppe, where nomads still can pasture their sheep (Hebrew מִדְבָּר (*midbār*); cf. 1 Sam 17:28; Jer 23:10), and finally the desert, or wasteland proper, where there are not even waterholes left (Hebrew רֵבְבָה (*rābāh*); cf. Jer 17:6). As said earlier, in relation to the "navel of the land", such a world is quite distinct from the continuous, homogeneous space, without human qualifications of modern scientists.

That the immediate world is man-centred, can be seen even more convincingly when we note what elements of the landscape are, in fact, explained. There is, for example, the human-like salt rock, standing near the Dead Sea, which is the petrified figure of the too-curious wife of Lot (Gen 19:26), or the piles of stones, covering the bodies of the sacrilegious Achan (Josh 7:26), and the king's son Absalom (2 Sam 18:17), or the memorial erected after the treaty between Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:45-48). Often, only one impressive stone has become a monument, and is anointed (Gen

28:18; 35:14), or given a symbolic name to remember the original incident (as with Ebenezer, the “Stone of help” of 1 Sam 7:12). In many instances, such stone monuments, or also sacred trees, were the centres of places of worship, or private shrines, of which there were so many in Israel (cf. Ex 20:24b), and which, eventually, were condemned by the prophets (e.g., Is 1:29-31; Jer 2:20; Hos 4:13). It was believed, of course, that on those sites God kept revealing Himself.

4. New Testament Concepts

Having touched upon the Old Testament worldview, in its more-analytical, and its more functional, aspects, there is not much to be added regarding the New Testament. The traditional concepts are taken for granted, when the Christian scriptures refer to “heaven and earth” (Matt 24:35), or to “heaven, earth, and underworld” (cf. Matt 11:23; Rom 10:6-7; Phil 2:10-11; Apoc 5:13), or allude to a plurality of heavens, as in Matthew’s “kingdom of heavens” (indeed, a Greek plural), and in Paul’s reference to a rapture into the “third heaven” (2 Cor 12:4). Even the picture of a four-sided world is not absent, e.g., in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem (Apoc 21:12-13), and, possibly, in the other passages as well (Acts 10:10-11). The anthropocentric approach is also there, with paradise as the place of those who are saved (Luke 23:43), Hell: the place of those who are doomed (Greek ἁδῆς (*hadēs*); cf. Luke 16:23), and the earth assigned to the ordinary humans (cf. Luke 16:27).

Whereas, in the Old Testament, Jahweh was the creator of the world, the New Testament professes that the world, with everything visible and invisible, was made through Christ (John 1:3; Col 1:16), and is subjected to Him (Phil 3:21). Several texts are tainted with an ethical dualism, whereby “this world” is counteracting the salvific will of God, yet – even in John, who favours this view – we can read that Christ is the light and the Saviour of the world (John 4:42; 9:5), and that “God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone . . . may have eternal life” (John 3:16). In continuation of some Old Testament views that heaven and earth will pass away (Is 51:6), the New Testament, too, believes in the transitory nature of this world (1 Cor 7:31). To describe the end of the world, the most impressive catastrophes are listed, culminating in a final destruction by fire (2 Pet 3:7, 10-13). Yet this is not a total annihilation, but rather the means to

arrive at a complete transformation, which brings about “a new heaven and new earth” (cf. Apoc 21:1), that will last forever (cf. Is 66:22).

II THE MELANESIAN WORLDVIEW

1. Contacts with the Outside World

The majority of Melanesians live concentrated in the New Guinea Highlands, and believe, according to their myths, that this was their home place.

Yet, although the Polynesians outdo them, there are also many local island people, with traditions about a distant land, where they came from. From a Manus Islanders, who trace their origin to Nimei, and his wife Niwong, their mythical ancestors came, in a canoe, from a far-away unnamed country (Richard Parkinson, *Dreissig Jahre in der Sudsee: Land und Leute: Sitten und Gebrauche im Bismarckarchipel und auf den deutschen Salomoinseln*, Stuttgart, Strecker und Schroder, 1926, p. 709). For the Trobrianders, the place of origin is the island Tuma, only ten miles to the north-west of Kiriwina, but, at the same time, the “other world” of the spirits (Charles Gabriel Seligmann, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 676). Actual knowledge of distant countries is sometimes fantastic, as they are believed to be inhabited by tailed people, and by people with wings, or only by women, so that any man, who adventures to go to this Kaytalugi, would die an untimely death (Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London UK: G. Routledge & Sons, 1922, p. 223).¹⁰

Recent archaeological discoveries have shown that, at certain stages, actual knowledge of distant places may indeed be assumed. In fact, coastal shells reached New Guinea Highlands at least 9,000 years ago, while obsidian from Talasea (West New Britain), used for knives and spearheads, reached the Eastern Solomons up to 3,000 years ago. There is evidence that the same material from Lou Islands, in the Admiralties, did travel to the New Hebrides, be it in one or more trips, but still linking places, which, in a straight line, are separated some 4,300 kilometres (Jim Allen, “Sea Traffic, Trade, and Expanding Horizons”, in Jim Allen, J. Golson, and R. Jones, eds, *Sunda and Sahul: Prehistoric Studies in Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and Australia*, London UK: Academic Press, 1977, p. 389). On these, and other,

accounts the people engaged in *kula-*, *hiri-*, and other trade expeditions, must have known more about their surroundings than the ancestors of the Jewish people knew about their outside world.

