

# **A BIBLICAL CRITIQUE OF THE WORSHIP OF THE SUN GOD *YANIGELWA* BY THE DINGA PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The sun's natural brightness and warmth has attracted worshippers since the creation of the world. James Orr writes, "The splendour of the sun makes it a natural object of adoration, once the purer idea of the one true God (Rom 1:20-21) is parted with, and, in most ancient nations, the worship of the sun was an outstanding feature".<sup>1</sup> The Dinga people<sup>2</sup> of Papua New Guinea are no exception. They saw the natural brightness of the sun, felt its warmth, and assumed it was a god. Therefore, they gave allegiance, venerated, and worshipped the sun.

This article evaluates sun-god worship, from a biblical perspective. What worldview do sun worshippers have? Does sun worship result in a preChristian understanding of God? Does sun worship help or hinder the understanding of the gospel? This article explores these questions, within the context of the Dinga people. However, to begin our study, we will look at sun worship, from a historical perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> James Orr, "Sun-Worship", in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed., Wilmington DE: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1915, p. 2870.

<sup>2</sup> Dinga people are of the Sinasina District in the southern part of Chimbu Province of Papua New Guinea. The Dinga people are made up of two big clans: Nineku and Kreku. Total population is 4,000 people. Other people of Chimbu regard the Dinga people as unique, and in the forefront of the development of Chimbu.

## SUN-GOD WORSHIP

### SUN-GOD WORSHIP IN ANCIENT NATIONS

Sun worship was important in the cultures of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, and Northern India. The people of these hot countries revered the sun as a deity. The people viewed the sun as both a beneficial god and a destructive god.

In ancient Egypt, the sun god Rah was represented by a man bearing a sun disc on his head, which was surmounted by the Uraeus-snake. The reptile, symbolising the withering effect of the sun, had often been used in the Near East.<sup>3</sup>

The Egyptian Pharaoh, Amenophis IV (1375-1358 BC), tried to introduce a monotheistic, or one-god religion, by declaring the sun god *Aten* the only god, while he renamed himself *Akhenaten* (glory of the sun disc).

Persian influence on the thought and language of Malachi can be seen in the prophet's references to "a scroll of remembrance" and "the sun of righteousness". . . . The unique expression "sun of righteousness" is reminiscent of the winged solar disk that represents the sun god in Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography, and symbolises protection for the king, and assures victory in battle.<sup>4</sup>

Sun worship was part of the religion of the Northern Bronze Age, the culture destroyed by natural catastrophes around 1220 BC. Later, in the Indo-Germanic religion, people celebrated the feasts of the summer and winter solstices, and used a number of symbols, such as the wheel cross, and the swastika. It may be that the Christian mode of praying with closed eyes is also a relic of the religion of our forebears, as it is impossible to look at the sun with your eyes fully open.

Quite different was the situation in Central and Northern Europe, where a abundant amount of sunshine was available for the ripening of crops.

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<sup>3</sup> M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edn, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, pp. 995-1000.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 995-1001.

Here, the people worshipped the sun as a beneficial power, as soon as agriculture became the principal means of support during the Neolithic period (4000-2000 BC).

### **SUN-GOD WORSHIP IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Other people groups in Papua New Guinea, besides the Dinga, adored the sun. The Siane religion of the Eastern Highlands Province believed that there was a sun god, “*Oma Rumufa* (black way), who existed before man did. *Oma Rumufa* symbolised the sun, and as a ruler over the land of the dead, he takes the form of a circle of white light”.<sup>5</sup>

The Kuman people, in Chimbu Province, believed the sun was their “grandfather”. This is reflected in their prayers, “Grandfather sun! Before your eyes, I plant my garden. I planted it, but it has not grown well so far. Shine, therefore, nicely, and when you have brought it for harvesting, then I can eat from it.” This was a request for a good harvest.<sup>6</sup>

The Dengglagu and Vandeke people of Gembolge, in Chimbu Province, speak of the sun as their “big father”. They pray to the sun, “If you make the vegetables and sweet potatoes grow well; I shall eat them. I have killed the rats, and have cooked *wamugl*-plants (as a sacrifice).”<sup>7</sup>

The important men in the Maprik area prayed, “*Nyamben mbampo* (sun and moon)! Come down, and help me! I wish to harvest large yams. For a long time, I have ‘eaten hungry’! Now help me!”<sup>8</sup>

The Nauru people, in the Highlands, considered the sun as their “big father”, and they prayed to it like this, “Watch, Oh Sun! We have planted

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<sup>5</sup> P. Lawrence, and M. J. Meggitt, eds, *Gods, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Theo Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 4-1 (1988), p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting Heinrich Aufenanger, “The sun in the life of the natives in the New Guinea highlands”, in *Anthropos* 57, 1962, pp. 6 and 2.

<sup>8</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 47, quoting Heinrich Aufenanger, *The passing scene in North-East New Guinea: a documentation*, St Augustin: Anthropos Institute, 1972, pp. 289-299.

sugar cane, and provided it with sticks to support it. We shall cut and eat it. May it grow well. Oh Sun! Our Father! Keep watching!”<sup>9</sup>

The Kuma people, in the Western Highlands, and in the Wahgi Valley, also pray to the sun, “Oh Sun! Our big father! Someone has stolen the vegetables that we had planted. We do not know who it is. You saw it; you reveal it! You are our big father.”<sup>10</sup>

From the Schouten Islands, this is a prayer of thanksgiving for good crops, “Sun! The bananas are good. Sun! The mamis are good. The sun is good. The sun and the moon are good.”<sup>11</sup>

The people of Komkane and Tsiambugla, in Chimbu Province, believed the sun was their “Father sun”, and chanted, “Oh Sun! Do not go down! Watch over us! If you go down now, it will get dark. You may go down when we have gone to our house.”<sup>12</sup>

This is a prayer, used among the Numa people, of New Guinea Highlands, during initiation, “Oh Sun! Look at these children! I gave them bows and axes. You help them.”<sup>13</sup>

A mother, from among the Kondulche people, prayed with confidence, “Oh Sun! You see I ‘found’ (=gave birth to) a baby. Will it live, or will it die?”<sup>14</sup>

The Kulchkane people prayed for healing, the binding of the wind, which was believed to be a cause of sickness, “Oh Sun! The wind (or: the cold) acted fraudulently, so the little girl fell ill. Take this ratan-rope, and bind the wind. It will try to come again; keep it tied up.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 49, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 50, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, pp. 20-21.

<sup>11</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 57, quoting Aufenanger, *The passing scene*, p. 302.

<sup>12</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 61, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, pp. 6, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 62, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 41, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Aerts, “Prayers of the Past”, p. 41, quoting Aufenanger, “The sun”, p. 63.

## **DINGA PEOPLE'S WORSHIP OF THE SUN GOD *YANIGELWA***

In writing this article, the author interviewed 11 people<sup>16</sup> from eight sub-clans of Dinga. Categorically, they said that their ancestors instinctively knew, through natural revelation (creation), that there was a God. From these ancestors, came the laws, customs, and rituals of sacrifice and worship of *Yanigelwa* that originally formed, and then held, the societies together.

