

# **DR SIONE ‘AMANAKI HAVEA OF TONGA: THE ARCHITECT OF PACIFIC THEOLOGY**

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In 1912, Roland Allen concluded that there were “three very disquieting symptoms”, which should cause grave anxiety on the part of missionaries and missionary organisations:

- (1) Missionaries were yet to plant an “indigenous” church in any heathen land: “Generally speaking, it still remains true that Christianity, in the lands of our missions, is still a foreign religion. It has not really taken root in the country.”<sup>1</sup>
- (2) Churches, planted by missionaries, were heavily dependent on the mother church to supply their needs, in terms of leadership and finance.
- (3) There is a uniform-type of churches planted by missionaries everywhere – a church in the likeness of those in the sending culture. For mission to make a profound impact in a foreign culture, Allen claimed that Christianity must put on “a foreign dress, and develop new forms of glory and beauty”.<sup>2</sup>

These objectives seem to have been formally launched in the Pacific region by the 1986 Consultation on Pacific Theology in Papua New Guinea. The purpose of that meeting was “to provide an opportunity for Pacific Christians to discuss what God’s message means for Pacific people, and

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul’s or Ours?*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, reprint 1986., pp. 141-142.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

how this message can be more effectively communicated”.<sup>3</sup> In the Foreword to the publication of essays presented to the meeting, Dr Sione ‘Amanaki Havea of Tonga claimed that this meeting directed the theological enterprise in the Pacific to “Pacific Theology” as a theme. He summoned all Pacific theologians to make this “moving towards a Pacific Theology” a matter worthy of their utmost serious consideration. Dr Havea informed Pacific writers that there were so many thoughts, which were relevant to this subject, and that they should think and write immediately on this important theme.<sup>4</sup>

Dr Havea’s 1986 contribution to the Consultation on Pacific Theology is, in my judgment, the inauguration of a theological movement in the Pacific region, which attempts to produce a distinctively “Pacific” theology, in terms of its descriptive categories and conceptual frameworks. The paradigmatic model for this movement was set forth by Dr Havea himself in his contribution to the 1986 meeting, namely, “Christianity in the Pacific Context”.<sup>5</sup> Dr Havea’s essay sets forth the foundational principles for Pacific Theology. The term “Pacific” here deliberately indicates that the distinctive nature of this movement lies in its identification with a geographical region, and aims to distinguish it from theological movements of a similar kind in other parts of the world.<sup>6</sup> Here, I wish to document the

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<sup>3</sup> R. Boyd Johnson, “Introduction”, in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology: Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, Regnum: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> S. ‘A. Havea, “Foreword”, in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology: Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, Regnum: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11-15.

<sup>6</sup> Liberation Theology and African Theology are two examples of theological movements parallel to Pacific Theology. For a critical assessment of Liberation Theology, see E. Nunez, “Church in the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez: Description and Hermeneutical Analysis”, in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualisation*, D. A. Carson, ed., Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984, pp. 166-194, and the literature cited therein. For a brief description of the development of African Theology, see Tite Tienou, “Church in African Theology: Description and Analysis of Hermeneutical Presuppositions”, in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualisation*, D. A. Carson, ed., Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984,

various aspects of the constitutive elements of Pacific Theology, as developed by Dr Havea since the 1986 meeting.

## **A QUEST FOR A PACIFIC THEOLOGY: DR HAVEA'S PARADIGMATIC APPROACH**

In his 1986 essay, Dr Havea indicated that the quest for a Pacific Theology is a movement, beyond indigenisation to theological contextualisation. Contextualisation, according to Dr Havea, "refers to that which grows out of the local soil". The relationship between contextualisation and Pacific Theology is defined as follows. Pacific Theology, "is an effort to put faith and the [g]ospel in the local soil and context, so that they can exist in a local climate". By implication, if "faith and the gospel" were the theological "seeds", the "local soil and context", and "local climate" (which basically refer to the Pacific worldview, informed, as it were, by our diverse cultural backgrounds), is where these "theological seeds" are to be sown, then the "sower" is the Pacific theologian. Moreover, the "plant", which is supposed to grow from it is, in Dr Havea's view, what is meant by contextualisation. This insight becomes foundational for what is currently known among Pacific theologians as the *pot-plant transportation* model of contextualisation.<sup>7</sup>

