

A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF PRAYER IN BAEGU TRADITION

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[The spelling of the surname of this article's author was incorrect in the original printed edition. Also, it seems that the second half of the bibliography was missing from the original text, because authors' names are cited in the text, but there are no corresponding details in the bibliography. For information of readers, as many authors' names, with references that could be reliably determined, are now shown in the bibliography. However, despite a thorough search, the details for the remaining seven authors, to which citations refer, could not be determined. Furthermore, a number of the page numbers shown against author citations in the text are incorrect. Unfortunately, the correct page numbers could not be determined. –Revising ed.]

Introduction

In the year 1970, a great revival swept across Solomon Islands. One birthplace of the revival was a small village called Kofiloko, a village that is located on the harbour of Lau Lagoon, and serves as a gateway to the Baegu region.

The outcomes of the revival were Christians having prayer meetings lasting the entire night, having weekends of praying and fasting, and establishing prayer mountains. This led people to adopt the traditional concept and approaches of prayer.

Over the years, many Christians were not in favour of this new experience, so they resolved to be neutral in their prayer commitments. This led to division within the churches. Instead of being mature in their Christian spiritual lives, the church members became more legalistic in their prayer commitments.

The purpose of this paper is to present clear teaching from the scriptures that, if appropriated into the Baegu setting, will guide the Baegu Christians in their prayer lives. This paper may serve as a resource for the Baegu people, and even to others who desire to venture deeply into the ministry of prayer.

1. The Object of Baegu Traditional Prayer

The Mythical Supreme Father

In Baegu theology, there was a supreme being, who was addressed sometimes as *ma* (father), not just in the sense of biological heredity, but simply based on the concept of his moral attributes: his *liosaua* (love), his *kwaiofea* (grace), and *kwaitatakomia* (mercy). The supreme father was believed, by the Baegu, to exist, and be enthroned, in the *fanoi langi* (the heavenly place).

I like the definition, made by Joshua Daimoi, about the mythical supreme father: “The mythical supreme father is probably the creator god or hero for some Melanesians, or divine ruler for others.” (Daimoi, class notes)

Baegu culture firmly believes what other people groups in the world believe, that there is a supreme being beyond their habitation. What is true about the Baegu people is that, though their rituals in worship were directed to their immediate ancestral fathers (*beu akalo*), the allegiance went beyond the capacity of the ancestral fathers to the supreme being, who was higher in status.

Mbiti, in his classical book about prayers of South African religions, states a prayer which shed light on what is also true about the Baegu concept of traditional prayer communications: “Bilikonda [God], who art in the bush, Creator Akongo [God]; Akongo of the ancestors, Akongo of the fathers, our Akongo” (Mbiti, p. 143). *Bilikonda* was the supreme being in the

African context, and the Africans highly honoured *Bilikonda*. They prayed to *Bilikonda*, and they highly enthroned *Bilikonda* as the supreme being, when they paid allegiance, through their ancestral fathers.

The Baegu people have different titles for the supreme being. It is very important to know that the different names the Baegu people attribute to their supreme father do not mean that they were polytheistic worshippers. Indeed, the Baegu people were monotheistic worshippers. They believed in one supreme being, who is *sufa* (omnipresent), *gwaufutana* (the creator), *bubufera gwau* (omnipotent), and *salokwalia* (omniscient).

I will now deal specifically with the meaning of the attributes of the Baegu supreme being. The first attribute is *sufa*. This word is a combination of two words: *su* (cover) and *fa* or *fafia* (to spread). So *sufa* means, “the spreading of the covering”. This attribute indicates that the presence of the *sufa* covers the whole universe. In the biblical concept, this is like the omnipresence of God.

Another attribute of the Baegu supreme being is *bubufera gwau*. This word is a combination of three words: *bubu* (to look), *fera* (city or nation), and *gwo'u* (empty). This means that the *bubufera gwau* needs only to look at a city, or a nation, with its inhabitants, and his look could totally destroy them. This speaks of powerful judgment, which carries the biblical concept of the omnipotence of God.

The term *gwaufutana* is the combination of two words: *gwau* (head), and *futana* (power). It indicates that *gwaufutana* is the head of everything, the creator. He has the power and authority over his creation. He is full of knowledge, like our biblical concept of God's omniscience.

The last attribute is *salokwalia*. This is also from two different words: *salo* (sky or space), and *kwalia* (the breaking forth of light at the dawn). This speaks of the splendour and the majesty of the *salokwalia*. This also expresses that the *salokwalia* was a glorious being.

The above terminology is significant for Baegu traditional worship. It creates total confidence in the one they worship. They are not approaching

a man of their sort, but the one who is incomparable (even to their ancestral fathers). Ofasia reported a word of amazement uttered by his grandmother, Borubae, while watching the lightning and thunder across the skies. “There must be a great man, who was the author and activator of all that is happening in the heavens.”¹ Lastly, the terminology used to describe the supreme being in Baegu culture is not the terminology used in daily language. The terms used are sacred words that are used only during prayer rituals, and only by the pagan priest.

The Ancestral Fathers

According to Baegu culture, the tribe or family includes both the living, and the dead ancestral spirits. This is similar to what Burnett said about African beliefs: “Just because the person has moved from the world of fleshly order and existence, this does not mean that they have ceased to exist, as part of the tribe” (Burnett, p. 60).

The above quote expresses the fact that all tribal groups under the sun have the same beliefs about their ancestral fathers. The Baegu people were not an exception. A myth tells of how the Baeguan people came, and placed high value on the existence of their ancestral fathers.

When *gwaufutana* (creator) finished creating the island of Malaita, the culture heroes came to build their houses and gardens on the hills of North Malaita. The founding ancestor of the Baegu was one of a pair of twins hatched from a primordial eagle’s nest. From one egg hatched the Baegu ancestor, and from another egg hatched the Kwaio people group (located on the southern side of the island). Because the originality of the Baegu people goes back to the eagle’s nest, the Baegu people believe that the eagle is the bodily representation of their dead ancestors, who still exist, and live among them. Therefore, the eagle still is a sacred bird to the Baegu people today. (Ross, p. 160)

The Baegu people believe strongly that *gwaufutana* was the one who gave the land to their ancestors. So they see their ancestors, not as the creators,

¹ The expression of amazement uttered by Borubae Andiata, the grandmother of Ofasia, over a powerful manifestation of God’s nature in the skies. She ascribed that to an unknown supreme being.

but only as mediators. Therefore, the prayers of the Baegu people were presented to the *gwaufutana*, via the ancestral fathers.