### ***Dinga People's Principal Spirit***

The Dinga people knew and believed that *Yanigelwa* was all-powerful, and gave them power to win battles. *Yanigelwa* saw what they did in secret, and knew everything they did, good or bad. *Yanigelwa* was everywhere, and watched over them at all times. He was eternal: living forever. He was the creator of the heavens and the earth (including human beings), and blessed them with material prosperity (e.g., many pigs). *Yanigelwa* protected them from the charms and spells of the sorcerers and witches, which belonged to the devil. Therefore, they gave themselves to *Yanigelwa*, and served him. The Dinga people's religious beliefs developed, as they worshipped the sun, with a variety of rituals and cultural practices.

The question is whether they directed their pagan sacrifices and prayers to an impersonal power or to a Supreme Being, to a minor deity, or to an ancestor, to a localised spirit, or to a different spirit. Based on the author's research, it is impossible to know, confidently, who was at the back of *Yanigelwa*. The most likely answer is that *Yanigelwa* was a principal spirit of the area.

Practically, Dinga people believed that the sun could harm them if they faced it. Therefore, they went out to work in their gardens early in the morning, before the sun rose. Then, from 10 am to 4 pm, people came home and hid themselves in their houses, so that they would not face the

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<sup>16</sup> Primary research interviewers names: Dom Poye, William Poima, Pastor Kepe, Pastor Bere, Wel Anton Baule, Kiage Bal, Kambole Awi, Binabe Millima, Kosmas Kapenowa, John Kaupa Poye, Awi Millima. At June semester break, and September study break, 2003.

sun. They believed that, if they faced the sun, they would die, or something bad would happen to them.

### ***Dinga People's Worldview***

The Dinga people's awareness and interaction with this particular sun god (*Yanigelwa*) were part of their pre-Christian culture. It was the result of the people's perception of the universe, in their worldview. "A worldview carves out appropriate and meaningful belief systems, norms, and values that are activated in an acceptable behaviour of a culture."<sup>17</sup>

The Dinga people viewed the globe as a living blend of two worlds, the physical and the supernatural. The physical world was the earth, which included the environment, geography, plants, creeks, rivers, lands, and people, with their communities and structures. The physical world was managed by cultural norms, value systems, and regulations, produced from the people's understanding of reality. This universe owed its origin to the spirit world. In this regard, much of the Dinga people's lives were spent maintaining and promoting that spiritual order.

Dinga people believed that these spirits lived in bodily forms. They facilitated this view, through prayer and sacrifice to *Yanigelwa*, to protect them, to bless them, and to give them victory over their enemies. For instance, they would pray, "*Yanigelwa!* I am hiding in my house. Other people do not know about it. You always used to help me greatly."<sup>18</sup> This is an example of the practical interaction the people had with *Yanigelwa*. Hence, through *Yanigelwa*, people found meaning and substance in their world. When the Dinga people were about to bury their dead, they offered the deceased person directly to *Yanigelwa*, "Oh Sun! We want to bury this man NN. Oh watch! His soul is going up to you. You watch. He used to stay with us, but now he is going up to you."<sup>19</sup>

They believed in the survival of a man's spirit after natural death, however, such a belief stressed continuity, rather than eternity. This shows us that

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<sup>17</sup> Namumu, *Spirits in Melanesian Tradition*, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> Aerts, "Prayers of the Past", p. 41, quoting Aufenanger, "The sun", p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Aerts, "Prayers of the Past", p. 47, quoting Aufenanger, "The sun", p. 32.

the physical world of the people had its meaning and existence in the spirit world, and in the sun god they worshipped. In addition, Dinga people realised, in their worldview, that, whatever happened in the physical world, would affect the spiritual world. So, they were committed to *Yanigelwa*. This affected their religious practice, as well as cultural orientation.

### ***Dinga People's Ways of Salvation***

*Kanimine puayale* (a person who knows the sacred words of prayers and rituals) had to make sure his own life, and the lives of all others in his society, conformed to appropriate patterns of behaviour. Taboos were strictly observed, laws were carefully obeyed, and good order was established and maintained. Above all, proper relationships had to be preserved between man and man, and between man and *Yanigelwa*.

Salvation was always related to the group, and its well-being. It was not something one person could experience, apart from the community, and the world in which he lived. Identity came from contribution to the group. Wholeness, feasting, dancing, celebrating, and worshipping their god, and relationships, were significant to Dinga people. Laws regulated all aspects of life, including relationships. It included the important concept of give and take, for it involved obligations. Thus, it was essential to establish, maintain, and fulfil, law relationships and obligations in every sphere of life in order to achieve salvation.

For special events, and festivities of social importance, pigs were killed in honour of *Yanigelwa*. This was to maintain their relationship with *Yanigelwa*, and to make sure, at all times, that salvation or well being was secured.

### ***Dinga People's Religious Experience***

The Dinga people believed they were born into a spiritual and religious order. Much of life was devoted towards the maintenance and promotion of cultural practices and rituals (sacrifices and prayers). Religious experience was the foundation of the Dinga people, and they cherished it as part of their livelihood. No one could take it away from them.

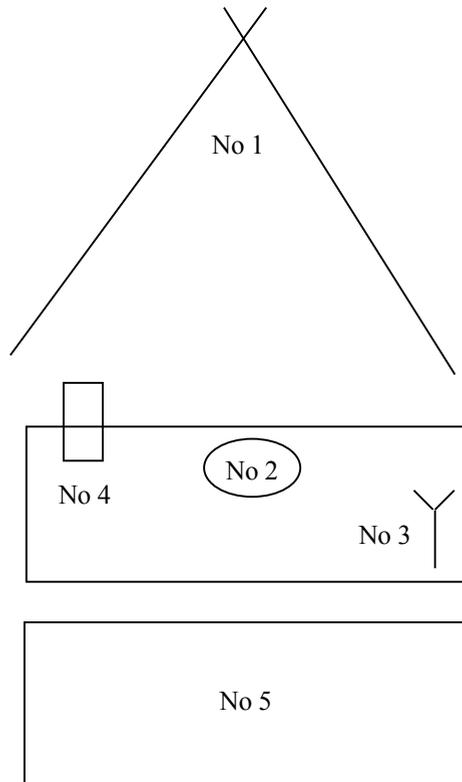
They believed that, when *kanimine puayale* performed the rituals, their sun god, *Yanigelwa*, was actually present, and would bless them with material prosperity, protect them from charms and spells, give them power to win the battle, and furnish women to marry. People believed that *Yanigelwa* knew what the people needed, and, therefore, *Yanigelwa* would grant *kanimine puayale* the petition of the people.

Moreover, Dinga people believed that life was something that survived death. It was the opportunity to shed the old skin and put on the new one, like the snake. My mother used to tell me that, when a black man or woman died, the spirits in the grave burned him or her with fire, in order to take off the skin, like a snake. The person would then be transformed into a European, and continue in life. I believed this, until I received the gospel, and learned that Christians will be changed from mortal to immortal (1 Cor 15:51-54), and that white people are just human beings, too. The life-after-death concept prepared the Dinga people for the reception of the gospel.