2. Traditional Concept of the Universe

Leaving the immediate geography, we come to the broader view of man's place in the universe. As far as these Melanesian concepts are published, they look very similar to those found in the Bible. One such view has been reconstructed by H. J. Hogbin, in relation to the Busama, a people living on the coast of Huon Gulf, between Lae and Salamaua. Here, it is believed that one, who would like to journey beyond the small world of the ancestors, had to climb up the blue vault of the sky, which is supposed to be solid, "just like that" (H. J. Hogbin, "Pagan Religion in a New Guinea Village", in *Oceania* 18 (1947), p. 121).

The sky itself is peopled with so-called "sky spirits", which are supposed to look like humans, but who always carry torches. The two largest of these, representing the sun and the moon, are borne by the headmen, the rest being content with stars. Subsequent to the original chaos, sun and moon sent some of their followers down to instruct men in the proper way to behave, so that, in the end, the culture of the earth duplicates the culture of the sky (Ibid., p. 124). Having completed their tasks, these spirits have forgotten all about their handiwork, or, at least, they have displayed no further interest in it. Rain is ascribed to the displeasure of certain of the spirit men at the goings-on of the spirit women, and, when the ground is shaken, it is as a result of their wars.

Another kind of supernatural being, which occasionally took the form of bright, varicoloured eels, snakes, or lizards, are the so-called "spirits of the land": they are responsible for tempests, thunderstorms, and heavy downpours, especially when out of season, while their multicoloured breath is to be seen in the sky, from time to time, forming the rainbow. The dwellings of these types of spirits are definite sacred places, noteworthy for their gloom, chill atmosphere, or danger – a cave, with a fern-covered entrance, perhaps, a waterfall, drenched with cold spray, a lonely pool, where a stray crocodile may be lurking, or a slippery precipice. Dangerous as these spirits are believed to be, however, it is thought that the group dwelling at each sacred

place has made a promise to the first claimant of the surrounding area to leave him, and his heirs, unmolested, as long as they respect the holiness of the site. Persons, however, who have no claim to ownership, were not included in the contract, and could expect no favours either (Ibid., p. 125).

A third category of supernatural beings is the “souls” of the deceased. After an interval of one to three months, depending on the dead person’s status, they leave the village they have lived in, and go to dwell with the particular land spirit, which has previously granted them his protection. There is, in other words, no single afterworld, where all the departed are assembled (Ibid., p. 128). The Bukaua, who live across the Huon Gulf, between Lae and Finschhafen, and who are culturally related to the Busamas, hold very similar concepts of the universe (cf. Stephen Lehner, “Bukaua”, in Richard Gustav Neuhauss, ed., *Deutsch Neu-Guinea*, vol 3, Berlin Ger, Reimer, 1911; Stephen Lehner, “Die Naturanschauung der Eingeborenen im N.O. Neu-Guinea”, in *Baessler-Archiv* 14 (1930/1931)). They are positive about the place of the deceased; first they stay a while at the traditional ancestral places, but then they go to a place under the earth, whose entrance is somewhere towards the east (Lehner, “Bukaua”, p. 430). This place is also in some relation to the bottom of the sea. From here, the souls of the departed grant favours to those who survive them on earth, on condition that the latter keep honouring them.¹¹

The earth, itself, is seen, by the Bukaua, as a broad, mountainous mushroom-like mass, surrounded by water. It is flattened towards the sides, and tapers off, below, to a mere stick. Earthquakes are happening, when the stick of the earth is moved. This occurs when an under-earthly being, with a long and a short leg, who leans against the earth-stick, is changing position. Other explanations of the earth tremors relate them to powerful humans, or to the magic of some sorcerers (Lehner, “Die Naturanschauung der Eingeborenen”, pp. 105-106).

