

## ***Tuma*: the Trobriand Heaven**

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In all Melanesian societies, where the belief in life after death was accepted, there was a place where the spirit of the person went to continue his life, but in a different form. Those places were thought to be better than the earthly ones. Therefore, Melanesians looked forward to going to those paradises. They were seen as the highest achievement for all Melanesian societies. The Trobrianders had *Tuma*, where everyone wanted to go. When life seemed too hard to bear, Trobrianders would even commit suicide, so that they would escape the hardship, and be with their ancestors in *Tuma*. Those places, like *Tuma*, were believed to be true, and no one doubted or questioned their existence. *Tuma* was real to the Trobrianders, until Christianity challenged the Islander's faith.

Many educated Trobrianders today have taken a negative stand toward Christianity, as a whole, after realising what it did to their culture. The problem was not within Christianity, rather, it was a difficulty with how Christ was presented. The European approach worked in the past, when Trobrianders were not exposed to the white man's way of living. Now that they have been educated, they have seen Christianity as nothing

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but Western imperialism. That, of course, is not correct. Christianity is the message of liberation, and salvation, for all humanity. However, how it was presented did not really show liberation, but rather destruction.

In this paper, I will attempt to suggest ways of rediscovering the true message of liberation and salvation in Christianity. I aim to do this, by identifying Christ as a Trobriander, who can enable Trobrianders to experience a higher existence, not in heaven, or *Tuma* only, but here on earth first, and finds its fullness with God, wherever He is.

*Tuma* and heaven are destinations for two different religions, which have many similarities, as well as differences. Both are viewed as resting places of spirits, or souls, of the faithful followers of those religions. The reality of their existence is unquestionable, though they cannot be rationally proven.

Trobriand Islanders, in the past, did not have a definite doctrine of their paradise, *Tuma*. However, all Trobrianders agreed that it existed. The fact that living people had visited *Tuma*, strengthened the belief of its existence. There were no questions asked, and no doubts entertained, in the belief systems of the Islanders. However, when the Christian concept of heaven began to creep into the traditional belief systems, it created doubts, and raised questions concerning the existence of *Tuma*. Many Islanders began to divert their attention from *Tuma* to heaven.

Very few islanders have successfully absorbed the Christian concept of heaven into their belief system. Many have opted to retain *Tuma*, as their highest achievement, but the majority of the islanders have found themselves “sandwiched” by the two concepts. They began to ask questions, such as, “Is *Tuma* heaven? Can the Christian God live in *Tuma*? What is the difference between *Tuma* and heaven?” I will attempt to answer these questions in this article, by discussing the similarities and differences of these two destinations. I will also attempt to identify God’s place in *Tuma*, and suggest some ways, in which these two concepts can be harmoniously married.

## Similarities and Differences of *Tuma* and Heaven

The belief in the realities of *Tuma* and heaven are one, but in different forms. Both belief systems require faith, as the only basis of the knowledge of their existence. No scientific investigation, or rational formulae, can be employed to prove the existence of these paradises. The reality of their existence is based on faith alone. Although these belief systems vary in physical expression, and may be regarded as two different systems, it does not necessarily mean they oppose, or contradict, each other. Both systems are complete in themselves, and are parallel truths.

### a. Religious Similarities

The Christian concept of heaven, which originated from Jewish and Greek belief in the survival of the person after death, is parallel to the Trobriand idea of *Tuma*. These two beliefs are part and parcel of the total beliefs of the two systems, in their respective religions. Both religions believe in a supernatural being, or beings. The practical results of their beliefs are expressed in worship and ritual, and have a particular view of the world, and of the nature and destiny of man. Also, in these religions, there is a particular view of the way man ought to live his daily life, in order that he may enter the everlasting destination.