The priest represents the people, and offers their prayers to the supreme being, via ancestral fathers. The ancestral fathers lay their petitions before the supreme being, and the supreme being responds directly to the people, by granting the people whatever the request may be.

Smith, in his book, stated something similar to that of the Baegu traditional power communication. “The Tongan do not normally address petitions to *leza* (the supreme being). The priest, on behalf of the people, directs their petitions to *mizimu* (the ancestral spirit), and *mizimu* would lay their petitions before *leza*” (Smith, p. 68).

To be more practical, in the context of traditional power communication, a prayer from the Baegu pagan priest of Faeno tribe included, “*O ma Rifaitalo, amasia ma oe sa Bubuferagwau, uri ramoa nau ku musia luana lalmoa sa Gorikwae.*”² Iro, the priest, prayed to Rifaitalo, who was his forefather, that Rifaitalo would cry before *bubuferagwau* (the supreme being) to grant to him the power, that Iro would “eat the head”³ of his enemy, Gorikwae.

The ancestral fathers are mediators between the Baegu people and the supreme being. The Baegu people still keep the ancestral shrines, and offer sacrifices to the ancestral fathers on the sacred groves like *beu ambu* (holy mountain) today.

2. Ancestral Names are the Medium of Baegu Traditional Prayer

Names Reflect Power

When the Baegu people worship their forefathers, they usually call out their names. “In many ancient, as well as contemporary, cultures, the name of a person represents an individual’s character, family history, and cultural status” (Webster, p. 65).

² A warfare prayer orally passed down to me by my auntie, Tasimaoma, of Faeno tribe. Iro the pagan priest was her father.

³ The phrase “to eat the head of the enemy” is a Baegu term for expressing the utter destruction of the enemy.

The Baegu people traditionally believed those who were heroes, who stood out with extraordinary capabilities when they were alive, retained the power in death that belonged to them when they were alive.

Practical examples of the characters of Baegu heroes, when they were alive, and believed to be retained after death, includes: “valour in war battle (aggressive temperament and military skills), ability to accumulate wealth by hard work, skilful in trading and investment, and being an eloquent speaker” (Ross, p. 191).

Traditionally, the Baegu method of the “calling”⁴ of names of the ancestral fathers for blessings or curses could be done through two distinctive forms: through ritual observations, and through direct calling on ancestral names.

The first method of calling on the ancestral names is through ritual observations. The ritual activity must go together with the worship of the people of Baegu, and the ritual activities are conceptualised as a form of prayer. “Magic as knowledge is in three parts: the correct words of the formula, the correct observation of taboos, and the correct use of the name of the ancestor by the practitioners.”⁵

The method of ritual observation actually demonstrates the concept that, regardless of what the circumstances were, the rules and regulations prescribed for the rituals must be carried out, without fail. Failure to observe the rules and regulations would mean death to the covenant community, or the individual practitioner. In this case, the ancestral names that should have been the channel of goodwill for the people now pronounce the death penalty on the people.

According to Baegu beliefs, there are venues that are still regarded as *abu* (holy), in which they believed that the ancestral spirits have their abode.

⁴ *Ai* (calling) is also used for the word “prayer” in English. *Arangai Akalo* or *angitakalo* are the two words that express the cry of intimacy with deep anguish that requires immediate attention from the ancestral spirits.

⁵ Joshua Daimoi, “Melanesian Theology Course Notes”, Banz PNG: CLTC, 1999, chapter 3.

Whenever a need is identified, they would go to any of these venues, and pray to the ancestral spirits, through ritual observations.

These are the *abu* (holy) sites of the Baegu:

- Sacred shrine (*beu abu*);
- Sacred caves (*falume*);
- Sacred stone (*fau abu*);
- Sacred pool (*matakwa abu or kafo abu*).

Within Melanesian societies, the venues for carrying out rituals may be similar, but some may be different. For contrast purposes, the rituals of the Ngaing of the Rai coast of Southern Madang District took place at the war god sanctuary, where the ancestors “lived either in their war gods’ sanctuaries, or with the guardian deities of their sacred pools, [where] the bones of the dead were deposited” (Lawrence, p. 17).

Abu and *sua* are the terms in Baegu and Toabaita that portray the same concept of holiness and defilement in relation to God and the tabernacle complex in the Bible.

In our Christian concepts today, those places, such as quiet-time sites, prayer hills, holy sites, etc., may not necessarily be called sacred shrines, but we may regard these venues, which we use, to meet with God, as holy places. It may be a small hut, made specifically for quiet-time and prayer, a selected site in the bush, or a church building.

The second method is to call the names of the ancestral fathers in times of emergencies. This expresses the heart-cry call to the ancestral spirits, a typical cry that demands an immediate response from the ancestors (*angitaiakalo*).

I will use a case study here to illustrate the point stated above. In 1976, about 30 men surrounded a man from Baegu during a long night of drinking at the Honiara hotel. The 30 men actually planned to kill the Baegu man. The Baegu man had no means of hope. At this point of time,

the Baegu man called upon the name of his forefather “Rifaitalo”.⁶ It was noted that, by calling the name, the man regained his strength, courage, and confidence. At that moment, that Baegu man just felt like a superman. He then retaliated, took revenge, and the outcome was five of the opponents had broken bones, and the rest shared major injuries, which caused all of them to flee for their lives from the hotel.

The calling of ancestral names, through ritual observation, and the calling of ancestral fathers, in times of emergencies, are the traditional avenues the Baegu people used in calling upon their ancestral spirits. It is vital to note that names, to the Baegu, are not mere labels. People, who give ancestral names to their children, believe that names characterise ancestral identities. The identities of the ancestors are manifested at the time the practitioners called upon the particular name for help. The calling out of ancestral names means inviting oneself to be possessed by the ancestors’ power. The caller is also challenging the ancestors to open the floodgates of the supernatural realm, for the caller’s personal business.

Names Reflect a Covenant Bond

The Baegu people are under obligation to their ancestral fathers, because they are special people, a possession of the ancestral fathers. The ancestral fathers, too, have a strong obligation to members of the Baegu people. The ancestral spirits are accountable to the members of the tribe for their well-being. “The unity of a group reached out, back in time, to include the ancestors. In burial, for example, the dead were gathered to their people, united with their kindred” (Martens, p. 72).