Dr Havea's proposal, regarding the method of Pacific Theology, was a reaction against the supposed influence of the 19th-century missionaries in the culture of the Pacific islands. He shared the conviction that the Christianity, which the 19th-century missionaries brought to the Pacific, was a foreign religion, kept, as it were, in a "Western theological pot", and

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pp. 151-165, and the literature cited therein. See also D. Mwasaru, "Africanisation", in *International Review of Mission* 64-254 (1975), pp. 121-128.

<sup>7</sup> I. S. Tuwere, "What is Contextual Theology: A View From Oceania", in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-27 (2002), p. 8. For a summary of other models of contextualisation, see J. Meo, "How Do We Do Contextual Theology", in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-27 (2002), pp. 41-60. As far as I am concerned, the impetus for Dr Havea's thinking may have emerged from a speech given by the Governor-General of Papua New Guinea in 1976 at the Third Assembly of the Pacific Council of Churches, for which Dr Havea was the chairperson for a very long time. See M. Palu, "Pacific Theology: A Reconsideration of Its Methodology", in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-29 (2003), p. 31.

nurtured with Western ideas.<sup>8</sup> What the 19th-century missionaries failed to do, according to Dr Havea, was to uproot this “plant” from that “Western theological pot” and to re-plant it in the “local soil” of the Pacific. Thus, while this kind of Christianity has been fostered and nurtured in the Pacific region, it nonetheless remains a foreign religion. What this meant, according to Dr Havea, was that categories, deployed in the theological enterprise in the Pacific thus far, have been Western and not Pacific Islander.

Pacific Theology, therefore, is the attempt to transport this foreign Christianity from its Western theological pot into the local soil – that is, to make it more relevant to the specific context of Pacific islanders. In that sense, Pacific Theology is “an effort to interpret and to see [the Bible] with Pacific eyes, and to listen with Pacific ears”. In so doing, Dr Havea believed that theology would become “local and indigenised and contextualised”.<sup>9</sup> The “local soil”, to which this foreign religion is to be transported, however, is Pacific history, culture, and customs. Dr Havea frequently stressed that, in contextualising theology, we must look to “our history, culture, and customs, to illustrate, in the light of the Good News, what God is like and is doing to us in His saving acts of revelation and salvation”.<sup>10</sup>

Taking Jesus as the ultimate example of a theologian, who practised this contextualising model, Dr Havea argued that Jesus made good use of His physical, cultural, and Jewish history to illustrate His message about the Kingdom of Heaven. According to Dr Havea, Jesus drew on immediate regional elements to illustrate His preaching of the kingdom. That Jesus employed the animals of Palestine, such as sheep and goats, that He spoke about vines and bread, and even His usage of metaphors, such as, “good

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<sup>8</sup> Havea, “Christianity in the Pacific Context”, in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology: Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, Regnum: World Vision International South Pacific, 1987, p. 11. The same judgment is expressed by Mwasaru, regarding churches in Africa. He asserted that “[t]he church in Africa is not authentic, it is a carbon copy of the church in Europe”. See Mwasaru, “Africanisation”, p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Havea, “Christianity”, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Palu, “Pacific Theology: a Reconsideration”, p. 12.

shepherd”, and “yoke” for ploughs, was simply due to the fact that He grew up in a Hebrew context. Had Jesus grown up in the Pacific context, Dr Havea confidently asserted that Jesus’ teaching would have been stated rather differently. He would have employed “what we have in the Pacific: the coconut, yams, and taro, the Pacific delicacies; the hibiscus and the orchids; the *kava* plant and its cultural significance, to relate His teaching to us”.<sup>11</sup>

This is the foundation of the quest for a relevant Pacific Theology. Dr Havea maintained that Pacific Theology, if it were to have a unique shape, is to be a response to the question: *What would be the content of the gospel message, if Jesus were a Pacific islander?* In his 1986 essay, Dr Havea offered his own response to this question. He looked at his Tongan culture, the Tongan legends and myths, and to the Pacific natural environment to extract from them what the message of Jesus would have looked like if Jesus was a Pacific Islander.