The fact that no human being has ever lived without some experience of religion, is the joining factor of these two belief systems. No society in the world can dismiss religion, as Farley has stated:

No human being has ever lived without some acquaintance with religion in some form. Every community of people, even the most primitive, has some religious beliefs and practices. . . . Of course, there have been great varieties of beliefs and practices. . . . Of course, there have been great varieties of belief, due to wide differences in powers of understanding, but the essential religious emotion, or attitude, is everywhere the same.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> F. A. Farley, *The Faith*, London UK: Epworth Press, 1938, p. 16.

Although the doctrine of *Tuma* has not been highly developed, and clearly defined, it is in agreement with the Christian concept of heaven, as the destination of man. Therefore, the main similarity, or oneness, of *Tuma* and heaven is the religious belief of their existence.

### **b. Glimpses of Paradise**

The reality of the existence of *Tuma* and heaven has been strengthened by visits, taken by living people, into those places. *Tuma* had been visited by the *Tokesivila*, and has been seen by those who were about to die. Heaven, on the other hand, is not out of reach. The Bible records some experiences, where living people saw heaven. In St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he told of a person he knew, who was caught up to the third heaven, and told of many "inexpressible things" (2 Cor 12:2-5). St Paul may have been modest in his approach, not wanting to clearly state that he was the man. Also, in the prologue of the book of Revelation, St John testified that he was shown the things of heaven. Many other Christians have claimed to have had visions of heaven. Because conscious men and women have seen *Tuma* and heaven, it is difficult to dismiss their reality.

However, those "visits" were only glimpses. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether the boundaries of both paradises have been explored. For instance, if the *Tokesivila* only visited *Tuma*, how do *Wabwaima* and *Walisiga* look? If Paul was caught up in the third heaven, how many more stages of heaven are there? Therefore, it is not totally incorrect to suggest that both *Tuma* and heaven are part of each other, and can be seen as one.

### **c. Physical differences**

In the light of what has been said, above, the discussion on the physical differences of *Tuma* and heaven does not necessarily mean that they are totally different. For instance, as a Melanesian, I am physically different from a Chinese person. However, the physical difference does not make me an inferior being to the Chinese. Of course, there are minor differences between us in terms of appearances. Similarly, *Tuma* and

heaven may have many physical differences, but are really the same reality. There are a lot of physical differences between these two heavens, but I will discuss only a few of the major ones.

One major physical difference between *Tuma* and heaven is their locations. While heaven is believed to be somewhere in the sky, or above, *Tuma* is underground. Because *Tuma* is underground, one can easily be tempted to conclude that it is inferior. However, it is incorrect to say that what is below is less than that which is above. It is correct, in mathematical terms, but not in belief, for faith cannot be equated to mathematics. The cosmology of Trobriand society is different from Jewish and Greek societies. However, the idea of a higher destination, beyond the world of the living, is the same for both heaven and *Tuma*.

Another great difference, is the destination of the rejected. In the Trobriand belief, a spirit is caused to turn into a *Vayaba*, when *Topileta* rejects him. There is no idea of the rejected spirit experiencing indescribable pain. However, his rejection will mean that his life's cycle has ended. He will never again experience rebirth, but will remain an "alien" forever. In the concept of a Christian heaven, there is a place called hell, where the rejected spirit will experience torment for eternity.

The causes for rejection, in both places, are also different. A person is rejected from *Tuma*, when he fails to pay the "entry fee" of valuables. How he had lived his earthly life does not really matter, as it does not determine his entry. On the other hand, the earthly life of the person, in Christian belief, is what determines his eternity. Those who accept Jesus Christ, and become part of the community of believers on earth, have the assurance of eternal life in heaven. Those who do not belong to the community, end up in hell.