The firmament is like a huge shell of a sea turtle, resting upon the ends of the earth. Yet, there exists, also, the belief that one “man”, called Nochta, is sitting on the horizon, supporting the heavenly vault, lest it should fall down and crush all the living (Ibid., p. 107). This heaven is conceived as another inhabited world, planted with trees, of which the stars are the roots.¹²

Sun and moon are the eyes of dreaded, but also venerated, powers. When, at evening, “Lord Sun” sets, it is believed that his grandmother came to fetch him; he then passes underneath the earth, to appear on the other side next day. The moon follows the same route, but takes more time, because he is smaller, and also slower. There exists a fear that, one day, the sun and moon will disappear, thus marking the end of mankind; therefore, moon eclipses cause a great show of sorrow and grief, because of the nearing disaster. A halo around the moon is a premonitory sign that somebody is about to retire into a seclusion hut, e.g., the next widower, or the next girl coming to puberty. When a rainbow appears, it is believed that it shows the blood of the killed person, which mounts to heaven, or, also, somebody’s bile, which burst and splashed up into the sky (Ibid., p. 110). Similar explanations cover nearly all atmospheric phenomena, but those mentioned here will suffice for the people near the Huon Gulf.

Elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, we find ideas, which, in many instances, are exactly the same as those described, but there are also differences to be noted. One missionary, noting the keen interest in cosmological problems among the Austronesian Palas of New Ireland, refers how, once an old man asked him, whether he – a white man – had come from below, evidently using a ladder, which was standing in the world below (Karl Neuhaus, *Das Hoehste Wesen: bei den Pala (Mittel-Neu-Mecklenburg)*, Vunapope PNG:, 1934, p. 87). According to these islanders, the earth and the sea form a flat, round disk, like the knots of a bamboo. Above us, there is, like another bamboo knot, the upper world, while our earth rests upon pillars planted upon another earth, right under us. The lower side of our earth is, then, the heaven of the earth below, and the heaven above us is the lower side of the earth above. Contact between these worlds is quite feasible, with ladders, and the same is true to go from one heaven to the other (Karl Neuhaus, *Beitraege zur Ethnolgraphic der Pala Beitrage zur Ethnographie der Pala, Mittel Neu-Irland: Aus dem Naiclass bearb*, Koln: Kolner Universitats Verlag, 1962, pp. 218-219). One wonders whether this model does not better fit some ancient Near-Eastern views, than some of the complicated three-dimensional constructions, proposed thus far (cf. Warren, pp. 33-40, and frontispiece).

In some of the information gained from among a Papuan society, the Mbowamb (near Mount Hagen), we meet the greatest variety, from plain, naturalistic explanations, to the most-mythical ones. The society, referred to, knows a Western-type explanation of the rain, that it is evaporated water in the clouds, which reliquefies, and falls on the earth (George F. Vicedom, *Myths and Legends from Mount Hagen*, Andrew Strathern, tran., Port Moresby PNG: Institute of PNG Studies, 1977, p. 8). In one mythical explanation, it is said that the rain is the tears of the sky people (*taewamb*), who own the game, and weep over the wild animals, which have been killed by men. The other says that rain happens when Rangkopa, a female sky being, urinates over the earth. This explains, also, the rainy season, while, during the dry spell, Rangkopa hitches her skirt, and allows the sun to shine all the time (Ibid.).

The rainbow is understood as a heavenly reflection of a giant snake lying in the forest. If there are two rainbows, it is said that there is a married pair there, the “woman” lying below, and her husband lying above (Ibid.). During a thunderstorm, people hear the voice of Kukakla, and some say a red man comes below to eat men, while others say it is a red pig, which comes and kills men. Others are still more specific, and see, in the lightning, the sexual act of a heavenly, flecked boar, and an earthly red sow. When a man is struck by lightning and dies, it is a sign that he stood on the spot where the two animals mated, and burnt him, as with fire (Ibid., p. 9). The human, or animal, form of these heavenly beings is not really of importance, while the main idea is to connect the various atmospheric events with the “parents of the world”, a male-heavenly and a female-earthly principle, as is done in many other religious systems.¹³

To this complex, one can also reckon some myths of the Samap (East Sepik), which compare the moon, either to the genitals of, for example, a fish-women (Johann Gehberger, “Aus dem Mythenschatz der Samap an der Nordostkueste Neuguineas”, in *Anthropos* 45 (1950), pp. 79-85), or those of a man, who could change himself into a pig (Ibid., pp. 96-100). As such traditional tales should be seen against their respective cultural backgrounds, there is nothing absent about them, but they witness how, generally, daily experiences are linked with the ever-present supernatural beings, who secure survival and vitality for man, animals, and plants, alike.

For the descriptions given, so far, one can see that no rounded-off cosmology is intended, and that earth and sky, day and night, and the most-varied phenomena, from earthquakes to moon halos, used to be seen in direct relation to man's practical concerns.¹⁴ People believe that they depend, somehow, on what is going on in the sky; hence they try to avoid the dangers, which threaten them from above, or they seek to catch the benefits which, according their observations, are connected with the appearance, or disappearance, of some definite atmospheric phenomena (Lehner, "Die Naturanschauung der Eingeborenen", p. 105). As a rule, the heavenly bodies, or events, are, themselves, related to some spirit beings, whose nature is supposedly known, and not further described. Finally, the views expressed may have no wider currency than the one particular society they derive from. As in the Bible, then, there is not one authoritative worldview, but there is a multitude of partial concepts.