It is understandable that, in order for the relationship between the Baegu and their dead ancestors to remain intact, “the living Baegu must keep, and faithfully maintain, the mutual cooperation, through rituals, daily prayers, and offering of sacrifices” (Ross, p. 141).

⁶ *Rifaitalo*: A war hero in the Faeno tribe of Baegu. The name means *ri* (shout), *fai* (with), and *talo* (club). So *rifaitalo* means “shout with a club”. The incident referred to was witnessed by Billy Dauuma, of Waleano, who was accompanying the main character. This incident was common knowledge throughout my community, after it had taken place.

To call out the names of ancestors actually signifies the keeping of the covenant bond, with great honour and respect. When the names of the ancestors were being called in times of sacrifices, or during emergency situations, the ancestral spirits immediately responded with great obligation, because the ancestors knew that they were highly respected by their tribe, or a member of their tribe. “The ghosts were usually resident in the region of the dead, a specific locality, but were available for assisting human beings when suitable prayers and sacrifices were offered to them” (Tippett, p. 6).

A case study of a people group in Malaita, Solomon Islands, actually illustrates the above point. A Langalanga man, under the coverage of the sacrifices offered by his priest, was rescued by the *baekwa asi*⁷ while hopelessly drifting in the ocean. The man was safe, because the name of his ancestor was called in this emergency situation (Cooper, p. 119).

Maintenance of the covenant affected was done through keeping of the sacred relics. The Baegu term for “sacred relics” is *matale*.⁸ Hogbin reported that “*matale* to the Toabaita people was a bundle of hair taken from the deceased, while placed on the already-dug grave” (Hogbin, p. 104) “To the Kwaio people of Malaita, a *matale* is a skull of their dead” (Keesing, p. 116). And to the “Nyakyusa of South Africa (for contrast purposes) the dead relics may be a lump of hair, or finger nail, of the dead person” (Willson, p. 22), while to the Baegu people the relics maybe a “walking stick or a lock of hair” (Ross, p. 211).

To the Baegu, the keeping of relics of the dead are the mark of the living covenant with dead ancestral spirits, and, also, the preservation of the dead relics are the way of accommodating the presence of the ancestral spirits with men. The assistance needed could be provided, at the disposal of the person, who called on the name, or the one who preserved the dead relics, anywhere, and at anytime.

⁷ *Baekwasi* is the red shark, worshipped by the Langalanga people of Malaita, Solomon Islands. They believed that the red shark was their ancestor. The red shark could be mouth-fed at the shrine by the priest.

⁸ *Matale* is a part of a dead man or article that was kept by the deceased while he/she was alive.

We conclude by saying that ancestral names, to the Baegu people, are believed to be their medium of prayers. To the Baegu, calling of the ancestral names is the sign of assurance that power is always available, to be used in the best interest of the living relatives, and also the calling of the ancestral names signifies that the covenant bond was still intact.

Finally, the whole concept of ancestral names, as the medium of prayer, is the total explanation of their faith in calling upon the names of ancestors. It sums up their faith that, what they called for, was sure to be granted, without being in doubt, or being faithless (*fitala*).

The Shrine Complex: the Essence of Baegu Traditional Prayers

The Sacred Shrine (beuabu)

The Baegu people prayed to their ancestral fathers in the sacred groves. The sacred groves consisted of virgin hardwood, rising out of the green blanket of secondary forest. To the Baegu, the sacred groves were both temples and cemeteries. This is where the ancestral heroes were buried, and it was where all the greatest religious ceremonies took place.

In Baegu, the groves are termed as *beuabu* (holy house), from *beu* (house), and *abu* (holy). There are different concepts related to the word *beu* (house). In Baegu, the general meaning for the word *beu* is a “dwelling”. *Beu*, in this context, is a masculine noun, and is a dwelling for men only. The dwelling place for the whole household, and particularly for females, is a feminine noun.

The concept I will focus on is *beuabu*, “the dwelling place is sacred or holy”. As the ancestral spirits are most sacred, their abode must be treated with great honour and respect. The *beuabu* to the Baegu is not a building, but the whole shrine complex. It includes the natural grove, and all the activities that take place in the sacred grove.

The Baegu people believed that the community was made up of both the living and the “living dead” (Mbiti, quoted by Adeyemo, p. 132). The groves, where the ancestral heroes are buried, are called *beu* (house). Because the *beu* was the abode of the ancestral spirits, the *beu* became holy (*abu*). The *beuabu* (holy house) was traditionally restricted from common

life activities. This concept of *beuabu* will be discussed in detail under the biblical concept of tabernacle.

The Baegu Shrine Complex (beuabu)

The graves of the ancestors were located in the *ra'ai* (holy of holies). This was surrounded by a rectangular wall of stone (*lasi*). Outside the *lasi* was the main place of fire for sacrifices. This was the *laloabu* (holy place). The *laloabu* was surrounded by another rectangular wall of stone (*sulofou*) that served as the enclosure that marked the boundary between the holy place (*laloabu*) and the common court (*fuliau*). This boundary was called the *fara boboe*. Outside the *laloabu* was the *fuliau* (common court), which was used as a celebration ground for public worship. The rectangular enclosures restricted different groups to different places, according to prescribed law, passed down by the founding ancestors.

Fuliau (Common Court)

This is literally the venue for music. The typical music, in traditional Baegu, was called *agae* (orchestra). This was for a selected group of people, playing traditional panpipe instruments, accompanied by a well-arranged, and organised, band of males.

The section was described as “common court”, because it was a neutral ground that was located under the *laloabu* (holy place). The concept behind the celebration that took place in the common court was “celebrating the victory”. After all the sacrifices and prayers were offered by the priest, on behalf of the community, the whole community then flooded into the *fuliau* for the joyful celebration. The community burst out with thanksgiving to their ancestral fathers for all the blessings imparted to them.

Hogbin notes a bystander’s comment about the outcome of the Toabaitan *aga'a* (celebration): “Our bellies are full, our bodies are light, and we only think of laughter. Long standing disputes are forgotten, because we are not angry when we dance. Music and dancing throw anger out. We see a kinsman, against whom we have a grievance, but we think only that he is a kinsman, not of the grievance, and we dance together” (Hogbin, p. 70).

It was understandable that only the priest could enter the shrine complex, together with a few other ritually-*abu* (holy) people. The *fuliau* is the only court that is accessible for the whole community to enter and celebrate the victories of their ancestral spirits.