### **God's Place in *Tuma***

When I raised the question of whether or not the Christian God lives, or has a place, in *Tuma*, Revd Lepani Gumagawa paused for a long time, before finally answering:

Theologically, we describe God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. These words mean that God knows everything, His power is beyond compare, and He is present everywhere. If I say, God is not in *Tuma*, because *Tuma* is not the heaven Christianity teaches about, then I am questioning the omnipresence of God. But, if we believe that God is truly everywhere, then He must be in *Tuma*.<sup>3</sup>

Revd Lepani Gumagawa did not, at any time during our interview, suggest that, because God is in *Tuma*, then it becomes heaven, in the Christian sense. His emphasis was on the fact that God is everywhere, and because of that, he is also in *Tuma*.

The question of God's place in *Tuma* is not merely a question of His presence there. Rather, it is a question on the total existence of God. The question is really asking: "Is there a God?" Traditional Christian faith affirms the existence of God. Yet, that affirmation denies God's omnipresence when Christianity restricts God to remain in the Jewish and Greek heaven. Christianity's "developed" doctrine, too, has placed God in a restricted zone, with boundaries, thus restricting Him from moving away to other heavens, like *Tuma*.

This was exactly what the early Methodist missionaries did to God, when they presented Him to the Trobriand Islanders. Instead of identifying God's existence, in the midst of the total life of the people, they tried to replace the Trobriand values and beliefs with a Western way. In so doing, they restricted God from entering into the total lifestyle of the Islanders. They denied God's existence in *Tuma*, while, at the same time, taught that "God is everywhere". If God is really everywhere, then He is also in *Tuma*.

When I asked my informant, Bokadala, whether or not Christians, who had died, went to *Tuma*, she replied affirmatively, without giving any further details. Another informant, by the name of Mweyawata, made

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Revd Lepani Gumagawa, January 12, 1994.

mention that his father, Tosila, during one of his visits to *Tuma*, came across a place that was brightly lit, with some light that was not from the sun. Tosila saw a great multitude of people, all dressed in white, and standing around something that was glowing in the centre. Tosila hid in the nearby bushes, and gazed with amazement at the glory of the place, until one of the whitely-dressed people saw him, and told him quietly to leave, because the place was highly sacred. Tosila believed that those people were Christians.

Mweyawata said his father, who was a great *Tokesivila*, made it possible for Bokadala's first trip to *Tuma*. He had, himself, visited *Tuma* many times, but had not seen any place like this before. I was unable to confirm the story of Mweyawata, because Tosila was old, and had lost his memory. When I went to his village, his brother told me that Tosila was dying. He had requested the Catholic priest to come and give him the last sacrament. Consequently, Tosila became a Christian after his experience of the highly-sacred place in *Tuma*. If this is sufficient to be taken as confirmation of Mweyawata's story of his father's experience, then God must also be in *Tuma*.

Trobrianders, in the past, believed that *Tuma* was in three stages: *Tuma*, *Wabwaima*, and *Walisiga*. Even *Tokesivila*, like Bokadala, mentioned about going only to *Tuma*, which was generally believed to be the original step up of the Trobriand community. Every village, road, beach, and island, in the underworld was exactly the same as those in the Trobriand Islands, but in perfect condition. The question of whether or not Tosila had some acquaintance of *Wabwaima* or *Walisiga* will remain unanswered. However, I am inclined to think that Tosila did have some glimpse of one of these two places, or stages.

### **The Highest Achievement for a Trobriand Christian**

The highest achievement for Trobrianders, before the introduction of Christianity, was *Tuma*. All longed to join their ancestors in the land of *Kemwana*, where happiness was everlasting. In the long past, those who were found guilty of unforgivable crimes, like incest, would choose

suicide, rather than live with the pain of being ridiculed by the whole community. Suicide was classed as a good death, where the person would find happiness in *Tuma*. Many more islanders would rather be in *Tuma* than to live in this world, with toil and hardship. *Tuma*, then, was the highest achievement.