### ***Dinga People's Form of Worship***

The *Erehari hike mokime* (literally the “tree leaves round house”, but interpreted as the “sacred round house”) was a house built from special wood *Dinkoparim* (smells like ginger). It stood in the centre of the main village (common ground), where the Dinga people gathered round for pig feasting, dancing, making sacrifices, worshipping *Yanigelwa*, and any social gatherings. (See No 1 in “Figure 1. Layout of the village and sacred round house”, below.)

The sacred place (No 2), the Holy of Holies, was where *kanimine puayale* put his sacred items for sacrificial rituals and worship. Sacred items included a string bag, hung in this place, filled with traditional salt, a special stone, as fossil with human dolly face, and some sacred special tree leaves. This was to enable him to do certain rituals in his worship of *Yanigelwa*.



**Figure 1. Layout of the village and sacred round house**

The two-fork stand (No 3) was the place where *kanimine puayale* took a sacrificial pig and slaughtered it. He took the blood, and internal parts of pork, heated the stone with the fire in the fork, and, when it was hot, *kanimine puayale* steamed the pork as a sacrifice to *Yanigelwa*. When the steamed pork was cooked, he took it out to the common ground, where the people were assembled. He cut the pork into pieces, and spread blood over them, as well as spreading blood over the offerings, and the seeds of food crops, brought and laid there to be blessed. He laid hands over the offerings, and said, “*Yanigelwa* watch on you, you awake, sleep, and do, and *Yanigelwa* will bless you to be fruitful.” The people outside, at the common ground, cooked pigs, chickens, and food crops, by steaming them

with heated stones in a native pressure-cooking pit. These were distributed among the people.

One door (No 4) led into the sacred holy house. Only the sacred person (*kanimine puayale*) could enter in, and only with the pig's blood and internal parts of pork, to do his sacrifices and rituals on behalf of the people. No other person was allowed in. People regarded it as a holy place of *Yanigelwa*.

The common ground (No 5) was where people assembled for special events, and festivities of social importance. Concerning worship, people took pigs, chickens, and food crops, to give as sacrifices to *Yanigelwa*, waiting patiently for *kanimine puayale* to accomplish all his sacrificial duties before leaving.

### ***Dinga People's Prayers***

Prayer is such a basic human exercise. The Dinga sacred man's prayer went like this, "*Yanigelwa, en neyalkanma ne kanmolo* (Oh sun, you watch over us, or look on us)." There were some sacred words, unknown to the people, which were secretly spoken or prayed. The sacred man would only pray and do rituals when the blood and internal parts of pork were available. Therefore, to catch *Yanigelwa's* attention, pigs had to be slaughtered for every invocation and ritual.

When Dinga people wanted to give sacrifices, and invoke prayers, to *Yanigelwa* to satisfy their needs, they would shed blood from a pig. The sacred man then went, with the blood and internal parts of pork, to the sacred holy place to do certain prayers and rituals. Without blood, there was no power, or impact, in the ritual, and no blessings.

### ***Dinga People's Rituals***

*The initiation ceremony for boys to manhood.* A boy was initiated into his father's group at the mini pig feast that occurred when he was between 12 and 18 years of age. The men seized him, as well as other eligible boys, and took them all to the men's house to dress them in new clothes or traditional dress, and arm them with bows and arrows. At the beginning of the initiation, the parents of the novice took pigs, and slaughtered them at

the common ground. Then the sacred man took parts of the pork into the sacred house and steamed it. When the pork was cooked, they told the novices to go into the house, the steamed pork was given to the novices, and they ate it. The sacred man then laid hands on them and blessed them.

Then the sacred man taught them about a holistic approach to life in the local society. This teaching included how to live morally upright, be a good leader, have good family relationships, look after domesticated animals, plant food crops, distribute food to the people, help others work, and how to fight.

After doing all these rituals, the sacred man gave advice and blessings, and went to the men's house. The generation of the grandfathers sat on one side of the fire, cradling in their arms two lengths of bamboo, decorated with cassowary plumes. They revealed to the boys the secret of the bamboo flute (*nebare kanua*). They blew the bamboo flute, and announced that they are now men.

*Kanimine puayale* was the only person who could take the initiative to initiate the boys. In everything that he did in rituals, he needed the pig's blood, to go into the holy place. The format of ritual prayers was, "Sun god, you watch over me and give me strength and power to initiate the boys to their fathers' group."

*The initiation ceremony for girls to womanhood.* Girls' initiation was different from the boys. A girl's first menstruation was treated as a form of pregnancy, heralded similarly by her swelling breasts, but giving birth to blood alone. She "gave birth", while lying in her mother's house, secluded for a month behind a partition of aromatic branches (*ere garapara*) erected by her eldest brother. Small groups of older men and women from other villages were invited for each night to sing *kuria mam* (traditional lovemaking songs) songs in the outer room of the girl's house.

On the third week of the month, the partition and aromatic branches were removed. The girl came forward to the fire, and senior wives of the clan instructed her in her duties as a woman. Then, the youths of her clan entered, singing *kuria mam* songs, led by the girl's lineage head. Using

techniques similar to male initiation, the girl was taught to submit to men, and to cook for them. This involved tricking her into trying to drink water from an empty container, and by tossing a bundle of sugar cane to her to eat.

The next afternoon, the girl and her attendants emerged from seclusion. The girl then symbolically cooked a previously-prepared meal, which included cut-up pork, and an opossum, or rat, killed by her eldest brother. She ate the small animal, and the brains of the pork, and gave the rest to her attendants, her “mothers”, and the other villages singers. For the next two months, she could not leave the village; but, from then, she was a privileged person, told by her mother not to work. She slept every night with other nubile girls in a woman’s house *gai hike* (girls’ clubhouse), and was known as a woman, sexually mature, and ready for marriage.

### ***Crop Planting and Harvest Rituals***

*Crop planting rituals.* The sacred man killed a pig, by clubbing it over the head, at the entrance gate of the garden. As he sprinkled the blood there, he called, “*Yanigelwa*, watch over us, our garden crops will grow healthier, and produce abundantly, so we can harvest and eat them.”<sup>20</sup>

The sacred man set taboos for people to follow, so that expected blessings would fall in line. Husband and wife were not to have sex before entering the garden. Prior to entering the garden, people could not eat a carcass, could not attend a funeral, could not eat pork, and could not eat salty foods.

All these rituals of prayers, sprinkling of pig’s blood, and taboos were designed to produce crop fertility. When the people, who tilled and planted the gardens, observed the appropriate taboos, then *Yanigelwa*, who controlled crop fertility, had to reciprocate, by ensuring a bountiful harvest. If, on the other hand, taboos were ignored, then misfortune, failure of harvest, and the loss of power and security were expected.

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<sup>20</sup> The receiving will be part of that reciprocity, which is a central concept in its life. It will be a returning of what it gave out of its own abundance.

*Harvesting rituals.* When a garden bore a crop, the sacred man took a pig, and killed it, by clubbing it over the head, at the entrance gate of the garden. He sprinkled the blood on the gate fence, and prayed, “*Yanigelwa*, watch on us; we are taking the taboos out from the garden, and we want to harvest the food crops, and eat.” This rite was the sign of giving thanks to *Yanigelwa* for producing abundantly. At the end of this ritual, the people were free to harvest their food crops, and eat them.

