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# **MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY**

*Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools*

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology in Melanesia. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians are welcome.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith within Melanesian cultures. The Editorial Team will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians and of general theological interest.

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# JUST WAR AND TRIBAL FIGHTING – RECONCILIATION NOT RETALIATION

**Peter J. Frost**

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## ABSTRACT

Tribal fighting had been happening in Papua New Guinea long before the Europeans discovered Papua New Guinea. Melanesia is highly relational, and fighting has been the traditional way to gain power and prestige in a community. Relationships were balanced with warfare, and group identity was solidified with allies and enemies. The problem facing the church in Melanesia is how to address tribal fighting from a biblical, historical, and moral framework that fits the context of Melanesia. In the Old Testament, God directed Israel to annihilate certain people groups. Holy war, חֶרֶם (chērem), had specific guidelines to be followed. Some have viewed the Old Testament as allowing for warfare, and the New Testament teaching that warfare is sinful. An examination of several passages of scripture in the Old Testament and New Testament will reveal that there is a time to fight. Historically, the “just-war tradition” states three criteria for a war to be considered justified. From Augustine to Aquinas, to the Reformers, to modern ethicists, the tradition has been carefully crafted. By applying the just-war tradition to one particular case of tribal fighting, a gospel response to tribal fighting begins to take shape. Through the application of scripture, the examination of the just-war tradition, and the moral responsibility of the church, one overarching theme becomes clear. Reconciliation, not retaliation, is the proper response of the individual and the community.

## INTRODUCTION

When fighting broke out between two neighbouring villages near SIL-PNG, I was shocked to hear the news. The two villages were engaged in a war for over two months. Seven people were killed as a result of this fighting. One village was blocked from working at the institutions in the valley, and stories of atrocities, which rivalled world conflicts, were abundant. How does the church respond to this kind of situation? Two Christian villages, with generations of inter-marriage, were involved in this fighting.

I will briefly examine tribal warfare in Papua New Guinea, what the Bible has to say concerning war and killing, the just-war tradition, and, finally, how should any church respond to such conflict. As an outsider, the question that comes to mind is how can a fight between two people suddenly become a fight between two villages. The passages that will be examined in the Old Testament and New Testament serve as background passages for the just-war tradition, and help clarify the issues involved in the just-war tradition. The passages from the Old Testament focus on חֶרֶם (chērem), holy war. The reason for addressing holy war is because I have heard some of the people involved in the fighting refer to the fight as a “holy war”. The passages from the New Testament relate to the attitude of the believer. I will not offer the Pacifist point of view, because I do not believe that it would be accepted in the Papua New Guinean context, and I do not believe it is the appropriate response for the church. The just-war tradition will be briefly explained, and a response to tribal fighting will be offered.

This paper will not examine the root causes of this particular fight, nor will interviews be conducted to determine whether or not the fighting was justified. This paper is more of a reflection, from the etic point of view. Limited emic perspective is provided as I questioned Papua New Guineans during the fighting, or in discussing this topic, but, again, these conversations were informal, and used by me to understand their perspective. Reflecting on these conversations over the course of many months has led me to produce this paper.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

In addressing tribal warfare as a vital issue facing the Melanesian world, the author is making some basic assumptions. Firstly, the issue addressed in this paper does not affect all of Melanesia directly, but does have an impact on the church in Melanesia. Secondly, Melanesian culture is highly relational. Thirdly, as an outsider, the author must rely on the willingness of Melanesians to share the emic view. Fourthly, as an outsider, the author must rely on published research. Fifthly, the author does not have access to all of the available published research on tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea, many anthropologists have studied tribal warfare in Papua New Guinea, but the author has not been able to review their published works. Sixthly, principles of this paper apply to all cultures, because violence is prevalent in all societies, not just Melanesia.

## **TRIBAL FIGHTING**

Within the context of tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea, a Westerner is immediately struck with the sense of a lack of justice. During the time of the recent fighting near The Summer Institute of Linguistics Ukarumpa (SIL-PNG) centre, I served for two months as the Security Operations Manager. While SIL-PNG's policy is not to choose sides during periods of fighting, many ex-patriots were concerned with the level of violence that was occurring so close to our homes, with people we know, and with people we know to be Christians.