On conversion, that is, turning to God, and believing that He is the source of their power and total being, Trobriand Christians have shifted their efforts, from wanting to go to *Tuma*, to striving for a place in heaven. The concept of heaven, as the highest achievement, was thought to have penetrated into their total being, and directed their everyday living. Their lives had to be lived in a way pleasing to God. Their conversion meant that they would now seek access to God's power, through Jesus Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (Tim 2:5 NIV). This also meant that their conversion was turning away from all other mediators, like the *Tokesivila*, at least in their role as mediators, who brought back power and wealth from *Tuma*. Ancestors would still be venerated, or respected, but not related to, as the means and mediators of power, through the *Tokesivila*.

The conversion of the Trobrianders also meant that they had turned to a God, who was seen as more transcendent than any spiritual being they had ever known. They employed the phrase *Baloma bomala* to describe this new God. Trobrianders used *Baloma* for spirits, and *bomala* to describe their sacredness. Yet, not at any time, before the introduction of Christianity, were these two words put together to describe a super-spiritual being. There was very little idea of a creator being. Their explanation of their existence started from the myths of origin, where it was believed a man and his sister, both from the same clan, broke open a cave, hole, or a tree, and led the whole clan out. Beyond the point of first emergence, no one knew. Therefore, the new experience meant that they had to come to terms with this God, who was behind their emergence and existence, and who was believed to be above all other spiritual beings.



The characteristics attributed to Him were also new, and more attractive, in the sense that they did not suggest any degree of negative fear. In describing this type of conversion, Ewan Stilwell wrote:

Conversion, in Melanesia, therefore, means turning to a Spirit Being, who does not easily fit into the Melanesian category of Spirit. Of great significance, is the fact that the Christian God is a God of love, and a God who desires man to relate to Him, not on the basis of fear of the negative effects of His power, but out of deeply-felt spirit of thankfulness, and love for Him, as small children would relate to a good father. So, conversion is fundamentally entering into a loving, obedient, dynamic relationship with the living God, and believing in Him is the trusting commitment of one's life, which issues in lifelong faithfulness, lifelong allegiance to Him.<sup>4</sup>

What, perhaps, was difficult for Trobrianders to absorb was the concept of this "One true God", who originated a loving relationship with men. It was not the difficulty of accepting the idea of a loving Father, but the difficulty of accepting a Father who was foreign. A "father", to the Trobrianders, was one who was the husband of their mother, or all the maternal aunts, or the members of their father's clan. Anyone outside this circle was not regarded as a father. It was an insult to a Trobriander, when one claimed to be the father of the other. It meant that the person had sexual relationship with the other's mother.

Therefore, when God was presented as a Westerner, He was regarded as a foreigner. Although Trobrianders became Christians, they did not absolutely relinquish the values of their traditional belief systems. In actual fact, they carried over into Christianity what values and beliefs they were so accustomed to. One of them, was the fear of the negative effects of the powers of the divine. How much more should they fear the "jealous God" (Deut 5:9 NIV) now that they had accepted Him?

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<sup>4</sup> Ewan Stilwell, "Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (1993), p. 35.

Although His loving acts were intended to dismiss fear, most Trobriand Christians, even up until today, still have the same fear they had of the Trobriand deities.

The shift in the highest achievement may have been seen visibly, but that did not absolutely mean all Trobriand Christians had been transformed, totally. Many wanted to go to heaven, while *Tuma* was still within them. In their struggle to accommodate these two ideas, they placed themselves in a difficult situation. Up until today, Trobrianders are still confused on which destinations to go to. Therefore, an appropriate Trobriand theology is needed to address the situation. In the next section, I will attempt to suggest ways of addressing this religious problem. The concept I will suggest, is not without dangers and disadvantages. It will also not be exclusive, thus, it is open to debate and criticism. However, there has to be a start somewhere, where Trobrianders can really claim the “one true God” as their own, and not as a foreigner.