In the *fuliau* (celebration court), visitors from other tribes or clans could enter and participate together in the celebration with the hosting tribe. The commemoration feast that was enjoyed after the *agae* is called *maoma*⁹ (Ross, p. 236).

The Laloabu (the Holy Place)

According to Baegu traditional religion, entering the *laloabu* required certain conditions. The *laloabu* actually was not a venue for mere entertainment, such as the *fuliau*. These are some of the conditions prescribed for entering the *laloabu*:

- The men had to remain in the *beuwane*¹⁰ for a prescribed period before the sacrifice took place.
- The laws and regulation required by the community's behavioural pattern must be strictly observed, without failure.¹¹
- A man had to avoid entering the *bisi* (menstruation hut), the *bisi ni lafi* (childbirth hut), and the boundary of *kabara* or *tala keni* (latrine).¹²

The people entering the *laloabu* must be strictly from the same tribe of the ancestral shrine.

⁹ *Maoma* is the traditional feast, commemorating the ancestral heroes who died and are still active in the affairs of the living community.

¹⁰ *Beuwane* comes from two words: *beu* (house) and *wane* (house man).

¹¹ The community's behavioural laws and regulations included most of the Ten Commandments. See Ex 20:12-17.

¹² The blood from menstruation and childbirth, and the female latrine, were powerful enough to defile and destroy the *beubu*.

The whole idea, developed in this section, is that the worship and the prayers, offered in the shrine, were based on agreement in the community. Those who are guided by the law and regulations instituted by the community, and the god, in whom they believe and worship.

The Ra'ai (the Holy of Holies)

This is the most sacred of all the courts in the Baegu shrine complex. Even the priest could not enter the *ra'ai* of his free will. The priest, and those who are ceremonially *abu*, entered the *ra'ai* only at the burial of the existing priest, or burial of a man of heroic character.

The various duties normally carried out by the priest in the *ra'ai* were:

- Preparing the oven for the sacrifice (*koboso*);
- Digging the new grave for the burial of the dead priest, etc.;
- Carrying of the corpse into the *ra'ai* to be buried;
- The priest's aid (*falesusua*),¹³ who helps the priest recite the names of all the living members of the tribe during the sacrifices.

The duties carried out in the *ra'ai* were too demanding for the priest to be able to do by himself. There were other people, who were able to enter the *ra'ai*, together with the priest, for the sole purpose of assisting the priest. The priest has to offer special prayers before and after the job has been completed, to appease the anger of the ancestors against those who helped the priest (*famola*).

Finally, although there were certain boundaries that were structured in the Baegu shrine complex, the worshippers actually, subconsciously and consciously, knew their boundaries. The restriction of certain groups to certain courts in the shrine is, actually, not in the sense of "being forced not

¹³ *Falesusua* is the term for the priest's aid. The priest held a string of beads (*ae galu*) as a rosary, and the priest's aid would recite all living members of the tribe so that no one would be left out of the blessings.

to enter”, but is based on respect and honour towards the ancestral spirits, who were the source of the individual and community well-being.

These are boundaries for certain groups of people:

- The female members, the ceremonially-defiled people, and visitors from other tribes, could only enter the *fuliau*, and not go beyond the *faraboboe*.
- The ordinary *abu* (holy) people could enter the *laloabu* (holy place), but not the *ra'ai*.
- The priest could enter the *ra'ai*, only when an existing priest, or a person of heroic character, died, and was buried.
- The *falesusua* (priest's aid), and those who were sanctified to assist the priest with duties in the *ra'ai*, could enter the *ra'ai*, when the priest offered special prayers and sacrifices for them.

The different groups enjoyed their boundary limits, because they had a sense of respect and honour. Their submission, in being confined to given boundaries, was, to them, an act of worship.

The whole traditional worship of the Baegu people, and their approach in the shrine is related to the concept of holiness. Without holiness, worship would be in vain. Likewise, the whole essence of Christian worship is holiness. The scriptures state “But, just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do . . . for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15-16). The concept of holiness, as a mark of godly worship, will be discussed in detail later.

3. The Object of Christian Prayer

The God of the Ancestors

The word “transcendence” describes the traditional Baegu beliefs about the *gwaufutona*¹⁴ (God). Baegu traditional beliefs about the supreme being

¹⁴ *Gwaufutona* is the term, in Baegu, for “head”, but it was seen in the context of a creator. In relation to Baegu traditional religion, the creator is the supreme being.

can be summed up, as Erickson shares in his book: “God is other than the world, and other than humans. . . . God was thought of as being very high above the earth, and off in some far-distant place” (Erickson, p. 268).

The Baegu people subconsciously knew that there was someone far greater than their ancestral fathers, who existed, and were enthroned in the *fanoilangi*.¹⁵ It is very difficult for the Baegu people to describe the supreme being. The way the Baegu people described the supreme being is similar to what Webster says about some so-called world religious views about God. “In the highest forms of Buddhist, Hindu, and the Taoist thought, God is imagined to be a nameless and indifferenced spiritual reality beyond personality. The conception of God in Islam is impersonal and deterministic. His name is associated with power and transcendence” (Webster, p. 72).

When we contrast the Baegu, and the views about God of the above world religions, with Christianity, we find out that they are different. Christian belief about God is that God is the God of relationship, the God who reveals Himself throughout history, through specific acts, propositional teaching, and personal communion.

While the Baegu’s supreme being is transcendent, without personally revealing himself to men, the God of the Christian is transcendent, but also reveals Himself to men: “God permeates the world in sustaining, creative power, shaping and steering it, in a way that keeps it on its planned course” (Packer, p. 277).

Christians are worshipping and offering prayers and petitions to God, who is not an impersonal being, unlike the Baegu’s religious views about God. The God of the Christians is the God who relates personally to His covenant people, rather than being a nameless impersonal force. He is the God of creation, who chooses to be known through His covenant relationship with specific individuals, who walk before Him, and obey Him. It is very important to know that Baegu people believed that the supreme

¹⁵ *Fanoilangi* is the term, in Baegu, for “Heaven”, an abode beyond the human world.

being is enthroned in *fanoilangi* (heaven). He is superior over their ancestral fathers, because he was also their god.

The first time God revealed Himself to Moses, He said, “I am the God of your Fathers, the God of Abram, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The scriptures also confirm that, during the Lord’s earthly ministry, He emphatically said to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees “I tell you the truth . . . before Abraham was born I am” (John 8:58). God revealed His identity to Moses at Horeb by saying that He was the God of his ancestral fathers. In doing this, He was actually affirming to Moses that He was the God, who spoke to his forefathers, and He was the God, whom his forefathers worshipped, and He existed before his forefathers came into being.