### ***Pig Feast Rituals***

The pig feast ritual had five phases. The first was the announcement of the feast, by blowing a bamboo flute. The second was the building of long and short houses. The third was dancing with *gerua* boards. The fourth was *gerua kapekiwa* (pig feast) for the localised spirit (*kewakwipeyal*), who looked after the pigs. The fifth was the main feast. In each step of the pig feast, *kanimine puayale* took the lead. He called on the people to assemble at the common ground. He killed the pig, by clubbing it over the head, taking the blood, and the inside parts of the pig, and going into the holy place, saying, “*Yanigelwa*, you look upon us now. We want to kill the pigs that we have looked after, and eat”.

The rest of the pigs were slaughtered, and steamed with heated stones in a native pressure-cooking pit, outside, at the common ground. When everything was cooked and prepared, the sacred man took the pork, steamed inside the sacred house, and cut it into pieces, and spread blood over it, and laid hands on the people, and blessed them saying, “*Yanigelwa* is looking upon you, you kill pigs, and do anything, here now, you will be blessed.”

After the main feast was over, the people cooked the pieces of pork, which were left in the house, and ate them. The sacred man laid hands on the people, and blessed them, by saying, “*Yanigelwa*, help these people, so that the piglets they are intending to raise up will grow fast.”

### ***Tribal Fighting Rituals***

The sacred man called on the warriors to assemble at the common ground before entering into a tribal fight. The sacred man killed a pig, and prayed,

“*Yanigelwa*, you watch over us, we are giving this pig as our sacrifice to you, and help us to win the battle.”

The sacred man ate the pork. As the people walked to the battlefield, the sacred man took the initiative to shoot the first arrow at the biggest shield, carried by their enemy. He tested to see if the arrow could penetrate the shield. If it did, they knew that *Yanigelwa* was with them, and they would win the battle. If they won the battle, they went home singing victorious songs. If they were unsuccessful, the sacred man called on the people to confess their sins. Any grudges among them were ironed out. They had to redo the sacrifice, because *Yanigelwa* was not on their side, and did not help them in the battle.

### ***Positive Aspects of Dinga Practices***

Every situation needed *Yanigelwa's* attention, and *kanimine puayale* knew appropriate rituals and prayers for every situation. Taboos, laws, and vows had to be faithfully followed. If they carefully observed the terms and conditions required in the taboos, laws, and their solemn promises, they reaped positive blessings. For example, their garden crops grew healthier, and gave abundant produce, children grew wholesome, domesticated animals grew fast, and they won in their tribal warfare over their tribal enemies.

Therefore, in everything they did, they had to please *Yanigelwa*. They had to comply with everything that was required of them by *kanimine puayale*. It was essential to establish, maintain, and fulfil law relationships and obligations in every sphere of life, in order to achieve salvation, or well-being.

### ***Negative Aspects of Dinga Practices***

When the people did not practice the taboos, laws, and solemn promises that they made, or they neglected their relationships, then misfortune, loss of blessings, loss of power, and loss of security were expected. They were in an unfortunate situation. Their garden crops might yield unhealthy and sparse produce. Consequently, their children and domesticated animals might become malnourished, or their tribal enemies might defeat them in

tribal warfare. If these things happened, the people had to go back to *kanimine puayale* and confess their sins, kill their pigs, and make sacrifices to *Yanigelwa*. They were to comply with the taboos and laws that were required of them, as the means of their salvation.

## **BIBLICAL CRITIQUE**

The Bible begins with the words, “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The phrase “heaven and earth” means everything. The first thing the Bible tells us about God is that he is the Creator of the universe. “All things were made through Him, and, without Him, was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3).<sup>21</sup>

God made all the things of nature (Gen 1:1; Rom 1:20), and made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night (Gen 1:16).<sup>22</sup> The purpose of God’s creation is that God made all things for Himself (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). God made all things to show His greatness and glory (Ps 19:1; 97:6; Is 43:7). God made all things to do His will, and to give praise and worship to Himself (Ps 139:14; 145:10-12; Rom 11:36).

Since God made all things, He is the owner of the universe. This world, and everything in it, belongs to God, because He made it. The world does not belong to men and women, and it does not belong to the spirits, it is God’s universe (Ps 50:10-12). God has given man dominion over the natural world, but we are to look after the world, on behalf of God, who still is the owner and the ruler of the world.

God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe: because God made the world, and owns the world, He is the only one who can rule and control the world (Is 6:5; 43:15; 44:6; 1 Tim 1:17). God, in Christ, is King over all other kings in this universe, and Lord over all other lords (1 Tim 6:15; Ps 95:3).

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<sup>21</sup> See also 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Rev 4:11.

<sup>22</sup> Pagan contemporaries of Genesis regarded these bodies as gods in their own right. To avoid any suspicion that the sun and moon were anything but created by God, Genesis calls them just lights (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds, *New Bible Commentary*, 21st-century edn, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 60).

He rules and controls every part of creation (Ps 10:16; 24:8; 29:10; 47). The creation does not rule Him. This shows us that no other created things are to be substituted as the Supreme God. He alone is to be worshipped. If people worship the created elements, they exchange the truth of God for Satan's lie (Rom 1:25). This is idolatry, and God forbids it in His second commandment (Ex 20:3-5). Further, God says, "I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you" (Lev 26:30).

### **THE BIBLE SPEAKS TO SUN WORSHIP**

"On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD, in the presence of Israel: O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the valley of Aijalon. So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies" (Josh 10:12-13).

In this passage, the sovereign LORD considered Joshua's word, and extended the hours of daylight to allow the Israelites to defeat their enemies. The passage shows that Joshua had commanded the sun to stand still, and it stood still. We have seen that the natural revelation of God does not have power to rule over the creator (God) and His servant. Thus, the passage reveals that God is sovereign over the universe, the created elements, including the sun. The general revelation (creation), revealing God, follows the commands of the creator, and His servant, who stood for Him. In this regard, the sun is one part of God's creation, and, in its natural brightness and mild heat, should not be an attraction for people to worship it as god.

The Bible plainly teaches us that Christ has defeated all the spiritual powers, through the cross (Col 2:15). This has set the path for the Dinga people to shift their allegiance from their sun-god worship to God, alone, in Christ.

## **THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

“The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” (Mal 4:2). God and His glory are compared with the sun:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the people, but the LORD rises upon you, and His glory appears over you” (Is 60:1-2).

God’s glory is probably an allusion to the pillar of cloud, but announcing a new manifestation of God’s redeeming glory, in the face of Christ. Christ is the “rising sun” from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness (Luke 1:78-79; Is 9:2). The great light, Jesus and His salvation, would be a “light for the gentiles” (Is 9:2; 42:6; 49:6).

Christ intends salvation and renewal for his people (Is 45:8; 46:13; 53:5; Jer 30:17). Jesus Christ is that sun that rises upon the people, and guides and holds them fast (Ps 139:9-10). Victory over condemnation for sin, death, and the grave is obtained through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:54-57; Rom 4:25). Jesus Christ is the Root and the offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star (Rev 22:16). Jesus promises the Morning Star to those who do His will, and do not follow Satan (Rev 2:24-28), so they can shine like Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Sun of Righteousness. Jesus came in the flesh, to seek and save those who were lost (Luke 19:10). Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12), and the light of men (John 1:4). He is to men’s souls, as the sun is to the visible world, which, without the sun, would be a dungeon. Humankind would be in darkness without the light of the glory of God, shining in the face of Christ. He is the Sun of Righteousness, for He is a righteous Saviour.

## INDIGENISATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

These two terms have the same meaning, to incarnate, meaningfully, the Word of God into a given culture, to bring about growth, to address each cultural issue, and to reach spiritual heights in all spheres of life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The terms coexist in this frame of reference.

Indigenisation means, “a national church has been produced, which shares the life of the country, in which it is planted, and finds, within itself, the ability to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself”.<sup>23</sup> Contextualisation “seeks for no less than the recovery and effective communication of the biblical message” and endeavours “to extricate the biblical message from its ‘Greek’ trappings”,<sup>24</sup> and Western scientific-cultural context.

The pioneer missionaries aimed at saving Dinga people, not by regeneration from within, but by restrictions from without. The missionaries sought to abolish *Yanigelwa* worship by physical force, and not by the redeeming grace of God to bring salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ, so that heart transformation could be achieved.

Down through the generations, faithful pastors and Christians have taught the gospel, and lived a godly life. The matter of concern is for those who have not made a clear break from past *Yanigelwa* worship. They profess to be Christians, and, at the same time, show harmony with the old religion. Hence, those who are ministering God’s Word are never successful. It is a polluted exercise, with compromising interpretations of the Bible, and syncretistic faith.

How can the Dinga church address these issues? If contextualisation and indigenisation are aimed at addressing the old religious issues of the people, then the church is in a right position to be prophetic, to call people back to the Word of God, and to challenge and change the situations it is in now. If

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<sup>23</sup> Melvin L. Hodges, *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles Kraft, and Tom Wisley, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Chan, “Second Thoughts on Contextualisation”, in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9-2 (1985), p. 50.

the Dinga churches ignore the gospel, they will be ineffective, compromising, and syncretistic.

## **HISTORY OF THE DINGA CHURCH**

This section discusses the interaction and impact between the gospel and the Dinga people's worship of *Yanigelwa*. The author did research with leaders of three churches: Catholic, Lutheran, and Evangelical Brotherhood.<sup>25</sup> The research showed that missionaries encountered the Dinga people, by communicating the gospel in alien, cultural forms. When missionaries bring with them foreign ways of thinking and behaviours, attitudes of racial superiority, paternalism, or preoccupation with material things, effective communication will be precluded.<sup>26</sup>

This difficulty is not limited to the pioneer carriers of the gospel, but it is promulgated by Dinga churches, which, from a feeling of insecurity, seek to preserve culture and *Yanigelwa* worship, and, therefore, maintain cultural barriers. The people then regard Christianity as a foreign religion, a Western religion, or a white-man's religion. This is one of the more serious handicaps to effective evangelism in Dinga society. Christians in Dinga have sought to foster this image of Christianity, and to present its own image, as a Dinga religion of *Yanigelwa* worship. This is where serious syncretism creeps into the churches.

## **CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Dom Poye, who is over 60 years of age, said that many members in the Koge parish, including Dinga people, were brought into the Catholic church, through their adaptation and catechism programs. The adaptation period was when missionaries, through their evangelism attempts, with

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<sup>25</sup> Catholic: Dom Poye; Lutheran: William Poima; and EBC: Retired Senior Pastor Kepe, and Bindai-area Pastor Bere.

<sup>26</sup> “ ‘One of the first duties of a missionary (regardless of nationality) is to try to understand the people, among whom he works.’ . . . Understanding the people is a very taxing exercise, and demands the very best of a man or a woman, especially one involved in cross-cultural missionary enterprise” (Joshua Daimoi, “Understanding Melanesians”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17-2 (2001), p. 6).

their Christian religion, and their Western benefits,<sup>27</sup> introduced the receptor culture to Christianity. Both the Western, Christian culture and the receptor culture (Dinga people) had to establish a dialogue for acculturation.<sup>28</sup> In accommodating the Western, Christian culture, the primitive Dinga people maintained their cultural goals, while trying to benefit from the counterpart. Through these benefits, the people of Dinga were drawn into accepting the missionaries, and adapting their religion. The catechism programs of the church taught the people, through standard prayers,<sup>29</sup> Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), and seven sacraments.<sup>30</sup> They did not have a meaningful conversion experience.

The Dinga people were drawn into accepting the missionaries, and adapting their religion, by combining *Yanigelwa* worship with these Western benefits, and the enforced rule of the colonial government. The late Fr Glen, in the 1940s or 1950s, made radical campaigns to eradicate *Yanigelwa* worship, by burning out the sacred houses and holy shrines at the old Peramara church ground. Conversion to the Catholic church was by physical force, and external reform, but not by an internal, or a heart conversion, thereby shifting their allegiance to Christ. As a result, the Catholic church was full of nominal, syncretistic, and unconverted members.

## **LUTHERAN CHURCH**

William Poima (church evangelist during the 1960s) said that Revd Towadon planted the Lutheran church in the 1950s. Revd Towadon was a missionary from Finschaffen, in Morobe province. The missionary brought

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<sup>27</sup> Western benefits: metal axe, spade, clothing, medicine, bush knife, salt, education. Church schools still exist at Koge, and have a great influence in the Dinga community.

<sup>28</sup> Acculturation is a process of accommodation by any one culture, when in confrontation with another culture. Effective acculturation will allow the people of the receptor culture, and the incoming culture, to maintain their own principles, values, norms, beliefs, and allegiances, while coping with the challenges and opportunities of the incoming culture, with minimum strain (Stephen Grunlan, and Marvin Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1979, p. 85).

<sup>29</sup> Prayers: Hail Mary, Lord's Prayer (Matt 6: 9-13), prayer of faith, prayer of contrition.

<sup>30</sup> Sacraments: 1. Communion; 2. Baptism; 3. Anointment of oil; 4. Matrimony; 5. Confirmation; 6. Confession; 7. Penance.

people into the church with the help of the colonial government,<sup>31</sup> sacramental teachings,<sup>32</sup> and adaptation programs.<sup>33</sup>

The late Revd Towadon took a bold stand in introducing the gospel of Jesus Christ. With the help of the colonial government, he told the people, from different clans of Dinga, to tear down the sacred houses and sacred shrines, used for worshipping *Yanigelwa*. The missionary, with the help of newly-converted Christians, burnt them down at the Kiane church ground. Again, it was just an outward reform. There was nothing of an inward impact of genuine conversion. Thus, the church consisted of nominal, syncretistic, and unconverted members. As a result, many deserted the church.

### **EVANGELICAL BROTHERHOOD CHURCH**

Retired senior pastor Kepe, and Bindai-area pastor Bere, said that the Evangelical Brotherhood church (EBC) church was planted in the Western Highlands Province in 1954<sup>34</sup>. The church was brought to Yuri, Chimbu, in 1966,<sup>35</sup> and, in 1990, extended to Dinga,<sup>36</sup> at Giu village.

The pastors said that their primary goal was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and only the Word of God could judge the desires and thoughts of the hearts (Heb 4:12) of the people, and cause genuine conversion in their lives. This was the only way that they could succeed in helping the people renounce their animistic practices and *Yanigelwa* worship. The EBC missionaries and pastors did not use physical force,<sup>37</sup> or adaptation

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<sup>31</sup> The colonial government forced people into the church to discourage them from engaging in tribal fighting, animistic practices, and worshipping the sun god, *Yanigelwa*.