Tribal fighting within Papua New Guinea is not a new phenomenon. A brief skimming of articles and books, while researching this paper, has revealed tremendous research on the topic of tribal fighting and warfare. If one has the interest and the resources, gathering all the articles and books referenced by some of the recent writings could prove profitable for further study. It is beyond the scope of this paper to document the history of tribal warfare in Papua New Guinea, other than to state the existence, history, and continued presence of tribal warfare in Papua New Guinea.

What made the fighting particularly difficult to understand was the fact that the two villages involved were closely related, spoke the same language, and all claimed strong allegiance to the Christian faith. Garry W. Trompf

observed, “Clan allegiance, once re-enlivened in all its demanding reality, can rapidly undercut all other ties, even those of the church”.<sup>1</sup> Dan Seeland echoes Trompf, “Relationships outside the clan may fail; clan relationships are expected to last. In Melanesia, the clan tie is strong, and serves, in effect, to promote the life of the clan.”<sup>2</sup> Through conversations with multiple sources, I have ascertained the events that lead to the fighting. Firstly, a dead tree was cut down inside a coffee block. Secondly, the man responsible for the coffee block asked the general manager and director of the Coffee Research Institute (CRI) if they had given permission for the tree to be cut. Thirdly, the security supervisor was the person who had given permission for the tree to be cut down. Fourthly, violence broke out in the CRI director’s office. Fifthly, the police were called and broke up the fight. Sixthly, the man from Aserangka stated to the police that he wanted to pursue his charges in court. Seventhly, one Sunday morning, a man from Aserangka was cut to death while working in his garden by men from Onamuna. The reality of clan allegiance clearly outweighed other allegiances – Christianity, the justice system, and the laws of Papua New Guinea.

Trompf points to the difficulty in transitioning from the old culture. “For peoples, whose traditions set such store by warriorhood, and clan solidarity, in the face of all-too-proximate enemy neighbours, the achievement of a genuinely peaceful cross-cultural order requires an enormous shift of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> This “shift of consciousness” is faced by anyone who comes to Christ. The shift is not unique to Melanesian culture. People from any culture experience the same difficulty when shifting from a non-Christian worldview to a Christian worldview. Paul admonishes Christians to “put off the old man”. Trompf insightfully states:

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<sup>1</sup> Garry W. Trompf, *Payback: The Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Seeland, “Obligation in the Melanesian Clan Context and Its Effect Upon the Understanding of the Gospel of Grace”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 20-2 (2004), p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Trompf, *Payback*, p. 322.

The clash between traditional expectations about justified revenge, and the insistence on the maintenance of law and order by representatives of the new superstructures is very striking! Through it, on the one hand, we see the age-old resilience of primal religion. Admittedly, the accepted course of violent action has been reinforced by a politicisation of payback, by a more-conscious agreement among the combatants to keep the agencies of change from interfering with what tradition dictated as a group's spirit-sanctioned imperatives.<sup>4</sup>

Here is the heart of the matter. The traditional way of dealing with conflict (revenge and retaliation) and the biblical way of dealing with conflict (reconciliation) stand opposed to one another. As Seeland noted, "Clan members are expected to help each other with gardening, house-building, and fighting, in paying out bride price and compensation claims, and in paying school fees, and other expenses".<sup>5</sup> The church has the authority and responsibility to speak to the problems. The authority is derived from Christ Himself, and the responsibility is to Christ Himself.

In discussing the fighting with Papua New Guineans from other parts of the country, there is a clear distinction made between highlanders and those from the coast. The highlanders felt the cause for the fighting was unjust. As one stated to me (in Tok Pisin), "If the fight was over land or family, it would be alright".<sup>6</sup> To this individual, fighting over who cut down a dead tree was unjustified. When I asked a Papua New Guinean, who grew up at the SIL Ukarumpa Centre, what she thought of the fighting, she replied, "The idea of payback is preventing the country from moving forward. Progress can't come if we keep going back to the old ways."<sup>7</sup> While discussing tribal warfare and violence with a man from Western Province, he stated, "The people don't understand what the Bible is teaching them".<sup>8</sup> Glenn Banks offers an insightful observation. He observes, "[W]hile

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>5</sup> Seeland, "Obligations in the Melanesian Clan Context", pp. 93-94.