It is interesting to know that the concept of a supreme being is found in the traditional beliefs of the Baegu. The problem lies with the fact that the Baegu people have no personal relationship with the supreme being. They worship the supreme being via their ancestral spirits.¹⁶ The problem is that they have no covenant relationship with him, and no knowledge of him. The Baegu’s traditional perception about the supreme being was similar to the beliefs of the Athenians at the time of apostle Paul.

Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagas and said: “Men of Athens! I observed that you are very religious in all aspects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an unknown God’. What, therefore, you worship in ignorance this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world, and all things in it, since He is the Lord of the heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:22-25).

The above scripture reveals the heart of the Baegu traditional religion. The fact is that, because they have no personal knowledge of the supreme being,

¹⁶ The Baegu believe that the family includes both the living and the spirits of the dead. The ancestral spirits have great power, and can influence the lives of their earthly descendants, because the supreme being is transcendent and unknown, so they worship and offer prayers to their ancestral fathers, who are immanent beings.

they have tended to worship their ancestral spirits, and accommodate them, because ancestral fathers were, to the Baegu people, the immanent beings.

Baegu and Christian Worldview of Supreme Being

“The great French agnostic Voltaire said, ‘God created man in His own image, and man returned the favour.’ God created man, and we have reduced our unique God to just a superman. But He remains totally, utterly, absolutely transcendent” (Evans, p. 39). It is a pity, but Voltaire’s statement reflects the beliefs of traditional Baegu worshippers.

BELIEFS	BAEGU WORLDVIEW	CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW
Supreme being	<i>Gwaufotona</i> (Creator)	Yahweh (God)
Transcendence	Lofty	Lofty
Immanence	Replaced with ancestral spirit	Covenant
Revelation	Manipulation via ancestral fathers, communicating through rituals	Personal revelation through specific acts, propositional teachings, through incarnation, sacraments
Personal knowledge	No personal knowledge	Personal knowledge

In order to understand the God, to whom all Christians offer their prayers and petitions, we must look into the scriptures and find out what God Himself has said about His being. The scriptures explain that He is both transcendent and immanent.

- The Transcendent God – “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-9).
- The Immanent God – “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin” (Ex 34:6-7).

The two scripture passages above actually express that God is in no way to be compared to human beings. And, because God cannot be compared to humans, He is not subject to the limitations that men possibly make. Human beings cannot possibly help themselves, because of their limitations. Only God, the God of all impossibilities, can help human beings in their limitations.

Finally, it is a pity to see traditional Baegu worshippers serve their ancestral spirits under obligations. In order to obtain and maintain their well-being, they have to manipulate the ancestral spirits, by observing the rituals of keeping sacred relics.

The Christian God is an all-sufficient God. He has made Jesus to be “far above all rule, and authority, power, and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. And God has placed all things at His feet” (Ephesians 1:21-22). This scripture shows that God is the God of the ancestral fathers. We see, in this text, that God has placed all things under Jesus’ feet. This indicates that even the ancestral spirits, whom the Baegu people have held in high esteem, were ultimately under the total authority of God. Therefore, all worship and prayer should be directed to God alone.

The I Am Who I Am

Whenever the Baegu people worship, or call on the names of their forefathers, during the offering of sacrifices, or during emergency situations, their forefathers are usually available at personal or community disposal. The Baegu people believe that power was channelled through the names they called upon: “the names denote the essence of a thing . . . the name was related to the nature of the character of the person” (Smith, p. 116).

In Baegu terminology, *rifaitalo* means “shout with a war club”, and *ramo* means “warrior”. Whenever there was a war confrontation, calling upon these names meant definite victory, because *rifaitalo* and *ramo*¹⁷ are two

¹⁷ *Rifaitalo* is the name of a war hero in my Faeno tribe. *Ramo* is a popular name in the Baegu and Taobata cultures. The names reflect the war heroes who bore those names.

names that signify being powerful. It is interesting to observe the way in which the God of the Christians first revealed Himself to mankind, because God revealed Himself to man by using the concept of His name.

In order for us to know how God introduced Himself to man, we must go back to the root of the culture of the people to whom He revealed Himself. “The general term ‘El’ and ‘Elohim’ may possibly be connected with the idea of ‘strength’, the epithets, ‘Shaddai’ and ‘Elyon’, the former is cognate with an Accadian word *shadu*, “mountains”, and later means ‘lofty’ ” (Robinson, p.52).

It is interesting that, although God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He never revealed His name. God spoke His proper name for the first time to Moses in the Sinai wilderness (Peel, 88). “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent you’ ” (Exodus 3:14).

This indicates that, at the right time, the eternal supreme being, who is the author of the whole universe, revealed Himself to the nation of Israel. “The English translation actually used the term ‘LORD’ to represent God’s Hebrew name YHWH. Because the Israelites never read or spoke the name Yahweh, they substituted the word ‘Adonai’, meaning ‘LORD’. The Hebrew word Yahweh simply means ‘I AM’ ” (Peel, p. 88).

The ancestral names of Baegu are frequently used during sacrifices, and emergency calls, as a form of manipulating ancestral fathers for immediate attention. Whereas the name Yahweh not only denotes greatness and power, it is too sacred to mention. He is not to be manipulated or abused.

The personal name of God, “Yahweh” is expanded by Martens: “I will be who I will be. . . . I will be for you the kind of God you have need of” (Martens, p. 22). Yahweh represents the God who identifies Himself with His covenant people: the unchangeable God, the God who always is true to His promises.

When God revealed His name to Moses as Yahweh, He was assuring Moses that He was reliable, because of His nature. The Israelites, who

were the covenant nation, needed to wholly trust in Him for their salvation, because He used His own name as an oath, a guarantee of the covenant. “I am God, there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like me. . . . My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure” (Is 46:9-10).

We have already seen that the Baegu people believed that a higher being was beyond their ancestral fathers. The problem is that the Baegu people did not know how this supreme being could be known, in their own context. Due to this difficulty in understanding the supreme being, they turned their worship and prayers to their forefathers.

Finally, the God, whom Christians worship, and to whom they offer prayers, is the God who revealed Himself to human beings, and entered into a covenant relationship with them. The God who made promises with His people is reliable in fulfilling what He has promised. He does not tolerate manipulation, like the Baegu traditional worship does with their ancestral fathers.