<sup>32</sup> Sacraments: 1. Baptism; 2. Communion; 3. Confirmation; 4. Matrimony.

<sup>33</sup> Western benefits: education, clothing, medicine, salt, metal axes, spades, and bush knives.

<sup>34</sup> Missionaries: Ruthy, Ervin, and Arnold in Minj, Modumil in the Western Highlands.

<sup>35</sup> Yuri in South Chimbu (up in the icy mountain place).

<sup>36</sup> Christian brother, James Minga, brought the church to Giu village, and planted it there.

<sup>37</sup> Physical force: missionaries and pastors do not discriminate, and renounce the cultures and worldview of the people. They trusted only the Word of God could penetrate into the hearts of the people (Heb 4:12), and could cause genuine conversion (Rom 1:16).

programs.<sup>38</sup> The church radically stood on the Word of God, preached the Word of God, and the Word itself did the final work in the lives of the people. However, today the church members are growing fewer, and becoming stagnant.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Because the Catholics and Lutherans used force and adaptation programs, the churches are full of unconverted members, and they face the consequences of losing their church members to different churches. The churches need radical reform, and sound biblical teaching, to enable the members to grow spiritually, and to lift the growth of the church from stagnancy. If this does not happen within a decade, their churches will diminish.

On the other hand, even though EBC evangelised the people with the Word of God, the church lacks discipleship programs.<sup>39</sup> The consequence is that the church grows spiritually stagnant, and loses members to the Pentecostals. The church needs reform.

## **SYNCRETISM IN THE DINGA CHURCH**

“Syncretism is an attempt to reconcile two or more opposing elements of religion, in hope of creating a new one. It denies any unique revelation, thus blending traditional religion and Christianity as ways from and to God. It is adding of traditional elements, and watering down of the uniqueness of Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The church does not have any adaptation program (Western benefits), the missionaries and pastors’ made a holistic approach in encouraging people to be self reliant in using their land, and any resources before them. This is the only church where their members are business-minded, self-reliant, and genuinely converted to follow Christ.

<sup>39</sup> Discipleship programs: Bible study, youth ministry, and women’s ministry. TEE courses are not conducted in the churches, and there is a lack of men’s fellowships and retreats, music ministries, etc., which causes stagnation in congregational growth.

<sup>40</sup> Ledimo Edonie, “Syncretism in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 16-2 (2000), p. 20, quoting W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, *No Other Name*, London UK: SCM Press, 1963, p. 10.

Most Dinga people are receptive to the gospel. They acknowledge God's work, supremacy, salvation, and even His Lordship, through Jesus Christ. Problems arise, however, when people embrace Christ, without making a decisive break with their preChristian involvements with sun-god beliefs and worship.

As we have already seen, sun-god worship is intimately interwoven into a Dinga's culture, history, religion, and relationships. Radical adjustments in their way of thinking (worldview) and practice are not usually immediate.

A convert from sun-god worship, or animism, cannot suddenly divest himself of what a hundred generations has woven into every strand of his mental and moral nature. . . . The (gospel) seed sown may be of the very best quality, and the soil may be suited to the new crop; but old hopes, fears, ideas, and impulses bring up stray seeds of former crops that the field has carried.<sup>41</sup>

It is unrealistic, then, to expect new Dinga believers to separate themselves totally from all that they know, and hold dear. Indeed, they should not have to. "It should be possible for a tribal man from say, Africa or New Guinea, to be a Christian, without having to reject his tribe."<sup>42</sup> Dinga is a tribal group, and their custom is that they should live corporately in a tribe. Everything is in common in the tribal group. In this regard, Dinga culture and worldview is part of the survival of the society, and syncretism is obvious.

## **SYNCRETISM PRACTISED CONSCIOUSLY AND UNCONSCIOUSLY**

### ***Conscious Syncretism***

The worst form of syncretism is when those who profess to follow Christ deliberately (consciously) entice new believers to blend sun-god beliefs and practices with the gospel. Fr Nilles, of Chimbu diocese, says:

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<sup>41</sup> Patrick Hall, "Cults Course Notes", Banz PNG: Christian Leaders' Training College, 2002, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

During the ceremony, I also called on the spirits of the ancestors to be among us, with their strong intercession with God, the giver of all things. I noticed a happy smile on the faces of the men and women around me.<sup>43</sup>

Dinga people have syncretised with old beliefs – particularly as it relates to the place of God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. There is an enormous transference from Dinga's old system of religion into Christian beliefs. The common use of *Yanigelwa's* name in rituals, magic, amulets, talisman, witchcraft, and sorcery reflects the earliest religions of sun-god belief and superstition. Most Dinga churches did not try to give new meaning to indigenous beliefs, but simply mixed two ways of thinking. One Catholic priest says:

We aren't trying to get the people to stop their worship of the ancestors, and any traditional beliefs. We're just teaching them to add Mary and Jesus to their list.<sup>44</sup>

They profess to be Christians, and, at the same time, show compatibility with the old religion. Thus indigenisation, especially by those ministering God's Word, is never achieved. It is a polluted exercise, a compromised way of interpreting the Bible, and a syncretistic faith.<sup>45</sup> This is conscious syncretism at its ugliest.

### ***Unconscious Syncretism***

Even honest Dinga believers sometimes unconsciously mix biblical teachings with *Yanigelwa* beliefs. They cling to traditional religion, mistakenly believing this is the practical way to manage the immediate problems of life, such as illness, infertility, death, and drought. Consequently, Dinga churches are often filled with people, who raise their hands in praise to God on Sundays, but visit witch doctors through the

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<sup>43</sup> John Nilles, "Chimbu Ancestor and Christian Worship", in *Catalyst* 7-3 (1977), p. 178.

<sup>44</sup> Hall, "Cults Course Notes", p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> We should never teach the people that their former ways of worshipping the spirits of their ancestors, and *Yanigelwa* worship, were entirely wrong, or instigated by the devil, as *pasin bilong satan* (Nilles, "Chimbu Ancestor and Christian Worship", p. 183).

week to get their needs met. As Philip Steyne says, “Many converts hold the Bible in one hand, and their traditional religion in the other.”<sup>46</sup>

Very few Dinga believers are completely delivered from the web of sun-god belief and worship, because they are ensnared in ways they don't even realise. Certainly, they are saved in a moment of God's grace, but total deliverance from the old ways happens over a long process of time.

We must take extreme care that Dinga converts fully understand the basics of Christianity. It is unrealistic to expect Dinga believers to latch on to Christian teaching in such a way as to completely replace their *Yanigelwa* beliefs. They consider it extra protection. One Catholic priest put it well when he said, “My religion is Catholicism, but my philosophy of life is spiritism.”<sup>47</sup> Some professed church leaders in Dinga are such spiritistic people.