## **DR HAVEA’S IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS CONTEXTUALISATION MODEL**

From our cultural practices in the Pacific, Dr Havea proposed a “theology of celebration”, as a description of the Pacific Islander attitude to life. From the Pacific legends and myths, he suggested the origin of the *kava* plant as a symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus. From our natural surroundings in the Pacific, he constructed “coconut theology”. These are different ways in which a “Pacific Jesus”, according to Dr Havea, could have presented His teaching in the gospels.<sup>12</sup>

### **A THEOLOGY OF GIVING**

After the 1986 essay, Dr Havea extended the quest for a Pacific Theology with two further thoughts – both of which displayed additional elements to the kind of theology he had in view. In his 1989 Pacific Theological College Graduation Address, Dr Havea offered some further thoughts on

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

“The Theology of Giving – A Celebration”, as follows.<sup>13</sup> In the Pacific context, which is all too familiar with the poor, the handicapped, and the blind, Pacific theologians, being graduates of the Pacific Theological College, were to bring back to their respective islands the “good news of deliverance” (cf. Luke 4:16-21). Thus, Dr Havea referred to the theologian as “a gift of God” for the Pacific churches.

Furthermore, the Pacific theologian must feel that his or her presence in the Pacific context is necessary. But what they will offer to people in their respective villages will depend largely on how they respect the people living there. The theologian’s role as a gift, according to Dr Havea, is to be fulfilled in “out-reaching” to the people of the community in which they live. It is, moreover, to be expressed as “up-reaching”, in the sense that “out-reaching” is pleasing to God. Above all, as a gift to the Pacific community, the theologian is to be “in-reaching”, by finding a sense of satisfaction in “out-reaching” to others in the Pacific context.

This address indicated an important element of Pacific Theology, namely, the significant role ascribed to Pacific theologians. In Dr Havea’s contextualisation model, Pacific theologians are to assume the role of Jesus Himself, as the bringer of good news to the Pacific islands. By implication, Jesus becomes merely an example for Pacific theologians to follow. Pacific theologians are God’s gifts to their respective islands, just as Jesus was God’s gift to the world. They are to live lives pleasing to God and to themselves by fellowshiping with others, just as Jesus did during His earthly ministry.

Interestingly, the kind of fellowship between Pacific theologians and their respective local churches, which is assumed here, is an end in itself, and not a means to a higher goal, namely, Jesus’ mission to save the lost (cf. Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; 1 Tim 1:15; cf. Luke 15:1-32). While Jesus was sent to save the world (John 3:16-17), there is no such consideration in the kind of fellowship that Dr Havea envisaged for Pacific theologians returning to their respective islands. In that sense, God’s commitment to

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<sup>13</sup> S. ‘A. Havea, “The Theology of Giving: A Celebration: 1989 Pacific Theological College Graduation Address”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-3 (1990), pp. 10-15.

save the world through the gift of His Son is fundamentally downplayed in this kind of contextualisation. Nevertheless, what is obvious is the central role of Pacific theologians in Dr Havea's quest for Pacific Theology. This indicates that the personal reflection of the theologian is to play a key role in the quest for a Pacific Theology. Pacific Theology, so to speak, is the content of theological thinking and reflections by a Pacific Islander.