3. The Immediate Human Environment

Of more importance than either the geographical knowledge of distant places, or the practical concern with cosmology, and with atmospheric phenomena, is man's interest in his nearby physical environment: the village or place he lives in, the soil he tills, or the sea he sails, the strange shapes of beaches and rocks, the fascination of trees and groves, and of many other features of his immediate surroundings.¹⁵ One story of the Siwai-Papuans (South Bougainville) might illustrate this kind of concern (John J. Kinna, "*Tantanu* and *Paupiahe*", in *Creation Legends from Papua New Guinea*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, 1972, pp. 22-26:

Long before the missionaries, and other Europeans, came to Bougainville and Papua New Guinea, two gods lived on the mountains above Tonelei Harbour in South Bougainville. These two gods were *Tantanu* and *Paupiahe*. Because they were gods, each of them had servants to do his work.

Tantanu's servants worked very hard in his gardens, and *Tantanu* would reward them with four or five pigs every day.

The servants used to have a feast every night.

Paupiahe's men were very lazy, and never worked at all. To make it look as though they were working very hard, they would burn dry banana leaves and cover themselves with ash. *Paupiahe* did not realise their tricks, and he would also reward them with four or five pigs. So they, too, feasted every night.

This went on for years, but, finally, *Paupiahe* realised that he did not have any more pigs and food to reward his men. He then knew that this had happened, because his men had not really worked.

Tantanu's men kept on, as usual, working hard in the gardens, feasting, and having dances every night.

Paupiahe becomes jealous of *Tantanu*. He decided to chase *Tantanu* away, so that he could get his property and servants. *Paupiahe* stood on his high mountain, and commanded *Tantanu* to move away. "If you don't," he cried, "I'll send you right out of this world, to the world of spirits."

Tantanu had no choice. He started to move along the beach towards the south-west. When he came to the point, which is known as Moila Point today, he bent the trees towards the sea, to hide himself. But, still, *Paupiahe* could see him from the top of the mountain. *Tantanu* kept on till he was out of sight, and he finally came to a small coastal village, called Siwais. They got their name from this small village.

When *Tantanu* came to Siwai village, he found only children. They were alone in the village. Their parents had gone to gather food in the jungle. At that time, people were food gatherers. They did not plant gardens of their own.

Tantanu told the children to cook him in a pot. They did as they were told. After an hour, the children saw a man coming along the beach, combing his hair. It was *Tantanu*, himself. They asked him how he got out of the pot.

"You did not cook me," he told them. "You cooked food for yourselves."

So the children took the lid off, and each child picked up one type of food and named it. “That’s my taro,” said one.

“This is my yam,” said another.

“That is my singapore taro,” said a third.

This was how we got the various names of food. Then, all around the village, the various sorts of food started to grow by themselves.

Tantanu then started to teach the children a song, which is translated:

“God has found us.
God has found us.
Throw all the other food away.
The yams, and other food, are growing.”

Tantanu advised them to sing this song to their parents. He lived with them as their leader, till the people disobeyed him. Then he left.

Today, in Siwai, yams, taro, and other food, can be seen growing around. The pot, in which *Tatanu* was cooked, is also there, as a pool of water. *Paupiahe* still stands, as a rock on the mountain above Tonelei Harbour.

When the missionaries came to Siwai, they chose *Tantanu* as the word to mean the Christian God. Today, the Siwai people still call the Almighty God and Creator, by the name of *Tantanu*.

This tale is clearly confined to the coastal region, inhabited by the Siwai, with the old village, Moila Point, the mountains above Tonelei Harbour, with one specific rock formation, and one definite pool of water. All these items are, somehow, related to the “gods” *Tantanu* and *Paupiahe*. The story is, of course, not isolated, and so one could add the explanations of other noteworthy features of the landscape, as the large sickle-shaped stone, lying behind the village Koromira (South Bougainville), which is the petrified canoe given by Bakokora, as model for canoe building, or also the nearby fireplace and cooking pot used by the same “god”, when he taught the

people how to prepare food (cf. J. Rausch, "Gottesidee der Eingegorenen von Sued-Bougainville", in *Anthropos* 6 (1911), pp. 814-815). Almost every particularly large tree in the forest is connected with the tree spirit (Douglas L. Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society: Kinship and Leadership among the Siuai of Bougainville*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1955, p. 306), while one definite pool, elsewhere on Bougainville, where people used to feed a sacred crocodile with pigs and dogs (Carl Ribbe, *Zwei jahre unter den kannibalen der Salomo-inseln: Reiseerlebnisse und schilderungen von land und leuten*, Dresden-Blasewitz: H. Beyer, 1903, p. 148), has no doubt a similar spirit-story to explain the corresponding custom.