Following are examples, intended to illustrate how subtle syncretism can be in sun-god beliefs and animistic contexts. *Prayer* can become syncretistic if it can be used like a chant to *Yanigelwa*. Christians can attempt to manipulate God through prayer for their own selfish purposes, as they did to *Yanigelwa*. *Fasting* can also become syncretistic, if it is used as a manipulative ploy to get God to act on their behalf, as *Yanigelwa* acted on their behalf. *Baptism* may be viewed as being similar to tribal initiation rites. Initiation rites, in Dinga societies, are a systematic way of becoming demonised, so that the power of the evil spirit may be available to the individual, as they call on *Yanigelwa*. *Christian songs* may be used like Dinga chants to arouse God to bless them in some ways. *The Bible*, and its passages, can be used as though they were magical fetishes, just as the sacred men have sacred words to pray to *Yanigelwa* for protection. Clearly, it is not unusual for some Dinga believers to view Christianity as a new kind of magic, in which they seek to use formulas to manipulate God into doing their will.

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<sup>46</sup> Hall, “Cults Course Notes”, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

These examples illustrate the fact that, too often, Dinga converts (unconsciously) develop a veneer of Christianity that overlays their real beliefs and values, which remain deeply fixed and submerged.

### **OVERCOMING SYNCRETISM**

Syncretism prospers and succeeds on biblical illiteracy. The need is for strong, biblically-trained national pastors, who can provide the constant discipling of all believers in the things of Christ. The great commission mandate is not merely to convert the nations, but to disciple them (Matt 28:19). Dinga churches have emphasised evangelism, but have been weak in discipling their converts. The discipleship program is of utmost importance for the church of Dinga. That could, undoubtedly, do away with syncretism.

### **MAKING THE GOSPEL RELEVANT TO THE DINGA PEOPLE**

To make the gospel message relevant to the Dinga people, one has to change old practices, by giving them new Christian meanings. These suggested forms can either be indigenous, or obtained from outside, but they must serve as driving forces to express Christianity, meaningfully, into the Dinga *Yanigelwa* worship, to the glory of God. However, the following steps should be taken, when carefully examining old beliefs and customs, through biblical perspectives, before rejecting or accepting them. Most importantly, everything must be from a biblical view.

### **SEE ALL RELIGIOUS PRACTICES FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The church pastor should evaluate all religious practices, to see if they should be changed or replaced. The pastor should do this to give him good knowledge of how to answer people, when encountered, and reason with them, in their belief and worship of *Yanigelwa*. He must lead the people to make a clear break from the old worldview, and come to a new understanding of salvation. MacNutt wrote:

Most people we meet, who need deliverance, seem to be good people, not evil people. Most of them are Christians, and go to church on Sunday, but, in some part of their lives, they are not free.<sup>48</sup>

The people have to lay their sins at the cross. They must confess that they have sacrificed to the sun, but have never lived sacrificially for Christ. They must acknowledge that they have believed Satan's lie (Rom 1:25). Then they must forsake all and turn to the Creator, Lord, and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

### **TRANSITION FROM *YANIGELWA* WORSHIP TO CHRISTIANITY (ACTS 2)**

The first-century church set a pattern that can be adapted to the Dinga situation. On the day of Pentecost, God-fearing people were filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in different tongues, and people were amazed, perplexed, and said they were drunk with wine. However, the Apostle Peter defended them by stating, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The words pierced the hearts of the people, and they asked, "Brothers what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). "Peter replied, repent, and save yourself from this corrupt generation. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-39). They repented, were baptised, fellowshiped together, edified each other, worshipped, ministered, and shared the gospel (Acts 2:42-47), challenged them to "repent" (Acts 2:38), and urged they "save themselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40). As a result, Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord added to their number daily, those who were being saved."

The Christians were devoted to the church, apostles' teaching, and fellowshiping with each other. This should be the model for the Dinga people. They should repent from their *Yanigelwa* worship, and accept Jesus into their lives, and become men and women of like mind.

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<sup>48</sup> Francis MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1995, p. 68.

## **THE ELDERS' ROLE OF DISCIPLESHIP AND TEACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD (ACTS 17)**

The Apostle Paul's model of building bridges into the gospel is seen in Acts 17. "He reasoned with them from the scriptures" (Acts 17:2), delivering the message of the gospel of "Jesus' death and resurrection" (Acts 17:3, 32). Some Jews were persuaded, and believed, and became followers of Jesus (Acts 17:4, 12, 34). He bridged to the gospel, and gave new meaning to their beliefs and worship.

The elders and mature believers in the church need to lead the congregation in solemn Bible study to transpose their god-concepts of *Yanigelwa* worship into the truths of the true living God, as Peter and Paul did in Acts 2 and 17. Each elder, himself, must be fully convinced of the Word of God of its infallible authority. Only then, would he be able to guide the nominal, syncretistic, and unconverted members, as they explore the truths of the scriptures, and apply them to their situation. This exercise is significant, because the people will feel responsible for their own decisions in life, and it will sharpen their ability to discern the truth, and grow in the knowledge and grace of God.

## **FELLOWSHIPING WITH EACH OTHER (GIVING NEW MEANING TO THE TRADITIONAL RITUALS AND SYMBOLS)**

Associated with *Yanigelwa* worship, the Dinga people have rituals, taboos, and pig feasts. *Yanigelwa* worship was the time for people to come together to fellowship, and to celebrate their beliefs, and the wealth with which their god had blessed them.

Christians need to only change the direction, and put on new meaning to these practices. The foremost thing is to maintain intimacy with God. The goal in a Christian's life is to reflect God's glory. In the past, people manipulated their god, acquired wealth, and kept it for self-glory. However, God must receive the glory. The accumulation of food and pigs should be for God's glory, and should be shared among the people. Christians are called to become salt and light in such occasions (Matt 5:13-16). Bavinck says:

Christians ought not to be ready to refuse to take part in harvest feasts, and other sort of activities, which bring the all community together.<sup>49</sup>

Christians should not isolate such cultural practices, because, as a result, they could have less chance to witness to the people. Christians must view Jesus' earthly life as the model of ministry. Hesselgrave writes:

Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies, and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand, and turns them in an entirely different content. . . . He fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning, and gives it a new direction.<sup>50</sup>

Christians should be transformers of the culture. Wielely said:

The dynamic, equivalent church would take the indigenous forms, possess them for Christ, adapt and employ them, to serve Christian ends, by fulfilling indigenous functions, and conveying, into the society, Christian meaning.<sup>51</sup>

The rites and symbols, contextualised into Dinga *Yanigelwa* worship, would not be a new thing. The people are aware of the need to blend their activities, in order to acknowledge, venerate, and worship the true reality, God in Jesus Christ. The symbols, such as sacred houses, sacred shrines, prayers, rituals, and worship of *Yanigelwa*, must be transformed, and given new meaning in worshipping God.

The Old Testament is full of symbolism. The Israelites put up stones, as reminders or witnesses that God acted in their history, and will continue to do so in future (Gen 31:45-54; Josh 4). Therefore, Dinga Christians

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<sup>49</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Philadelphia PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960, p. 175.

<sup>50</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 229.

<sup>51</sup> Edonie, "Syncretism", , p. 39.

should be ready to modify rites and symbols,<sup>52</sup> to express new meaning in their love and faith in Jesus.