<sup>6</sup> Aura Tepi, conversation on "Fighting between Aserangka and Onamuna", November 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Eva Waram, conversation on "Thoughts on tribal fighting", May 2, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Katawer Baku, conversation on "Thoughts on tribal fighting", May 2, 2014.



conflicts in Papua New Guinea have always been, and still are, driven by disputes over resources, they are better understood as conflicts around identity, rather than resources”.<sup>9</sup> Here is the dilemma. What identity are Papua New Guineans striving for? What is the biblical standard for such fighting? Is there a moral obligation within Papua New Guinean society to prevent two villages from fighting?

Trompf notes, “A moot point, though it is, as to whether traditional revenge warfare could ever be ‘finally closed’ between long-standing enemy groups; most cultures had devices to bring about at least the temporary halt to hostilities”.<sup>10</sup> During a group conversation about the fighting, a long-term employee of SIL-PNG from Aserangka stated, “I don’t want to have peace with them yet. I would have to look at murderers walking by my house every day. We need time to pass before we work the peace agreement.”<sup>11</sup> Banks points out, “[C]onflicts are never finally ‘resolved’. Just as no current conflict is without ‘history’ that links the participants in some way, so these same current conflicts are likely to form the background to future conflicts, even when it appears that the parties have ‘settled’ their differences.”<sup>12</sup> The ability to forget wrongs suffered continues to feed the current fighting.

## **GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

Papua New Guinea does have a law against tribal fighting. The Inter-Group Fight Act of 1977 delineates penalties for participating in fighting. Robert Ganim, the Member for Wabag, stated, “The Inter-group Fighting Act of 1977 has been one these laws [to end tribal fighting] that was introduced in that respect. Yet it is one of the least enforced laws in the country, since that time on, all at the expense of tribal fighting, which is still a common occurrence in the Highlands to date.”<sup>13</sup> The author has heard of the

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<sup>9</sup> Glenn Banks, “Understanding ‘Resource’ Conflicts in Papua New Guinea”, in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 49-1 (April 2008), pp. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Trompf, *Payback*, p. 331.

<sup>11</sup> Sam Baimako, conversation on “Fighting between Aserangka and Onamuna”, November 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Banks, “Understanding ‘Resource’ Conflicts”, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ramcy Wama, “Wabag MP Challenges 1977 PNG Tribal Fighting Law”, in *PNG Post-Courier*, July 16, 2013, <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/2013/July/07-16-17.htm>.

responses by the police to end violence. Mobile squads are deployed between the warring factions. If an area is declared a “fighting zone”, houses could be burned. To the author, this response seems excessive. If the threat of judicial punishment is not enough to end tribal fighting, then what could the church do? Before addressing the response of the church, it is necessary to examine the scriptures regarding violence and warfare.

### ***Biblical Violence***

One difficulty in discussing tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea is that the Old Testament contains many examples of warfare, warfare sanctioned by God. Because of the lack of understanding of what the Old Testament teaches on warfare, some Papua New Guineans view tribal fighting as an acceptable means to bring God’s judgment on others. Improper reading of the New Testament could lead one to a pacifist position. The just-war tradition provides an answer to the issues facing tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea. To clarify what the Bible teaches, an examination of relevant passages is required.

### ***Old Testament***

In the Old Testament, God commanded the children of Israel to utterly destroy certain people groups, because of their sin. When the LORD promised Abraham that his descendants would inhabit the land of Canaan, He stated, “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” (Gen 15:16 ESV). After the children of Israel had wandered for nearly 40 years, the LORD God instructed Moses:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places. And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it (Num 33:51-53 ESV).