Mountains and valleys, and various coastlines, all have their own aetiologies. So, the Buka people tell us that their island was created by a "god" and a "goddess", which came in a canoe from the south (Bougainville); while the "god" steered the canoe, the coast line was straight, but later, when the "goddess" piloted the craft, the course was crooked, and, hence, the Queen Carola Harbour, on the north-west of the island (Gordon Thomas, "Customs and Beliefs of the Natives of Buka, in *Oceania* 2 (1931/1932), p. 220). Similarly, the Tolai people explain that the region of Rebar is flat and dry, because it was made by their good cultural hero To Kabinana, whereas the Papatava area is full of gorges and wells, because it is the work of the hero's silly brother, To Purgo (August Kleintitschen, *Mythen und erzählungen eines Melanesierstammes aus paparatava, Neupommern, Sudsee*, Modling bei Wien, 1924, pp. 18-19).

Not only natural features are explained in this way, but also, what appear to be, early man-made structures. At Wapaiya, for example, a village on Kitava Island (Trobriands), there are several megalithic monuments. One big, standing stone, measuring over 1.7 metres in height, is the petrified ancestor Yanusa (compare Gen 19:26), whereas the nearby remains of roughly-rectangular shapes are his wife, children, and dog. The story goes that Yanusa and his family were out hunting pigs, when, for some unknown reason, they all turned to stone (C. D. Ollier, et al, "Megaliths, Stones, and Bwala on Kitava (Trobriand Islands): Archaeology and Physical Anthropology", in *Oceania* 7 (1973), pp. 45-47).¹⁶ Again, in the village of Barim, on the south-west coast of Umboi or Rooke Island (West New Britain), one finds, outside the men's house, some standing stones, which,

during feast time, are sprinkled with the blood of pigs (compare Gen 28:18). People say that they belong to the *man bilong bipo*, and that they now guard the village (E. W. P. Chinnery, "Certain Natives in South New Britain and Dampier Straits", in *Anthropological Report* 3 (1928), p. 29). The explanations, just quoted, show that essential elements of some legends, such as the reason of Yanusa's punishment, or the specific aetiology for the Barim stones, can be easily be lost during the oral transmission, or, maybe, because of changes in the population, when earlier inhabitants have died out, or were chased away by new immigrants.

In more recent times, several geographical myths have emerged, in connection with some syncretistic movements. As a rule, it has been observed that biblical stories do not have the status of the tribal lore, because they did not leave any proofs, or visible marks, in the immediate surroundings (Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, p. 302). To obviate this deficiency, local "prophets" often rename parts of their environment; this explains in the Koréri movement (West Irian), the use of Bethlehem, Judea, and the places of the unclean spirits, Gadara (Freerk C. Kamma, *De Messiaamse Koréri-bewegingen in het Biaks-Noemfoorse cultuurgebied = Koréri: Messianic movements in the Biak-Numfor culture area*, M. J. van de Vatherst-Smit, tran., Gravenhage, Nijhoff, 1972., p. 161), or, in the story cult of Kallal (West New Britain), the new location for Lake Jordan and Nazareth, and for Mounts Sinai and Galilee (Hermann Janssen, "The Story Cult of Kaliai", in Theodor Ahrens, ed., *The Church and Adjustment Movements, Point* (1/1974), pp. 21-22). In the Mambu movement, something similar can be observed, when actual and mythical geography are combined into one single picture. A native of Manam Island (near Bogia) explained it all to K. Burrige, with drawings in support. The concentric circles, in the middle of the design, may recall the spherical form of the sky, and the waters surrounding the earth (as in traditional myths). The central point, however, was explained as the place where *bikpela bilong ol gat hap*, or where the Creator generated Himself. The frustrated Manam Islanders live at the far right, whereas the "cargo" is to be found at the far left, beyond Europe and America, although some benefits are trickling through to Rabaul, Port Moresby, Aitape, and Manus, some of the administrative centres in Papua New Guinea. The four cardinal points show a factual knowledge of a ship's compass.¹⁷ We have, then, here, a good

example of how experimental knowledge about Manam, Rabaul, etc., and learned facts about Tokyo, England, etc., are related to the place “no one in the world has seen . . . or knows its name” (Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: a Melanesian Millenium*, London UK: Methuen, 1960, pp. 10-11, 240-241).

CONCLUSION

A closer look at Melanesian worldviews cannot be without benefit, for a correct understanding of the scriptures, which were written by men, who had the comparable worldview. In neither of the two views, is there an attempt to ever arrive at the single valid synthesis; on the contrary, different views were cherished at the same time, yet, always, they were related to man’s needs, and are part of his so-called integrated experience. In this matter, Israelite and Melanesian views clash with modern scientific insights, based up on experiments and logical deductions, but, at the same time, showing hardly any relation to the daily experiences of one’s senses.