## **A THEOLOGY FOR THE PACIFIC CHURCH**

Dr Havea's second essay, which shows another significant development in the quest for a Pacific Theology, is a short paper on the "resurrection" in the *Pacific Journal of Theology*, which was published in 1990. In this essay, Dr Havea is more straightforward about the agenda underlying his thinking since 1986. This is indicated by the title of his essay, "The Quest for the 'Pacific' Church".<sup>14</sup> Dr Havea begins with a repetition of the invocation he had made upon Pacific theologians in 1986 to seriously consider the quest for a Pacific Theology, as a theme, by asserting that "one of the most important questions concerning the services of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* is whether we have seen any signs of a truly Pacific Theology".<sup>15</sup> Such a theology, according to Dr Havea, "should not be either a duplication of, or transfer from, Western thinking, but should be one grown and nurtured in the local soil".<sup>16</sup>

Dr Havea continues with the suggestion that the proper platform upon which Pacific theology could be staged is seen, for instance, in the migration of Tongans to foreign lands. Some, if not all, have contradicted the advice given by the mother church in Tonga to join the existing Methodist establishment in their respective host nations by setting up their own churches in which they could "stay together and worship among themselves, maintaining their own forms of liturgy".<sup>17</sup> They even adopt the name of their home churches, preferring "to sing their own songs, and to pray to a God who speaks their language", and in whose service a

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<sup>14</sup> S. 'A. Havea, "The Quest for the 'Pacific' Church", in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-6 (1991), pp. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Tongan minister would officiate.<sup>18</sup> This is what Dr Havea regards as an “indigenous Pacific church”. What is left for churches of this kind is to have their own Pacific Theology. According to Dr Havea, there is, therefore, a pressing demand upon Pacific theologians “to construct a theology for these and other ‘indigenous’ Pacific churches”.<sup>19</sup>

In this essay, Dr Havea has incorporated another foundational component of Pacific Theology, namely, that the indigenous Pacific church is *the sphere for which* a truly Pacific Theology is to be constructed and put into practice. Accordingly, Pacific Theology is to be the kind of theology that should be used to serve indigenous Pacific churches. The construction of Pacific Theology apparently remains the prerogative of Pacific theologians alone, with the implication that, while their constructive task may be conducted “outside” the parameters of the Pacific church, the product of their theological reflection is to be deployed inevitably in the service of the church.

In this respect, Dr Havea comes close to adopting the model that Karl Barth set forth in his *Church Dogmatics*. As one reviewer of Barth puts it, if *Church Dogmatics*, as the title of Barth’s works, is to be taken seriously, then it means that “this theology is bound to the *sphere of the church*, and is only understandable and meaningful within its borders”.<sup>20</sup> What Barth and Dr Havea have in common is their daring commitment to be the church’s spokespersons in their respective contexts by attempting to carry out the function of theology within the sphere of the church. But, while Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* may have emerged from a pastoral concern to measure the proclamation of the church by the yardstick of the essence of the church, namely, Jesus Christ, Dr Havea’s concern is that the proclamation of the Pacific church is to be measured by the yardstick of theological ideas from Pacific theologians.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> J. Godsey, “The Architecture of Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics”, in *Scottish Journal Theology* 9-3 (1956), p. 237. His emphasis.



On the basis of the foregoing discussion, I wish to propose that Dr Havea is the architect of Pacific Theology.<sup>21</sup> He is the one to whom we, as theologians from the Pacific region, owe our respect as the “father” of Pacific Theology. He did not merely summon Pacific theologians to take on Pacific Theology as a theme. He also charted the theological map, as well as fixed the destination to which we should arrive, in this quest for Pacific Theology.

Furthermore, Dr Havea did not leave it to others to navigate the “high seas” of theological contextualisation. Rather, he led the way, and showed by example, the kind of theological constructions that could be achieved by theologians, who would follow the theological map he had charted. His insistence on the quest for a “truly Pacific Theology” has been (as can be observed from many issues of *Pacific Journal of Theology*) ardently accepted with enthusiasm by Pacific theologians, and has almost become normative for theological enterprise in the Pacific region for past decades. In attempts at contextualisation in the Pacific since 1986, the fundamental influence of Dr Havea’s contextualisation agenda can hardly be missed.

### **SUMMARY: FOUNDATIONAL FEATURES OF PACIFIC THEOLOGY**

In summary, the essential features of Dr Havea’s paradigmatic approach to Pacific Theology include the following factors.

Firstly, there is a characteristically negative attitude to the influence of the 19th-century missionaries on the local churches in the Pacific. The point of departure of the current “pot-plant” transportation model of contextualisation is the accusation that the Christianity, brought by the 19th-century missionaries to our shores, has so far remained a foreign religion. Pacific Theology is, therefore, a movement, which is aimed at making Christianity more Pacific in its theological outlook.