The reason for possessing the land was twofold. Firstly, it was promised to Abraham. Other people lived there (Canaan), but God chose this land for

Abraham's descendants. Secondly, the sin of the inhabitants of the land had reached completion. God was gracious in dealing with the Canaanites, but He knew they would not repent.

War is a common event in the Old Testament. Violence permeates the pages from Genesis to Malachi. What was the purpose of the warfare? God was demonstrating His sovereign control and right to judge individuals and nations. One important Hebrew word, חֶרֶם (chērem), holy war, reveals God's sanction on warfare.

### *Exodus 17*

The first passage examined is Ex 17:13-16. This is the first example of חֶרֶם (chērem), holy war. Even though the text does not contain the Hebrew word חֶרֶם (chērem), the idea is clear. Ex 17:13-16 (ESV) reads,

And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is my banner, saying "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

John Durham comments, "The battle between Yahweh and Amalek will continue across the generations, because the Amalekites have raised a hand against Yahweh's throne, that is, they have challenged His sovereignty by attacking His people".<sup>14</sup> God always defends His people. He will not allow anyone or any nation to defy Him forever. God's judgment on Amalek had been stated and would be completed.

Douglas Stuart lists 12 propositions of an Israelite Holy War. Relevant to tribal warfare are propositions 4 through 9.

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<sup>14</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco TX: Word Books, 1987, p. 237.

4. Holy war could be fought only for the conquest or defence of the promised land. Israel had no right to any other land, or to warfare for any other purpose.
5. Only at Yahweh's call could holy war be launched. There was no opportunity to hold a national referendum, or for a king, or any other person, including the High Priest, to declare holy war. God alone was the arbiter of when such a war would be undertaken, if at all, and a true holy war was thus fought strictly and only at His call.
6. Solely through a prophet could that divine call come. Prophets were spokespersons for God, who did not make up their messages, but said what God had placed in their minds to say. Neither priest, nor king, nor noble, nor tribal leaders, nor any other authorities, except a prophet were in a position to declare a holy war.
7. Yahweh did the real fighting in a holy war, because the war was always His.
8. Holy war was a religious undertaking, involving fasting, abstinence from sex, and/or other forms of self-denial. It was an act of obedience to God, and not of national pride, or military strategy.
9. A goal of holy war was the total annihilation of an evil culture (the enemy, the Canaanites). This is based on Gen 15:12-16, in which God reveals to Abraham the plan of conquest as a means of eliminating the "Amorites" (Canaanites) once their progressively evil culture had become so corrupt that God could do nothing other than to exterminate it. The total

annihilation of the enemy, and all that might have been taken as plunder, followed logically from this commitment.<sup>15</sup>

Comparing each proposition with tribal warfare in Papua New Guinea reveals important points for the church. Applying proposition 4 to tribal warfare, one draws the conclusion that the defence of one's property is acceptable. Proposition 5 places the right to call a holy war on God alone. No one else has the privilege. According to proposition 6, only a true prophet could speak on the Lord's behalf. It begs the question, who is the true prophet to speak for God today? Proposition 7 reveals God's providence in the war. God would fight to defend His name. Proposition 8 shows that the holy war was fought in obedience to God. Proposition 9 reveals God's judgment on the culture. The evil was to be eradicated, and its influence permanently ended. In summation, the holy war was all about God. Israel was to be obedient in fighting, because God Himself spoke.

### *Numbers*

Even during the time in the wilderness, Israel learned how to fight. Num 21:1-3 records that Israel made a vow to utterly destroy Arad's cities, and God honoured their request. V. 2 contains the use of **חֶרֶם** (chērem). It is another early example of the use of the word, and the utter destruction of the people and their possessions. Later in the same chapter, Moses records the defeat of Sihon and Og, the Amorites. Israel did not destroy the cities, but they became the inhabitants of the conquered cities. In Num 31, the LORD again directs war to be waged. This war was to be waged against the Midianites for the sin caused by Balaam. The only humans spared in this war were young girls, who had never had sexual relations.<sup>16</sup> Timothy Ashley comments on Num 31:1-3, "What is meant is an executive action on behalf of Yahweh, carried out through Israel, to vindicate the honour of Yahweh and Israel, which had been sullied by the matter of Baal-Peor."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006, pp. 395-397.