The right approach that God requires from Christians during worship and prayers is not to be based on the concept of manipulation. It should be seen as an act of relationship, knowing that, through honour and submission in faith, God will fulfil His promise in granting Christians their needs and desires.

The Abba Father

According to Baegu terminology, the word *ma* is a widely-used term, which refers to “Father”. When the term is used, it could either be an address, within a household, to the father, or it may be an address, alluding to an elderly person, or a man of social status, by someone of low status.

The word *mama’a* also denotes “Father,” but in a different way. Little children, when addressing their fathers, may only use *mama’a*. It is an embarrassment for an adult person to use the term *mama’a* when addressing his or her father, or a man of social status.

When little children use the term *mama'a* in addressing their fathers, this signifies intimacy; it also shows an action of dependency on the part of the little children towards their fathers. It carries the concept of faith. The use of the term *mama'a* by little children, when they address their father, implies trust in their father for the provision of necessities.

It is interesting to see the Aramaic word *Abba* explained in the context of the Jewish culture. “To the Jew, ‘Abba’ is a very familiar form of address. *Abba* and *Imma* were the first words a child learnt to say, and even though, by the time of Jesus, the use was no longer restricted simply to very young children, yet it was a very personal and familiar term, by which no one had ever before dared to address God” (Magdalen, p. 60).

The word *Abba* is actually used as a personal name of God in the New Testament. It is an Aramaic word, which is translated as “Father”. The word expresses a very intimate and inseparable relationship between Christ and the Father, and between the believers (children) and God (Father) (Groningen, p. 887).

To address God as *Abba* was very unusual in Judaism, since *Abba* is the language of family intimacy. The Lord Jesus also taught His disciples to address God as *Abba*. The title, which He introduced, is used frequently in His prayers. It is very interesting that, whenever Jesus spoke about God as the Father, in relation to Himself and his disciples, He used *Abba* distinctively “I have not returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).

Tenney attempted to explain why the distinction was made, “The reason the distinction in His words to Mary was not, of course, that there were two gods but rather that her relationship with God was different from His. He is the eternal Son of the Father, she, as well as the disciples, had become a member of God’s family by receiving Him” (Tenney, p. 191).

It was encouraging that the title *Abba* was also recognised in the epistles to be used for the relationship of the believers to God. “The Spirit who cries

‘Abba’ makes the believer not just a son . . . but a *fellow-heir with Christ*’¹⁸ (Dunn, p. 25).

We have learned that the Lord taught his disciples to address God the *Abba* (Father), when they offered their prayers “Our Father”.¹⁹ When believers address God as “Our Father”, this signifies that all believers belong to a large family, and they are uniting with others in prayers to one God, who is the intimate Father.

The Baegu people address their ancestral father as *maka’ a’*. This is a title used by the priest when offering prayers to the ancestral fathers while in the sacred shrine. This title is totally different from *ma* or *mama’ a’*, which is the title used to describe the relationship of a child to his father, or between an adult, and an elderly man, or a person of status. When the priest calls out the name of the ancestral father, by addressing him as *maka*,²⁰ this carries a concept of *Abba*, in the sense that those whom the priest were representing were from the ancestral blood genealogy. They are those who were born into the tribe, or clan, that the ancestors belonged to.

To make the above point clear, I’ll mention the major tribes of the Baegu “the Waloiano, Waloilangi, Oisamaku, Auangisia, Agia, and the Masu” (Ross, 103). The idea is that no one, including the priest of Waloiano, could enter the sacred shrine *beu abu* of the Oisamaku tribe and offer a sacrifice to the ancestors of Oisamaku.

The act described above was regarded as impossible. It was impossible, because the members of the Waloiano, including the priest, have not entered into a covenant relationship with the ancestors of the Oisamaku tribe. Because of this, they cannot address the ancestor fathers of the Oisamaku tribe as *maka* (or *Abba* in Aramaic). This sort of action could well lead to death, because this was seen as an act of blasphemy against the name of the ancestral fathers of the shrine.

¹⁸ Rom 8:17 and Gal 4:7.

¹⁹ Luke 11:2.

²⁰ *Maka* is a term, in Baegu, for an intimate relationship. It is only applied to the living and the dead ancestral fathers, a covenant title.

Thus, the idea conveyed by the biblical *Abba*, and the Baegu *maka*, did carry similar concepts, and, I believe, the principles here could be used in furthering the prayer commitments of Baegu Christians. The title *maka* could be meaningfully used in the covenant relationship with God.

As we have seen, *Abba* could not be used outside of the covenant relationship towards God, within the category of believers. Likewise, *maka* could not be used outside the covenant relationship towards its own ancestral fathers, within the category of a respective tribe.

If we look at the above contrast with another interpretation, then we would see that there is a weakness in the Baegu covenant relationship. In relation to Christianity, all believers, regardless of tribe, race, nationality, and culture, can address God as *Abba*, while this was not the case with Baegu culture. However, the respective members of one tribe that worshipped the ancestral fathers that belong to the same tribe, and the same sacred shrine (*akalomae*), could only use the Baegu *maka*.²¹

4. Christ Contextualised into Baegu *Foa'a* (Prayer)

Christ the Perfect Beuabu

The Baegu people worship their ancestral father (*beuakalo*) on the mountains. The mountains were called *beuabu*, which is translated as “holy house”, or “house of prayer”, because it was where the priest presented all the community’s prayers, whether verbally, or in the form of sacrifices. To the Baegu people, the *beuabu* is the centre of all religious activities. There are significant points about *beuabu* (prayer mountains) in Baegu culture.

The *beuaba*, and its elevation, signify the moral attributes of the ancestral spirits. They are *abu* (holy), and *sukwai* (powerful). The mountains, and its elevation, signify the status of the ancestral fathers who were buried on the mountains, they were heroes of the tribe, to whom the shrine belonged. The *beuabu*, and its elevation, is believed to be closer to *fanailangi* (heaven), the abode of the *gwaufutona* (supreme being), and this would be

²¹ *Akalomae* is a term used for the house or abode of the ancestral spirit.

an advantage for the worshippers to be closer to the god, whom they worshipped.

The *beuabu*, to the Baegu worshippers, is a suitable venue for worship, because it is quiet and free from common life activities. It is a place suitable for private meditations.

If we look closely at the discourse between the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan woman, recorded in John 4:21-24, we see that the main theological issue that was in focus was the issue of traditional shrine worship. Historically, the Samaritan community put a lot of emphasis on Mt Gerizim,²² as the centre of religious activities, “while the Jewish community put high value on the Jerusalem temple, as the centre of their religious activities” (Tenney, p. 55).