Secondly, the *conditio sine qua non* of Pacific Theology is theological contextualisation, which, accordingly, is an attempt to remove the so-called “Western outfit” of the message of Jesus and to replace it with a

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<sup>21</sup> Palu, “Pacific Theology: a Reconsideration”, p. 33.

“Pacific cultural outfit”. According to one of its most enthusiastic proponents, contextualisation, by means of the pot-plant transportation method of Dr Havea, “seeks to allow the gospel to grow in the native soil, to which it is introduced, and takes account of present realities in that situation”.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, Pacific Theology is to be primarily the theological construction of Pacific theologians. As we have mentioned above, the central question of Pacific Theology is: What if Jesus was a Pacific Islander? Pacific Theology consists of the various theological constructions of Pacific theologians in response to that question.

Fourthly, the authoritative “texts”, from which Pacific theologians are to construct a truly Pacific Theology, include the Pacific cultural background, the Pacific natural environment, and the oral tradition of Pacific legends, myths, and history.

Fifthly, the purpose of Pacific Theology is to serve the Pacific churches. Dr Havea’s intention is that Pacific Theology should be a theology that emerges from Pacific churches, constructed by Pacific theologians, in order to guide Pacific people in worshipping God in the Pacific context.

## **THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF DR HAVEA**

The pervasive influence of Dr Havea’s thinking in contextualisation is still largely felt in the Pacific today. In one of the issues of the *Pacific Journal of Theology*, one contributor says that, with respect to the theological enterprise, we are only starting to yield the fruit of past efforts to navigate our theological boat towards contextualisation.<sup>23</sup> He identifies the “fruit” as theological topics, such as, “theology of the coconut, the theology of *kava*, Christ the perfect pig, the Pacific Christ”, as well as the contextualised worship practice in the Pacific Theological College, where the Eucharist is celebrated with taro and coconut juice instead of the traditional elements. Apart from the reference to Christ being the “perfect

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<sup>22</sup> Tuwere, “What is Contextual Theology”, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> K. Solomon, “Ecumenism in Oceania”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 24-2 (2000), p. 98. My italics.

pig”, the rest of these contextualised theological constructs originated in Dr Havea’s thinking.

Moreover, in the meeting of the Methodist church leaders in Western Samoa in 2001, banners were hoisted all over the venue for the meeting with “coconut theology” written on them. Young coconuts were scattered around the venue of the meeting, indicating that coconut theology has become the distinctive identity of Christianity in the Pacific context. In a very real sense, therefore, Dr Havea’s conception of “coconut theology” can be ranked as, thus far, the most distinctive formulation of Pacific Theology. For this reason, it is necessary to make a critical evaluation of Dr Havea’s 1986 essay, by way of assessing the current state of contextualisation in the Pacific during the past two-and-a-half decades.

### **A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF DR HAVEA’S CONTEXTUAL MODEL**

I have offered a thorough critique of Dr Havea’s method of contextualisation, as well as the various products of Pacific Theology, in a number of publications in the *Pacific Journal of Theology*.<sup>24</sup> Here, however, I shall provide the fundamental problem of this method, namely, undermining the authority of the scriptures, as foundational for Christian theological reflection.

In actual fact, Dr Havea initiates a paradigm shift in relation to the foundation of theological reflection in the Pacific. This shift can be described only as a movement *away* from the scriptures, and into the diverse cultures of the Pacific. The 19th-century missionaries, who brought Christianity to Tonga and the Pacific, maintained the scriptural foundation of theology.<sup>25</sup> Dr Havea, on the other hand, whether wittingly or unwittingly, relocated the source of doing theology in the Pacific from the scriptures to the cultural, physical, and social surroundings of the

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<sup>24</sup> M. Palu, “Pacific Theology”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-28 (2002), pp. 21-53. See also Palu, “Pacific Theology: a Reconsideration”, pp. 30-58.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, J. E. Molitoni, *Ko e Lotukalafi*, Nuku’alofa Tonga: SUTT, nd, where he says *Ko e feleoko ‘o e Lotukalafi ko e Tohitapu*, or “the source of theology is the scriptures”.