One has not to choose between either a traditional, or a scientific, view, because each applies to a different realm. Again, the scholarly explanation is apt to indicate that the more-imaginary views don’t pretend to be taken literally, or to be matters of saving truth. In their own fashion, popular views remain valid, though; they remind Melanesians that the Bible, too, has a human scale, of which smallness, one has to be aware, to grasp properly the greatness of its message. Even the Manam Islander, “who brings out from his storeroom, things both old and new” “(cf. Matt 13:52), reminds us of the fact that, for a truly religious man, not he, himself, or his tribe, or his land, are the centres of the universe, but, rather, what he called the place *bikpela bilong ol gat hap*.¹⁸ Seen from Manam, the “unknown land” is situated in the same (westward) direction as the centre of all things, maybe thus, betraying the conviction that “religion” is the means of obtain “cargo”. The latter would be in line with much Old Testament thinking, but it does not seem to follow from Jesus’ word of guidance: “seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all the rest will fall in line” (cf. Matt 6:33).

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NOTES

¹ One author, of the last century, believed that the Bible contained a reference to New Guinea, in as far as this as this island, and Australia, would have been settled by the descendants of Cush, the son Ham (Gen 10:6); the time of such an immigration, together with the occupation of India, might have occurred about 4,000 years ago (Franz Heinrich Ungewitter, *Der Welttheil Australien*, Erlangen, Verlag von J. J. Palm und Ernst Enke, 1853, p. 49, quoted in Arthur

Wichmann, *Nova Guinea I: Entdeckungsgeschichte von Neu Guinea*, Leiden; E. J. Brill, 1909, p. 1). The dates proposed are completely out of the question, while exegetes usually identify the Cushites with the Nubians.

² The Island, or Islands of Solomon, together with the places Ophir (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11) and Tarshish (1 Kings 10:22), are in the Bible; the ports from which Solomon's fleet brought, in its three-year-long voyages, great amounts of gold (14 tonnes!), silver, precious stones, sandalwood, etc. (1 Kings 10:20). Sixteenth-century European explorers spread the news, founding them in Pacific Ocean, South of islands Buka and Bougainville. The proposed identification only shows what the Spaniards expected to find in 1568, while the false rumours, subsequently spread in Europe and Central America, were intended to nourish the once-awakened interests (cf. Jack Hinton, 1969, 1-5, pp. 80-82). Exegetes now believe that Ophir is rather to be sought in India, Arabia, or Eastern Africa, while Tarshish could be located somewhere near Italy or Spain. It is possible, though, that "a ship of Tarshish" would not refer to any port called upon, but simply to "a sea-going vessel", able to make long voyages on the high seas.

³ Modern authors have, sometimes, yielded to the temptation to connect the South Pacific with the biblical lands; we will quote only two or three of these attempts. D. Macdonald, a Presbyterian missionary on the New Hebrides, was one who tried to prove that the Oceanic languages had a common stock of purely, and exclusively, Semitic words (trilateralism), with also the appropriate word-forming additions (such as prefixes, infixes, and suffixes); hence the contemporary Efate language was a linguistic "cousin" of modern Syriac, and vulgar Arabic dialects. The historical contact would have occurred via the Phoenicians, manning Solomon's fleet (cf. his book, D. Macdonald, *The Oceanic Languages: their Grammatical Structure, Vocabulary, and Origin*, London UK: H. Frowde, 1907, pp. 34, 52, 94, with the long index of Semitic words on pp. 317-352). The suggestion has not been taken up by later comparative linguists. Again, the diffusionists of the Manchester School, like G. Elliot Smith and William James Perry, did believe that a megalithic culture (expressed in huge stone monuments like the pyramids, and the South American temples) spread from Egypt via India, over Indonesia, and Melanesia, to start at the end the Inca and Maya civilisations (cf. William James Perry, *Children of the Sun*, London UK: Methuen & Co, 1923, esp. pp. 458-466, 473-476, and the index under: "Melanesia"). A more-limited diffusionist view has been defended recently, on the basis of some Egyptian/Greek inscriptions found in different places of Polynesia, and even of West Irian (cf. Barry Fell, *America B.C.*, New York NY: Times Book Co, 1976; also Gerhard Kraus, "More about Ptolemaic Presence (3rd-century BC)", in *Pacific and South America: The New Diffusionist (Sandy)* 5 (1975)). However, such affirmations are not taken seriously by the scientific community, because all the evidence adduced has not the strength of bridging several centuries in time, and many thousands of miles of space (cf. Alphonse Riesenfeld, *The Megalithic Culture of Melanesia*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950, p. 537), whereas, against the latest attempts of Barry Fell, serious linguistic difficulties have been raised (cf. e.g., Ross Clark, "The Fell Controversy", in *The New Diffusionist (Sandy)* 6 (1976)). The safer position at this stage would be to admit different Neolithic centres of diffusion, in, say, the Near East (agriculture, with wheat and barley), South-east Asia (rice culture), and Peru-Middle America (maize) (cf. Carleton S. Coon, *The History of Man*, London UK: J. Cape, 1955, esp.

p. 126, Joseph Campbell, “The Masks of God I”, in *Primitive Mythology*, Harmondsworth UK: Penguin Books, 1960, esp. p. 138, etc.).