To say that “the time is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on Mt Gerizim nor in Jerusalem” was a shocking statement to the Samaritan woman. This statement, made by the Lord Jesus, actually put more questions into the mind of the Samaritan woman regarding her traditional religion.

We will look closely at the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. We will see that He respected the synagogue, because this was the venue, which He normally attended, to listen to the scriptures, and to preach from the scriptures. He also went to respective venues, where he could pray with his Father without any disturbances. These are some biblical examples:

- It was the Lord’s custom to attend synagogues on Sabbath days.²³
- The Lord went to the mountainside to pray.²⁴

²² The Samaritans founded their claims on the historical fact that, when Moses instructed the people concerning the entrance into the Promised Land, he commanded that they set up an altar on Mt Ebal, and the tribes should be divided: half on Mt Ebal and half on Mt Gerizim. The Jews held that, since Solomon had been commissioned to build the temple in Jerusalem, the centre of worship should be located there.

²³ Luke 4:16.

²⁴ Luke 6:12; Matt 14:23.

- The Lord went up to the mountain with three of his disciples to pray.²⁵
- The Lord went to a solitary place to pray.²⁶

The Lord found His daily strength and wisdom from His Father by listening to the scriptures read in the synagogue or temple, and by spending time alone with His Father in a solitary place. If that is the case with the Lord, then what can we say about His words to the Samaritan woman, regarding replacing Gerizim and the temple worship? Was the Lord contradicting Himself?

All four gospels record the incident about the cleansing of the Jerusalem temple.²⁷ According to the gospel of Mark, the Lord was quoting the words of Isaiah, “for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Is 56:7b). It was very interesting to see that, when the Lord was being questioned about His authority over chasing the money-changers, the Lord seems to change His style of language, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:15).

The concept of raising the destroyed temple after three days actually found its fulfilment in the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁸ This proves that the new temple, which was raised after three days, as a replacement to the Jerusalem temple, is the Lord Jesus. Therefore, the Lord is the new House of Prayer for all nations.

The significant thing about the temple, and the religious mountains, is that they draw worshippers to themselves. The Lord Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). This indicates that the glorified Lord, now seen, has taken over the role of the temple in Jerusalem, the mountain of Gerizim, and the mountains of the Beuabu people, which used to be the means of attraction to multitudes of worshippers.

²⁵ Luke 9:28.

²⁶ Mark 1:35.

²⁷ Mark 11:15-19; Matt 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22.

²⁸ Acts 2:31-33; Matt 27:63-64; Luke 24:6, 21.

The Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “The time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks” (John 4:23). It looks as though the Lord Jesus is saying to the Samaritan woman, the hour is on its way, and, in fact, it is standing in front of you. I am the one, and I am going to inaugurate a new basis for worship. It has nothing to do with Mt Gerizim, or the Jerusalem temple, and, if you like, the prayer mountains of the Baegu.

The new principle of worshipping the Father is now based on, not where you worship, but whom you worship, for the Lord says, “for where two or three come together in My name, there I am with them”.²⁹ This implies that the new venues for worship are wherever the Lord’s name is present.³⁰

The scriptures also state that we Christians are like living stones that make up the spiritual building.³¹ Now, the localised manifestation of God’s presence on earth is replaced by His indwelling of all believers. “Thus, the thought is that, when anyone comes to Christ, a new stone is added to the ‘spiritual’ house” (Blum, p. 229). All Christians accommodate the temple of God, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). It is important to know that, both individual Christians and the community of all believers are the temple of God, and it is the Holy Spirit of God that universalised the presence of the Lord Jesus, in whatever venue, or avenue, they might use in worshipping the Lord.

The implication here for Baegu Christians is that the *beuabu* (prayer mountain), and the church building that was built with bush materials, are not the temple of God. The Baegu people, those who are worshipping the Lord on the prayer mountains, and in the church buildings, are the temple of God. Therefore, with no restrictions, no programme, the temple is open 24 hours a day. The task of the believer is to worship God, and offer

²⁹ Matt 18:20.

³⁰ Wherever the Lord’s name is present, it indicates the covenant relationship between the worshippers and God. True worship is the worship that derives from the heart of man.

³¹ 1 Peter 2:5.

prayers, whether he is on the mountain, in the garden, driving a car, or sitting on the toilet.

Finally, an encouragement to the Baegu people is that they should continue to go to the prayer mountains (*beuabu*), because they are part of the traditional heritage. But, remember, that *beuabu* is not really what the Lord is seeking. The Father is seeking individuals. Tony Evans says:

[I]f you go to the church thinking you are now going to *the* place of worship, you've missed the message. If you limit worship to where you are, the minute you leave that place of worship, you will leave your *attitude* of worship. . . . That's why we have a group of people, who can worship on Sunday, and then do their thing Monday, and the rest of the week (Evans, p. 343).

Let all Baegu Christians be encouraged by the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25 NIV). So, let us remain in the perfect *beuabu*, and offer our daily prayer to God our Father. It is through our meeting together that Jesus, as the temple, will be manifested in the midst of this corrupted world.

Christ the Perfect Arai Foa (High Priest)

I'll begin this section by quoting the words of Ross,³² in regard to the nature, and responsibility, of the Baegu priest.

The Baegu priest is very much a priest, and not a shaman, or prophet. The priest is the representative of the community, for dealing in the supernatural. Only the priest can offer sacrifices to the ancestral spirits, and only the priest can, through prayer, ask them to grant "blessings"³³ to his descendants. His office is socially created and validated. He is selected on the basis of his temperament, and mastery of specific ritual knowledge. He must

³² M. Harold Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organisation in Malaita, Solomon Islands*, Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

³³ The word "blessing", in Baegu, is *maman'aa*.

know detailed genealogies, the exact wording of all the relevant prayers, and the details of sacrificial and ritual procedure (Ross, p. 189).

The words of Ross indicate that the priestly office within the Baegu culture is a significant position in traditional religion. In order to obtain a perfect and harmonious relationship with the community, and the ancestral spirits, the elected priest must be a person with moral qualities. One moral quality that governs the whole Baegu traditional worship is holiness.³⁴ In order to obtain holiness, required as the basis for the covenant relationship, it is vital three elements be adhered to:

- The priest, as the mediator, must be conscious of his daily life involvements.
- The pigs that are reared for the sacrifices must be ceremonially clean from physical contamination.³⁵
- The priest must master the rituals, because rituals are the only saved language that should be used in communication with the ancestral spirits.