<sup>16</sup> Which could be taken as wives or slaves.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993, p. 591.

## Deuteronomy

In Deut 20, Moses explains the rules of war to the nation of Israel. Of particular importance to this paper are vv. 16-18 (ESV).

But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God.

חָרֵם (chērem) appears at the beginning of v. 17, which the ESV translates as “devote them to complete destruction”. Allan C. Emery states, “The reason given for devastating the cities of these nations is like that of Deut 7:1-5, namely, to prevent the inhabitants from causing Israel to deviate from its covenant with God”.<sup>18</sup> The list of names varies from Deut 7, but the purpose is of the complete destruction of these nations. Merrill, commenting on Deut 7:1-5, writes, “This drastic action was taken as a form of immediate divine judgment upon those who had sinned away their day of grace. It also was to preclude their wicked influence on God’s covenant people.”<sup>19</sup> Merrill further explains the sin of the nations in Deut 20, “Moreover, they had so irrevocably and implacably set themselves against the lordship of the Lord, and were such a moral and spiritual risk to His people Israel that there was no other course of action than to annihilate them, men, women, and children”.<sup>20</sup> In another book, Merrill states, “Moses also exhorted Israel to put certain Canaanite cities under חָרֵם (chērem), explaining that this meant that they could make no treaties with them, nor intermarry with their citizens

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<sup>18</sup> Allan C. Emery, “חָרֵם (chērem)”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, T. Desmond Alexander, David W. Baker, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2003, p. 386.

<sup>19</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994, pp. 179-180.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

(Deut 7:1-3). Rather, Israel must destroy their altars, sacred stones, Asherah poles, and images (v. 5).<sup>21</sup>

The use of חֵרֵם (chērem) in Deuteronomy focuses on the protection of Israel in keeping the laws and statutes of their covenant with God. God sovereignly knew the corruption that the nations would bring on Israel. Additionally, the defiance of the Canaanite nations to the rule of God demanded punishment. Reading through the Old Testament reveals that the nations did teach Israel to sin against, and rebel against, their Lord.

### *Joshua*

The conquest of Jericho bears mention at this point. The instruction to the army of Israel was to destroy Jericho and everything in it (Josh 6:17). The Hebrew word חֵרֵם (chērem) is used to denote that the city of Jericho was devoted to the Lord. “The story of Jericho’s fall to Israel provides clear examples of the first use. The whole city is called a ‘devoted thing’, and all Israelites are warned to keep themselves from the ‘devoted thing’, which likely is a reference to items within the city, all of which had to be burned if flammable and, if not, given to God.”<sup>22</sup> The battle of Jericho demonstrates the propositions previously listed in this paper. God fought the battle, and claimed everything in the city as His. Jericho would be the first-fruit of the Promised Land, it was devoted to God, and the possessions were holy.

Marten Woudstra asserts, “The symbolical nature of this event is also expressed by the fact that the *curse* applied to Jericho and its inhabitants is to be most severe. This curse (Hebrew חֵרֵם (chērem) meant that something or someone was absolutely and irrevocably consecrated so that it could not be redeemed (Lev 27:28-29). It also meant that the object (person) was sentenced to utter destruction (Deut 13:16).”<sup>23</sup> Jericho would serve as a

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<sup>21</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1987, p. 110.

<sup>22</sup> Leon J. Wood, “חֵרֵם (chērem)”, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol 1, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, eds, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980, p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1981, pp. 112-113.

vivid reminder of what חָרֵם (chērem) meant. In v. 21 we read, “Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword”.

The book of Joshua is full of examples of God’s chosen people waging war on the occupants of the land. Josh 10 recounts a battle with a great slaughter, in which the Lord Himself participated, and the killing of the five Amorite kings. In Josh 11, the “struck them” phrase occurs three times, with the conclusion found in Josh 11:17b-18 (ESV), “And he captured all their kings and struck them and put them to death. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.” The conquest did not end with Joshua, nor did warfare cease throughout the Promised Land. God had a plan for the nation of Israel, and fighting would continue to play an integral part in their existence.