## **WORSHIP**

Dinga people are very religious. They know about their cultural sacrifice and worship to *Yanigelwa*. This could enable them to transpose it into Jesus' true sacrifice, just as the Apostle Paul transposed the Athenians from being idolatrous to converts to Jesus. Paul reasoned with them the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, and urged them to cut away from the idols, and only serve the living God. Some were persuaded, believed, and became followers of Christ (Acts 17). Their culturally-idolatrous lives were transposed into new meanings of worshipping Jesus Christ.

Thus, Dinga people must change the direction from *Yanigelwa* worship to serve the true and living God, and worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for the Dinga people's salvation.

## **MINISTERING TO EACH OTHER**

Dinga people live in one big society. Activities, such as, worship, feasts, celebrations, and dances<sup>53</sup> are done corporately. The gospel encourages us not to give up meeting together and encouraging one another (Heb 10:25). We are to always pray for all the saints (Eph 6:18). There are many ways that Dinga Christians can share the good news of Jesus Christ, through corporate means.

The first place for Christians to minister the gospel is at home. Dinga people live in big families, including parents, children, and in-laws. Sometimes, an elder in the family is converted, and then the whole household follows his footsteps

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<sup>52</sup> It had been suggested that all the religious symbols of traditional religion in Papua New Guinea are to do with impersonal forces, and so, cannot act as preparation for a personal, theistic religion (Christopher Garland, "Is Traditional Religion in PNG Theistic", in *Catalyst* 16-2 (1986), pp. 127-134).

<sup>53</sup> James Knight, "Bona Gene: the Pig-kill Festival of Numai (Simbu Province)", in *Powers, Plumes, and Piglets: Phenomena of Melanesian Religion*, Habel, Norman C., ed., Bedford Park SA: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1979, pp. 173-193.

The second place is the men's house, where men live, and discuss important issues affecting the society. People from the society come together to fellowship with all religious activities. This is an excellent opportunity for Christians to minister to each other, and to the people.

The third way is through the extended family. The Dinga people have strong family ties to uncles and aunties on both parents' sides.

A final way is for Dinga people to continue to be loving and friendly to aliens. Their generosity and hospitality could enable the Christians to minister to these strangers to come to know the Lord.

### **CHURCH EVANGELISM (ACTS 1:8)**

In the past, Dinga people have worshipped their own sun god, and influenced other tribes and clans to follow their god. Therefore, they have their own skilful strategies of evangelism. They now need to use these strategies for spreading the Good News, in obedience to Acts 1:8, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth".

#### ***Family Pig Feast***

When Dinga people want to worship *Yanigelwa*, and do other activities involving *Yanigelwa* worship and rituals, they had to kill a pig, and shed blood for a sacrifice. They invited all bloodline relatives to the feast, and had family fellowship in worship, sacrifice, and food distribution. The families invited their relatives to participate in all the activities, and made sure that they were convinced and converted to their god.

Dinga Christians should adopt this strategy by inviting immediate family and bloodline relatives to come to fellowship with them in their homes. They could have a family meal together, and then disperse to their own homes. This is how Christians could make all these people come to know and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

## **ALL-COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OF THE PIG FEAST**

The pig feast, involving *Yanigelwa* worship and rituals, must be given new meaning. The Dinga people performed the rituals to honour the sun, and, in doing so, engaged in idolatrous practice. Now, as believers, we reject all of that, and worship Jesus for God's glory. Christians should arrange conventions, and invite immediate family members, bloodline relatives, and friends from everywhere, to have a wonderful time at a Christian feast. Through this, the attendees would be introduced to God. This is an important evangelism strategy, for the church to convert people to Christ.

## **INITIATION OF BOYS AND GIRLS**

Dinga people understand that a boy or girl is initiated into his or her father's and mother's group at a mini pig feast. The boy or girl is then changed from an unrecognised position in the society to a renowned position. The people highly regard them in the society.

Dinga Christians should be convinced that initiation is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which happens to every child of God, when he is born-again. He becomes a member of the body of Christ, with all the rights and privileges of that community (Rom 8).

## **DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAMS**

Discipleship programs in the church are vital for the spiritual growth of the individual members. Proper discipleship programs must be conducted in the church to challenge the church members, of a syncretistic and nominal type of faith, to make a clear break from their worldview, and serve and worship only Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour. Following are vital activities that the church could do in relation to discipleship programs: Bible study in the church, TEE study in the church, Christians coming together to fellowship with meals, worship, sports, and time for encouraging and edifying one another (Heb 10:25), men's fellowship, women's fellowship, youth fellowship, children ministry, and music ministry. These discipleship ministry programs will make a great difference in congregational and church growth.

## CONCLUSION

I have exposed and argued that the Dinga people's worship of the sun god *Yanigelwa* is their old religious practice, in their preChristian culture. The missionaries encountered the people to Christianise them. They made a radical attempt to eradicate sun-god worship. However, they did not meet the people with the gospel, and proper contextualisation strategy, in approaching the people's worldview and culture. Thus, the gospel message did not penetrate the core of the people's worldview and culture. The use of physical force to change them caused damage to the people. Hence, churches in Dinga are full of syncretistic, nominal, and unconverted members. This is where the gospel is ineffective. I see that the churches in Dinga are in a worse form of animism than before. On Sundays, they go for worship, and, on the other days, they mingle around with witch doctors, sorceresses, and magicians, for answers to their needs. God says:

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, in the form of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them, or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers (Ex 20:2-5a).<sup>54</sup>

Dinga people will have to renounce and forsake their nominal and syncretistic type of faith. Because God regards it as committing idolatry against Him, they must repent, and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, for their salvation. This will bring reform to the church, and lift it from stagnancy to vitality.

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<sup>54</sup> See also Ex 34:14; Deut 4:24; 32:21; Josh 24:19; Nah 1:2.

## DINGA LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

Aupile.....	Help
Auwakai .....	Doing good
Bona .....	Pig
Bona gakile.....	Small piglet
Bona gene.....	Pig-feast traditional dance
Dinga.....	Name of a people group
Dinkoparim .....	Special tree, smells like ginger
En.....	You
Ere.....	Tree
Ere-hari .....	Tree leaves
Gai.....	Teenage girls, sexually mature
Gai hike.....	Teenage girls, sexually mature, clubhouse
Garapara.....	Name of a special tree with a ginger smell
Gelwa .....	Son god
Gerua.....	Traditional dancing boards
Giu .....	Evangelical Brotherhood church ground
Hike.....	House
Kanimine.....	Sacred, secret prayer, spells, incantations, and magic words.
Kanimine puayale .....	A sacred person who knows secret prayers
Kanmolo.....	Watch on
Kapekiwa.....	Kill pig and cook
Kewakwipayal.....	A male <i>masalai</i> (localised spirit) that looks after the pigs
Kiane.....	Name of a Lutheran church ground
Kuria-mam .....	Traditional love-making songs
Masalai .....	Localised spirit
Mokime .....	Round
Ne.....	Me
Nebare .....	Bamboo flute
Nebare Kanua .....	Blowing of a bamboo flute at the initiation rites
Peramara .....	The old Catholic church ground
Puayale.....	A person who knows all the sacred, secret words of prayer, spell, and charm
Tamberan .....	Ghost
Tole-kanmolo.....	Watch on or look on
Yalminayale.....	The great man
Yani.....	Father god
Yanigelwa.....	Sun god

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