Pacific people, that is, to nature. The result is his “celebration theology”, theology of the *kava*,<sup>26</sup> and “coconut theology”.<sup>27</sup>

However, if theology is simply *knowing God*, then, just as in all true scientific knowledge, for that knowledge to take place, it must rest firmly upon the reality and grace of God, the object known or investigated. Barth rightly insists that “in the knowledge of God, we cannot raise questions as to its reality from some position outside of it”.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the true knowledge of God can grasp us only as God graciously confronts us in the person of Jesus Christ, to whom scripture bears the most reliable witness.<sup>29</sup>

The harmful implications of such a paradigm shift for Christianity in the Pacific are manifold:

- (1) Since we wish to know God, not from His gracious revelation in scripture, but from studying Pacific people in their relationship with one another, and with their natural environment, then, eventually, theology becomes anthropology. In my view, the present state of theology in the Pacific, at least, in its publicly-acknowledged form, reflects a kind of cultural anthropology.<sup>30</sup>
- (2) Shifting the source of theology from the scriptures to social relations, and to the natural environment of Pacific people,

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<sup>26</sup> For a more thorough exposition of this theme, see Havea, “The Theology of Giving”, pp. 10-15.

<sup>27</sup> This trend is also manifested in other attempts at contextualisation in the Pacific, such as I. S. Tuwera’s “theology of the ocean” or Sr Kanongata’a’s “theology of the womb”. In both attempts, a natural feature of the Pacific’s physical environment is chosen to provide the conceptual framework for theologising. Again, the influence of Dr Havea’s agenda for Pacific theology looms large in the background. See I. S. Tuwera, “An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania”, in *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2-13 (1995), pp. 5-13.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Incarnation* (Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1969), p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 1-11.

<sup>30</sup> This verdict is based on reading through several issues of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* in the more recent past.

effectively widens the gap between professional theologians and the laity.

- (3) With the scriptures being undermined as the ultimate source of theology, one can anticipate a theology constructed only upon cultural symbols (e.g., “Christ, the perfect pig”, Christ, the “coconut of life”). As Emil Brunner remarks, “The only man, who can look for some other foundations beside the *Deus dixit* (God speaks), is the man who withholds belief from the *Deus dixit* and wants, secretly, to replace revelation by symbol.”<sup>31</sup>
- (4) Not surprisingly, with the abandonment of the scriptures as authoritative in theological reconstruction, the outworking of Christianity in the Pacific is a form of cultural holiness, rather than scriptural holiness.

### SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

There is a pressing need among Pacific island theologians to construct a more positive response to Dr Havea’s model of contextualisation, as an alternative approach that will help both professional theologians and lay people alike to regain their confidence in the scriptures as the ultimate source of faith and practice for the Pacific island churches. In my judgment, while the *Pacific Journal of Theology* continues to uphold contextualisation in the pot-plant transformation model, outlined in this essay, some of the more recent developments among Melanesian theologians are moving in a more promising direction.

This is displayed in the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, where a critical appreciation of our Pacific culture is evident in most of its more-recent issues. This, in my judgment, is the way forward in contextualisation in the Pacific region. It is true that our culture, to a certain extent, shapes the way we read the scriptures, but it is not true that we, therefore, need to adopt a subjective viewpoint from Pacific cultures in order to better

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<sup>31</sup> E. Brunner, *The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology*, A. J. D. Farrer and B. L. Woolf, trans, *Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie*, (English translation) Herdford: Stephen Austin, 1937, p. 16.

understand the scriptures. We can only better understand the scriptures according to its own terms – by understanding individual passages in relation to the storyline of the scriptures, from its beginning to end. In other words, we need to develop the Reformers’ idea of “scripture interpreting scripture”, in a way more in line with the way Pacific Islanders think, namely, in narrative forms. But this is the story for another day. *Soli Deo gloria.*

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