### *Summary*

Even after the land was divided up, God still wanted Israel to know how to fight. “Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before” (Judg 3:1-2 ESV). Throughout the Old Testament, we see Israel involved in fighting wars. Saul and David were both warrior kings. But, is there a shift in the New Testament? Is God suddenly becoming the God of Peace, and not war?

### *New Testament*

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, one is struck by the seeming change towards violence. Had the captivity changed the people, or changed God? The teachings of Jesus and the apostles appear to support a pacifist point of view. Four passages from Matt 5 will be examined, as well as Rom 12:17-21, Jam 4:1-3, and 1 Pet 3:8-9. While the Old Testament is full of examples that seem to support warfare and retaliation, the New Testament speaks of reconciliation.



*Matthew 5:9*

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”. Firstly, by stating that there exist peacemakers means that enmity, strife, or warfare exists. Secondly, “[M]oreover, peacemaking is costly. It involved a cross for Jesus, and it involves a cross for His followers (Matt 10:37-39). According to Jesus and the Evangelists, no cost is too great for the privilege of receiving, experiencing, and sharing God’s peace.”<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, peacemakers are recognised as belonging to God. They do not fear man, because they know that God is protecting them.

David Turner affirms, “This beatitude is not about being a passively peaceful person, but about being an active reconciler of people”.<sup>25</sup> Reconciliation demonstrates a complete trust in God. Furthermore, he states, “Their experience of peace with God enables them to seek the cessation of hostilities, and the ultimate welfare of the world. Although the kingdom message itself may offend some people and lead to hostility, Jesus’s disciples actively seek harmonious relationships with others.”<sup>26</sup> The inner peace that a Christian experiences leads to an outer peace with others. Turner explains, “Jesus’s reminder that peacemakers (not warmongers) have God’s approval is sorely needed”.<sup>27</sup> One of the key words that Turner uses in two of the quotes is active. Peacemakers are actively seeking to reconcile enemies or potential enemies.

D. A. Carson argues, “The Christian’s role as peacemaker extends not only to spreading the gospel, but to lessening tensions, seeking solutions, ensuring that communication is understood. Perhaps his most difficult assignments will take place on those occasions when he is personally involved... He will not confuse issues, even important issues, with his own ego-image . . . he will learn to lower his voice and smile more broadly in proportion to the

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy J. Geddert, “Peace”, in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1992, p. 605.

<sup>25</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

intensity of the argument.”<sup>28</sup> The church must be active when rumours of hostilities arise in the community. Those who pursue peace in Melanesia will have to be church leaders, who are willing to humble themselves, and potentially endure the ridicule of their communities, when they actively oppose retaliation. Daryl Charles and Timothy Demy state, “Peace and stability themselves are the fruit of justice. For this reason, peace is incompatible with a tolerance of evil.”<sup>29</sup>

*Matthew 5:21-26*

Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “you shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment”. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny (ESV).

In this passage, Jesus is taking the Decalogue and expounding the deeper meaning of the text. The focus of this passage is not murder, or the act of murder, but the attitude that precedes murder. Reconciling differences, instead of resorting to warfare, would be the correct response to tribal warfare. Millard Erickson comments, “Similarly, although God is not the one bearing animosity, it is He who works to bring about reconciliation”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1978, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> J. Daryl Charles, Timothy J. Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity: Questions and Answers from a Just-War Perspective*, Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2010, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1998, p. 832.