Though the standard required by the ancestral spirits is holiness, the community always found themselves with a problem. This was because the priest, himself, was imperfect, and the sacrifices were imperfect. Traditional Baegu religion was not based on relationship, but obligation. They had to feed many pigs, in order to feed the ancestral spirits. Many sacrifices were necessary for the spirits to be appeased.

The apostle John presented Christ for the first time, by using the title “the Lamb of God”,³⁶ not as a priest, but, literally, a lamb. It looks as though

³⁴ “Holiness”, in Baegu term is *abu*, not in the sense of restriction, but respect and reverence.

³⁵ The pigs must be fed with the food from the sacred garden. Those who are scheduled for feeding the pigs must be also free from physical contamination (avoid contact with females, especially blood).

³⁶ In the Old Testament context, lamb is not an abstract idea. Lamb is actually the victim for sacrifice, which was the only remedy for covering up the sins of the people.

the apostle is saying, “Here comes the Lamb that the whole world is waiting for.” It was a joyful moment, a time of celebration.

According to Baegu culture, viewing the sacred animal (which was to be the victim for sacrifice) by common people is a dreadful moment, because that would mean death³⁷ to the whole community.

The scriptures say, “Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy.”³⁸ It is very difficult for mere man to be holy. The scriptures also confirm that “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have, together, become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12).

It is pity to see the Baegu people obligated to their ancestral spirits, by offering countless pigs to appease the ancestral spirits, to avert the impending judgment that would fall on them. The Baegu people are glad, because they now have Jesus Christ as the perfect priest, who is the perfect sacrifice that replaced the Baegu imperfect priest and sacrificial systems.

It is important that the Lord Jesus becomes the perfect priest for the Baegu community, by means of His incarnation process. Christ entered into relationship with the Baegu people by being qualified to be their *araifoa*,³⁹ and becoming the *boso*,⁴⁰ and, being a priest, offering Himself on the altar (*fuliere*), for the sins of the whole world.

To be human is the common essence of man, and Baegu people are not exempted from it. To say that Jesus is fully man implies that He is not only a Jew, but he is also a Baeguan man. Therefore, the Baegu people are not ashamed to call Jesus their brother, because it is what the scriptures

³⁷ The pig is sacred (*abu*) and the common people are defiled (*sua*). For a defiled object to come into contact with the sacred object (*abu*) means the sacred object will become defiled (*sua*), and that is violating the sacredness of the ancestral father. Therefore, the community deserves severe punishment.

³⁸ Lev 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15.

³⁹ *Araifoa* is the Baegu term for “high priest”.

⁴⁰ *Boso* is “pig” in Baegu language, whereas, for the Jew, the lamb is the victim for the sacrifice.

say, “Both the one who makes man holy, and those who are made holy, are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”⁴¹

What a great privilege for the Baegu people to have Jesus as their first-born brother to be the high priest. This means that all Baegu Christians are priests, because they are born into God’s family, and they share with Christ as priests. This confirms the scripture, which says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness, and into His light.”⁴²

The implication for the Baegu people is: let them bring their prayers and petitions to Christ, who is the High Priest, the one within their own family, who is perfect enough to intercede on their behalf, and the one who is a perfect victim of their sacrifice. Because He is the perfect Lamb (*boso*), and the one who is a perfect *beuabu*, they can offer all their daily lives as a sweet sacrifice to the Lord, as long as they live.

5. Recommendation

Cultural Extremity

It is logical to say that the practices found in the cult worship of the Baegu have common roots in the principles provided in the scriptures. The ritual teaches the Baegu people about prayer and faith. The relics teach the Baegu people about God’s presence. The whole shrine complex teaches the Baegu people about holiness, and God’s grace.

The people should value the traditional aspect of worship, as the vehicle they use to worship the true God. The scriptures must always be placed above culture, because, if that is lacking, then the churches of Baegu will end up with problems.

The Object of Worship

The enthusiasm in developing ancestral worship in this paper does not guarantee that I, in any way, believe my Baegu ancestors truly existed.

⁴¹ Heb 2:11.

⁴² 1 Peter 2:9.

After all, the scriptures testify that the devil is a great liar, a deceiver, and an angel of light (Matt 8:4, 2 Thess 2:9-10, John 8:44).

The ancestors were the founders of the Baegu people, and, historically, the Baegu people should appreciate their ancestors. But it does not mean that the Baegu people should worship their ancestors. The ancestors have gone to where they belong. It was the devil that did all the manifestations, claiming to be the spirit of the ancestors. Therefore, all prayers should be attributed to God alone.

The Scope of Baegu Traditional Covenant

According to Baegu traditional worship, a member of one tribe was not allowed to offer prayers in the shrine complex that belonged to another tribe. This act was regarded as a violation of the names of the ancestors of the shrine. Death would result from this action. To avoid this, the Baegu people normally established their own mountain shrines in their respective localities. Prior to the 1980s, the people lived in a Christian community (lived as a body of believers, regardless of which tribe they belonged to). However, by the 1980s, people went back to living in their own tribal settings. While this is good, especially for the maintenance of their cultural identity, the danger is that Baegu Christians will revolve around their own cultural boundaries. They will not perceive the mandate of the gospel, which is meant to be the gospel of every tribe and nation in the world.

The practice of living in tribal communities, and erecting small mountain shrines, actually got its roots from Baegu traditional worship. This practice allows Christians to interpret biblical principles of worship in their cultural context of worship. It is encouraging to see the Baegu people use the cultural elements of prayer as a vehicle to worship the true God, while their focus should not be confined to their own tribal boundaries, but to the rest of the world, as the potential universal family of God.

6. Conclusion

The churches of Baegu should reconsider their theological stand in their prayer commitments. It is also important that the churches look at the positive side of culture; after all it is God who gave them the culture. It is

a mistake to regard culture as evil, and so totally ignore it. It is understandable that, due to the fall, culture was spoilt.

The advice is that the Baegu churches should value their culture, adopting their traditional concepts and approaches in prayer, but should measure their culture against the scriptures. By using the biblical principles as a means of guidance, the cultural concept and approaches will be beneficial to Baegu Christians, in their prayer commitments.

Finally, all the cultural elements of worship, confirmed in this paper, have been pointing to Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that the material presented in this paper will bring blessings to the church of the Baegu as a whole.

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