### **The Beginning of a New Trobriand Christianity**

Western missionaries, after experiencing a new kind of religion, namely Christianity, felt they had to share the urgent message with others. Therefore, they came to Melanesia, including the Trobriand Islands, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their message did help, in many ways, to reform Trobriand society. For all the good that they did, Trobrianders are thankful. However, with all the positive changes, they brought destruction to the culture, which included social organisations, political and economic systems, religious systems, and the total activity of Trobriand habits, ideas, and customs. The gospel was not presented as it really is. The “content” of the gospel (Jesus Christ) was presented, together with the Western “container”. Jesus was not presented as the Son of God, who became flesh, and made His dwelling among all peoples, pitching His tent, igloo, thatched roof house, or other form of dwelling. He was not presented as wanting to be in the midst of different peoples, so as to make it possible for them to be redeemed (John 1:14). He only made His dwelling among the Westerners, so it seemed, because

missionaries wanted the Trobrianders to relinquish their ways, and follow those of the white man. They wanted the islanders to accept the gospel, the valuable content in the container that they were offering. Yet it was impossible for the Trobriand “container”, even if it was viewed as having a lesser value, to be relinquished by the people. The container was their total life.

Because of what has been said above, many Trobrianders, today, see Christianity as identical with Western imperialism. As more and more Trobrianders become liberated, and developed, in both secular and religious circles, they will see how much destruction Christianity has done to their culture. The more they are educated, the more they will question the value of this “foreigner” religion. Some have already identified the negative aspects of Western Christianity. One such person is Patrick Tobigabwela Tomausi, a graduate of Political Science from the University of Papua New Guinea, and formerly a senior public servant, for over 20 years, with the Papua New Guinea government. This is what he said about Christianity:

Western churches, because of their original roots, inherited the characteristics of Western culture. That is, they have a materialistic attitude, which is commonly known as “capitalism”. Furthermore, they have preconceived ideas, and myths, of the people they preach to, and teach. They called the people “heathens”, or “pagans”, because they are not enlightened by their Christian teachings. Christian churches play a dual role, wherever they go, including Papua New Guinea. They preach the good news, on one hand, and manipulate capitalist production, on the other hand. . . . They are among the wealthiest institutions in Papua New Guinea.<sup>5</sup>

Views, like that of Tomausi’s, would not have been expressed, if Christianity was presented in “content” only, without the “container”. If Jesus Christ was presented, to be accommodated in the more-communal

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Patrick Tobigabwela Tomausi, March 14, 1994.

Trobriand way, educated Trobrianders would not have vigorously attacked capitalism. However, as it is, many Trobrianders see Christianity in no different terms from that of Western imperialism.

**a. Jesus Christ, the Basis of Trobriand Theology**

God's plan of salvation found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. God, who initiated the wonderful fellowship, and relationship, with men, revealed Himself, in the way men understood best. He became man Himself, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells how Christ "made Himself nothing", and, not considering equality with God, became like us and lived as a servant (Phil 2:6-7). The reason for such an "emptying" is that, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV). The "world" that God loved so much may have initially meant the Jewish world, because Jesus was speaking to a Jew at that time. However, the Genesis account of the creation of man in God's image, and the commission given by Jesus to go to all nations (Matt 28:19), included the Trobrianders.

Thus, the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the Jewish community does not restrict Him to be a Jew only. Rather, the Jewish race was used as the channel of God's blessing to "all peoples on earth" (Gen 12:3 NIV).

Jesus Christ's incarnation was really an incarnation to the whole of humanity. We do not deny the fact that Christ was born a Jew, and would remain an historical Jewish figure. However, as far as common human characteristics are concerned, Christ was both a Jew, and a Trobriander. If this thought is seen as blasphemy, and impossible, then the concept of incarnation to the whole world is false.