The person initiating the reconciliation is the one who was wronged. This idea is contrary to our human nature. Turner states, “It is not a question of arguing about who offended whom, but of taking responsibility, and initiating reconciliation”.<sup>31</sup> Too often, we (as humans) seek to justify our actions instead of seeking to reconcile our differences. In explaining vv. 25 and 26, Turner notes, “Another hypothetical situation shows that the obligation to seek reconciliation applies not only to relations within the community of disciples but also to relationships outside that community”.<sup>32</sup> The Christian is obliged to seek reconciliation, even if someone is not a Christian, or of another denomination. Carson writes:

Jesus insists it is far more important that he [the “everyone” of v. 22] be reconciled to his brother than that he discharge his religious duty; for the latter becomes pretence and sham if the worshipper has behaved so poorly that his brother has something against him. It is more important to be cleared of offence before all men than to show up for Sunday morning worship at the regular hour. Forget the worship service, and be reconciled to your brother; and only then worship God. Men love to substitute ceremony for integrity, purity, and love; but Jesus will have none of it.<sup>33</sup>

The church must ignore our “religious obligations” and focus more on being the salt and light to a dying world. We should ignore our denominational differences when two communities are willing to shed blood. The church in Papua New Guinea has a unique opportunity to focus on reconciling enemies. When entire communities focus on reconciliation, the transformation that takes place will be incredible.

#### *Matthew 5:38-42*

Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if

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<sup>31</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 42.

anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you (ESV).

In addressing the issue of retaliation, Jesus is raising the standard from equitable compensation to non-retaliation. Commenting on vv. 38-41, Turner remarks, “The point of the first three situations is that the disciples are not to be a part of furthering the typical cycle of evil action and escalating evil reaction in this fallen world”.<sup>34</sup> The challenge for the disciple is reacting contrary to our human nature. When we are wronged, our first reaction may be to seek revenge equal to or greater than the wrong we received. Children demonstrate this nature. If a child has his toy taken by another child, the child may react by crying, hitting, or simply taking back the toy. With maturity, we learn proper responses to wrongs suffered. The same idea applies to Christian maturity. A mature Christian believer has the responsibility to respond properly to wrongs suffered. Charles and Demy offer this encouragement, “[I]t is *virtuous and not vicious* to feel anger at moral evil. In truth, something is very wrong with us if we *don’t* express anger and moral outrage at evil. And yet, moral outrage alone is not enough.”<sup>35</sup> Justice demands punishment for a moral evil.

Charles and Demy remind us of whom the verse is addressing, “The pacifist interpretation of Matt 5:38-39, mistakenly in our view, applies Jesus’ ethical teaching on matters of the heart to the realm of the state and public policy”.<sup>36</sup> Jesus is not speaking to the role of government, but, rather, to the individual.

Charles and Demy continue, “While rendering ‘justice’ is illegitimate in the private realm, and, hence, Paul warns sternly against revenge, it is both *permitted and required*, and, therefore, legitimate in the public domain, over which the magistrate has been set. Therefore, when it comes to handling personal insults, abuse, and persecution, we are to ‘turn the other cheek’,

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<sup>34</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, p. 175.

<sup>35</sup> Charles and Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 297.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

and ‘not resist an evil person’.”<sup>37</sup> The importance of Matt 5:38-42 is the personal application. The role of the government in the punishment of evildoers will be addressed later.

As if those four verses were not radical enough, Jesus adds v. 42. Turner asserts, “Not only is the disciple to avoid evil, by non-retaliatory reaction, when oppressed by a more powerful person; the disciple is also to promote good by a generous, benevolent response to those who are less powerful”.<sup>38</sup> The disciples are to be like Abraham, who was commanded by God to go and be a blessing to the nations. We are not to concern ourselves with what is currently in our possession, but we are to concern ourselves with blessing others, and believing that God will bless us. Carson notes, “Personal self-sacrifice displaces personal retaliation; for this is the way the Saviour Himself went, the way of the cross. And the way of the cross, not notions of ‘right and wrong’, is the Christian’s principle of conduct.”<sup>39</sup> The focus shifts from self to others.