⁴ The Hebrew word קֶסֶט (*qeset*) means, in other contexts, an ordinary “bow”, and so it has been understood in the Greek Old Testament, which has τόξον (*toxon*) = “bow” (and not ἴρις (*iris*) = “coloured rainbow”, or “moon halo”), so that, in principle, the text could apply to the moon segment, although the explicit references to the clouds rather supports the traditional understanding. The “bow” of God is referred to in the cosmological fragment of Hab 3:11 (cf. also Ps 18:14). In classical myths, the rainbow is often seen as a sign of disaster.

⁵ The Hebrew term אֵלֶּם (*‘ōlām*), which, for late Rabbis, indicated the universe, has, in the canonical books, the meaning of “unending time”, “eternity”. Hence, Qoh 3:11 refers to God permitting man to have an overview of the course of “time”, not a contemplation of the “world”, as in R. A. Knox’s translation of this passage. (For “time”, see, e.g., the Jerusalem Bible).

⁶ Some well-known examples of this figure of speech, called “hendiadys” (literally “one through two”), are: “flesh and blood”, “bind and loose”, “morning and evening”, “coming and going”, and many others more. We could refer here to the pidgin term: *bulmakau*, “bull and cow”, for cattle, *manmeri*, “men women”, for people, and even *banara*, “bow and arrow”, for weapon.

⁷ Although less observed, and often obscured in translations, there are quite a number of scriptural examples of threefold enumerations, such as: decrees-laws-customs (Deut 4:45), suffering-punishment-disgrace (2 Kings 19:3), riches-honour-life (Prov 22:4), wisdom-discipline-discernment (Prov 23:23, terror-pit-snare (Is 24:17), etc. See Brongers, 1965, esp. pp. 104-105.

⁸ The name יְשׁוּבָה לַאֲשׁוּרָיִם (*El Shaddai*), which Ex 6:3 places before the revelation of the divine name יְהוָה (*Y^ehväh*) (Ex 6:6), has been explained as deriving from the Accadian *shadu* = “mountain”, and pointing towards an archaic hill-worship, but this interpretation is not secured. As to the common biblical expression: “to go up to Jerusalem”, one should not press its mythological associations (found, e.g., in Is 2:2), since it might merely be an idiom, derived from Jerusalem’s geography (compare the English: “to go down town”, of the Gunantuna “go up to the village, go down to the forest” (cf. H. Kroll, “Der Iniet”, in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 69 (1937), p. 205, n. 1).

⁹ Sun and moon were commonly seen as gods of the gentiles (cf. Deut 17:3), and some traces of such a view might be detected, even in the Old Testament, e.g., where they are said to “govern” day and night (Gen 1:16), or “to strike (men) down” (Ps 121:6), or that the sun “comes out of his pavilion . . . to run his race” (Ps 19:5), or “stands still” (Jos 10:12-13). Again, such concepts as *tebel*, “the land”, תְּהוֹמוֹת (*tehōm*), “the deep” (compare the god-mother Tiamat), and לְיַדֵּי אֲבַדּוֹן (*sh^e’ōl*)/Ἀβασδών (*Abaddōn*), “the underworld” (cf. Job 25:6), are often used without an article, that is: as being personal names. Finally, references to a primal battle between Jahweh and the monsters, Rahab and Leviathan, are not completely expurgated, as can be seen in Is 27:1; 51:9-10; Ps 74:13-14; 98:9-10; Job 7:12; 26:12-13, and might be suspected, in more innocuous-looking places, as Hab 3:8; Ps 93, etc., which do refer, e.g., to the subjugation of Rivers and Sea (without capitals in the translations!).

¹⁰ The “island of women” is a common theme in Melanesia, as seen from Joseph Meier, *Mythen und erzählungen der küstenbewohner der Gazelle-halbinsel (Neu-Pommern) im urtext aufgezeichnet und ins deutsche uebertragen von P. Jos. Meier, M.S.C.*, Munster, Aschendorff, 1909, p. 85; Richard Parkinson, *Dreissig Jahre in der Sudsee: Land und Leute: Sitten und Gebrauche im Bismarckarchipel und auf den deutschen Salomoinseln*, Stuttgart, Strecker und Schroder, 1926, p. 688; and others, while the specific treatment on the island Kaytalugi reflects the customary mishandling of men, caught at certain stages of the female communal work on Kiriwina.