Joe Gaqurae, who made the first attempt to recognise Christ as a Melanesian, argued that, if Christ's incarnation to the whole world is to be accepted, all races, especially Melanesians, in this case, must claim Him as a Melanesian also. In his article, "Indigenisation as Incarnation", he wrote:

We do not attempt to make Christ become a Melanesian. We cannot make Him a Melanesian. He is already a Melanesian. The incarnation affirms the fact that He is already a Melanesian. He has been indigenised, or localised, by God Himself. We cannot do what already has been done. We only have to recognise the fact. We just have to wake up to the fact that, through the incarnation, Christ has already incarnated, and identified Himself with the whole of humankind, not only Jews. . . . If it was possible for Christ to become a Jew, what can stop Him from becoming a Melanesian, to me?<sup>6</sup>

What can really stop Christ from becoming a Trobriander also? Only the finite human mind can reject this truth, and continue to see Christ as a Jew, or a Westerner. Many finite minds think they know God, and can restrict Him to a certain locality, or race, only. Yet, many theologians, like Emil Brunner, believe that God cannot be fully known, either by scientific methods, or by faith. God is beyond human conception. He is not within our knowledge, rather our knowledge is in God.

No man can know who God is. The cleverest scholar knows nothing more, concerning God, than the simplest man. There dwells, of course, within every human heart, a feeling of something higher than itself, a dim apprehension of a Power ruling all that is, and giving His Law to all that lives. . . . What variety of ideas, men have of “God”, and “the divine” – and how many have no conception of the matter, whatsoever. Who dares to say, “I know who God is. I know His plans and purposes?” This much we know of God: He is the great mystery.<sup>7</sup>

No man has seen God, except the Son of God, who claimed, in John 14:9, that anyone who has seen Him, has seen the Father. His Father

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<sup>6</sup> J. Gaqurae, “Indigenisation as Incarnation”, in John D’Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia: a Reader, Point 8* (1985), p. 213-214.

<sup>7</sup> E. Brunner, *Our Faith*, London UK: SCM Press, 1959, p. 63.

was the one, whom people claimed as their God (John 8:54). Jesus Christ is that great mystery revealed. This self-revelation of God, through Jesus Christ, is the only fundamental basis of our knowledge of God. Of course, not all people know God, in Jesus Christ. It all depends on what Jesus means to them. Those, to whom Jesus is only a noble, wise, and obedient man, and the greatest of all religious leaders and saints, do not have God. But those who have the Son, as “God revealed”, have the fulfilment of God’s saving act, through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He is the basis of Trobriand theology, or any theology, for that matter.

**b. Accepting Christ as a Trobriander**

In order for Trobrianders to accept the finished work of Christ’s atonement, they must first accept Him, as the true revelation of God. This can be done, only when they identify Christ, in their own belief system, and pattern of thought. Christ must dwell in their midst, and be one of them. Christ must be seen as a Trobriander, who understands them in their joys and sorrows. They will be able to accept the fact that Christ is the “high priest”, who is able to sympathise with their weaknesses. He was tempted in every way like them, and yet did not sin (Heb 4:15). He will become their *kabogigisa* (model), the one who came, not to do away with culture (human activities, achievements, and beliefs), but to fulfil it. He will be able to change, reform, and restore, Trobriand culture, because He is in that particular culture, and understands every aspect of it. A foreigner, on the other hand, can never bring reformation, acceptable to the Trobrianders, because he does not understand all the depths of the Trobriand mind and being.

The only purpose for the atoning work of Jesus Christ was because man had sinned, and had fallen short of God’s glory. The image of God, originally created in man, had been spoilt by sin. That is, God’s purpose for man had been replaced with what man wanted to do for himself. Man had corrupted the culture, which constitutes man’s total lifestyle, given by God. So God came, Himself, in Jesus Christ, to reform and renew that culture. He continues to come, again and again, in His Spirit, to reveal

His plans for reformation and change in societies. Yet, that reformation is not experienced by all cultures, because changes are dictated by one particular culture only. It is difficult, because it is like using a screwdriver to mend a torn *laplap* (cloth). Because of this, changes have been viewed negatively, rather than in a positive way.

The sad thing is that many Trobriand Christians have accepted the use of Western ways, taught to them by early Western missionaries, as the only means to reform their own cultures. An attempt made by a lay pastor, Toboeta, to sing praises to God, and the Christian message in the traditional tune seemed very funny to them. Yet the initiative, taken by Toboeta, was a positive step towards identifying Christ as a Trobriander. For only a “Trobriand Christ” can change the Trobriand culture. His spirit, which indwells Trobriand Christians, will enable them to bring forth reformation and change to their own society. As they partake in the mission of Jesus Christ, in reconciling man back to God, they will experience liberation, reformation, and change, in their own “Jerusalem” first. Thus, they will experience the kingdom of God, which had already come upon them, and had become an earthly reality. They will foretaste the heavenly state of life, here and now, and fully experience it later with God, wherever He is. The assurance of eternal life in Christ is sufficient for any Trobriand Christian. It is better than attempting to know where God really is, whether He is in *Tuma*, or the Jewish and Greek heaven.

## **Conclusion**

Those, who saw that Christianity had failed to address their situation, meaningfully, commonly ask the questions raised by Trobriand Christians. The Christ, presented by the missionaries, who held strongly to the traditional Christian view, did not fit well into their lifestyles. The pattern of belief, they were so accustomed to, had been disturbed by the introduction of Christianity. Although the basic elements of the two religious systems were seen as one, presenters of the “new way” viewed the “old way” as ungodly and misleading. Therefore, those who got converted into the new belief system were told to relinquish their old “pagan” ways, and totally accept the new, as it was presented.

What the missionaries failed to see was the fact that the traditional religious experiences of people, in this case the Trobrianders, became the basis of all their religious experiences. By this I mean, the traditional Trobriand religious experiences, and the belief of a spiritual realm, made it possible for them to accept Christianity. If Trobrianders did not believe in the powers of spiritual beings, it would have been impossible for them to accept the Christian concept of a transcendent God. In other words, Trobrianders accepted Christianity, because they had already had some religious experiences, themselves.

The Trobrianders' religious experiences were not separate from all other experiences. Rather, their whole day-to-day experiences were nothing but religious. Their lives revolved around the world of spirits. Their political, social, economic, and other activities of life, were influenced and guided by the spiritual order. Nothing happened without the spirits, and nothing was possible without their powers. Their total being, and existence, depended entirely on the spiritual order that was born in, and with, them from the very beginning.

This study has enabled us to understand the inner realm of Trobriand religious experiences. It has also enabled us to understand the confusion that Trobriand Christians have gone through. While the basic elements of both their traditional religion and Christianity were one, they could not harmoniously marry the two. This was because the new way was disturbing their total lifestyles, from where they originated. What they did, and where they would end up, was never questioned before. Christianity taught a different path, and pattern of life, of which the people had no knowledge. It was hard for them to comprehend, because it was foreign.

Although Jesus Christ was presented as the means for salvation, Trobrianders found it hard to accept the idea of a foreigner saving them. How could he? He would not know their deep aspirations, values, joys, and sorrows. They knew that their salvation came from their gods and



spirits, who had their real and perfect existence in *Tuma*, their heaven, where life, in its perfection, was experienced.

Before God can appropriately address Trobriand situations, He must first become a Trobriander. This paper suggests that God, who was incarnated through Christ, must first be identified as a Trobriander. Only then, can He be seen as capable of becoming the means of salvation for the islander. The truth of God's incarnation, through Jesus Christ, to the whole of humanity, can be accepted. Trobrianders would look back into their traditional religion, which was the basis of their culture, to identify God there. They would view their pattern of life as the means of salvation, which has found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This would enable them to view their religion and Christianity as one, rather than seeing them as two separate systems, in conflict with each other.

Some Trobrianders may disagree with this paper, and I take full responsibility for this. However, there has to be a start somewhere, so that Christ can be made more meaningful in the lives of Trobriand Christians. The joy and deep value of God's salvation, through Christ, can again be experienced in its fullness.

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