¹¹ Whereas, in Hebrew thought, the dead live on as frail “shadows”, the general Melanesian view is that, when people grow older, they grow in authority and spiritual power, and can even disregard the commonly-observed taboos. After death, their power still increases, till, finally, they obtain a full spirit existence, with the respective magical powers to harm or to save. (For the latter distinctions, see the correlations drawn by Peter Lawrence, and M. J. Meggitt, eds., *Gods, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 14). There are, however, also cases where the attitude towards the deceased is full of ambiguity, with elements of fear and mourning and alacrity alike (cf. J. Pouwer, “A Masquerade in Mimika”, in *Antiquity and Survival* 1 (1956), pp. 381-386).

¹² Stephen Lehner, “Bukaua”, in Richard Gustav Neuhaus, ed., *Deutsch Neu-Guinea* 3 (1911), p. 107, explains that this belief is founded upon the fact that, during dark nights, one can see, in the forest, various lights caused by the phosphorescence of putrefying wood, or also, of certain species of moss.

¹³ In Egypt, where life is not so much dependent on sunshine and rain, but, more visibly, on the fertilising floodings of the River Nile, the primal time was described as the embrace of the protective Mother Sky (*Nut*) with the Earthly Father (*Geb*), till the skygod Shu (their son?) “separated” them from one another. One might possibly see here the mythical background of the biblical “separation” of Gen 1:7 and Ps 74:13.

¹⁴ It is not clear whether Melanesians also dissociate sun and moon from light and darkness, as this is sometimes done in the scriptures. One should, however, observe that, although the Bible well develops a kind of light-symbolism (e.g., 1 John 1:5c; Eph 5:8), it is not altogether negative in its appreciation of moon and darkness and night (cf. Gen 1:2; Ex 10:21; Ps 104:20; Luke 23:44, a fact which, no doubt, has something to do with the climatic reality of the Near East. Missionaries, who generally came from more-temperate zones, lacked these experiences; for them, night was only associated with darkness and gloom, with evil and all that is second rate. When bringing the “light” of the gospel, they easily condemned the *pasin bilong tudak*, whereas the South Sea Islanders did see the night with respect and admiration (because of the closeness with the spirit world), and the day as something ordinary and trivial, and without such emotional appeals. This is even truer of Polynesians, because of their distinct cosmologies (cf. Christa Bausch, “Das Nachtmythologem in der polynesischen Religion”, in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 22 (1970)).

¹⁵ In a different way, this immediate concern is expressed by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 54, where he writes: “it is a plain fact that primitive man shows remarkably little interest in what we may regard as the most-impressive phenomena of nature – sun, moon, sky, mountains, sea, and so forth – whose

monotonous regularities they take very much for granted". He wipes away, in one swoop, a library on solar mythologies, which also looked very much to Melanesia. See further, Richard M. Dorson, "The Eclipse of Solar Mythology", in Momas A. Sebeok, ed., *Myth: a Symposium*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1955.

¹⁶ Stories of petrified ancestors are very common in Melanesia. One can compare, for example, the legends about the four Kekenis (women) – rocks near Yule Island (Mendi Legends, 5), or the explanation attached to the two rocks Ndekatl and Mokatl near Mount Hagen (George F. Vicedom, *Myths and Legends from Mount Hagen*, Andrew Strathern, tran., Port Moresby PNG: Institute of PNG Studies, 1977, p. 7 n. 53). Different versions of one tale are the legends of Mount Sigul Mugal, near Kagamuga airstrip, (Mendi Legends, 10) and of the rocks Tagal and Magal in the Kuna river (Glenys Koehnke, *Time bilong Tumbuna: legends and traditions of Papua New Guinea*, Port Moresby PNG: Robert Brown & Associates, 1973, p. 82).

¹⁷ Traditional geography has no "orientation", according to the four cardinal points, but bases itself, for example, upon the relation of a place towards the sea, or downstream, and towards inland, or upstream. Hence, for one group, with a river flowing towards the west, the sun rises "up-stream", whereas, in a linguistic-related group, living near a river, which flows towards the east, the sun goes down "up-stream"! Cf. Adolf E. Jensen, "Wettkampf-Parteien, Zweiklassensystem und geographische Orientierung", in *Studium Generale* (Berlin) 1 (1947/1948), pp. 43-47; Georg Hoeltker, "Die maritime Ortung bei einigen Staemmen in Nordost-Neuguinea", in *Geographica Helvetica* (Bern) 2 (1947), pp. 192-199.

¹⁸ From this insight, we might derive a practical hint for religious instruction. In this part of the world, maps usually show Australia and the International Date Line in the centre. A common term like "the ancient Near East". Coined by the English, becomes, then, a manifest contradiction, since Palestine is located towards the west. It might be more helpful to use, whenever necessary, so-called European maps, with the zero meridian of Greenwich in the centre. This would bring out how the "Holy Land" occupies a central position to at least three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. This visual aid will show how God's word, which is historically bound to this place, has a critical function to all men, and all cultures, Western and Melanesian alike. In fact, Christians already use a similar approach, when reckoning the time, and divine history, into "before Christ" and "after Christ".