#### *Matthew 5:43-46*

In Matt 5:43-46, Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy”. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (ESV)

Jesus addresses a common feeling many people have towards their enemies. It is a common practice to classify an enemy by placing a label on them to make them appear sub-human. In World War II, Germans were called Krauts; Japanese were called Japs or Nips. During the Vietnam War, American soldiers referred to North Vietnamese as Gooks. During

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>38</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 52.

engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, enemy combatants were referred to as Towel Heads. “Evidently, the traditional view of the scriptures mistakenly restricted the scope of the word ‘neighbour’ in order to legitimise hatred of enemies. Jesus rejects this approach, and insists that disciples of the kingdom emulate the King.”<sup>40</sup> Jesus challenges His followers to increase the understanding of who is their neighbour. Geographic location does not make one a neighbour. The parable of the Samaritan demonstrates who truly is a neighbour.

### *Romans 12:17-19*

Paul writes, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” The application of Rom 12:17-19 is critical for the church in Melanesia. As previously quoted by a Papua New Guinean, “The idea of payback is preventing the country from moving forward. Progress can’t come if we keep going back to the old ways.”<sup>41</sup> Charles and Demy provide tremendous insight:

Whereas revenge strikes out at real or perceived injury, retribution speaks to an objective wrong. Whereas revenge is wide, “insatiable”, and not subject to limitations, retribution has both upper and lower limits, acknowledging the moral repugnance, both of draconian punishment for petty crimes, and light punishment for heinous crimes. Vengeance, by its nature, has a thirst for injury, and delights in bringing further evil upon the offending party. The avenger will not only kill, but rape, torture, plunder, and burn what is left, deriving satisfaction from his victim’s direct or indirect suffering.<sup>42</sup>

Understanding who is responsible for punishment helps the person wronged come to terms with the injustice. Ultimately, God will judge, and His justice will be appropriate.

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<sup>40</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, p. 176.

<sup>41</sup> Waram, “Thoughts on tribal fighting”.

<sup>42</sup> Charles, Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 298.

John Calvin provides tremendous insight on these verses. He argues:

[R]evenge implies more than the kind of recompense with which he is now dealing. Sometimes we render evil for evil, even when we do not exact punishment equivalent to the injury sustained, as when we treat with unkindness those who impart no benefit to us. . . . Since, therefore, this disease [pride, love of self] creates in almost all men a frenzied desire for revenge when they have suffered even the slightest injury, He commands us here not to seek revenge, however grievously we may have been hurt, but to commit revenge to the Lord. . . . Those who attempt revenge deprive Him [God] of this power. If, therefore, it is wrong to usurp the office of God, we are not allowed to exact revenge either, because, in so doing, we anticipate the judgment of God, who has willed to reserve this office for Himself.<sup>43</sup>

The thoughts of the individual Christian must not be on revenge. The church ought to teach the righteousness of God and that He is the Just Judge. Thomas Schreiner maintains, “The desire to retaliate almost overwhelms us when we have been treated unjustly. . . . V. 17 leaves no doubt that getting even is evil, and v. 21 demonstrates that if we do strike back, then we have been overcome by evil. This command is not fulfilled if one’s heart is filled with vengeance, and an intense desire to get even.”<sup>44</sup> Pastors and church leaders are challenged to change the culture, no matter where they live. Human nature, our old nature, desires to repay evil for evil. Commenting on v. 19, Schreiner continues, “We would fall prey to retaliation in the present if we did not know that God would vindicate us in the future. Thus, the recognition that God will judge our enemies is crucial for overcoming evil with good. Believers can leave the fate of their persecutors in God’s hands, knowing that He is good and just, and that He does all things well.”<sup>45</sup> Trusting that God will do as He has promised shows that we believe God.

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<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, David W. Torrance, Thomas F. Torrance, eds, Ross Mackenzie, tran., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1960, pp. 275-277.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1998, p. 672.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 674.

Retaliation demonstrates that we trust in ourselves more than we trust in God to judge according to the deeds done. Douglas Moo argues, “It is not our job to execute justice on evil people; that is God’s prerogative, and He will visit His wrath on such people when He deems it right to do so.”<sup>46</sup> When we retaliate, we are essentially telling God that He does not know what is best in this situation.

*James 4:1-3*

Another verse to address the issue of tribal fighting is James 4:1-3 (ESV):

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

For fighting that begins with land disputes, the application of James 4 seems appropriate. William Barclay observes, “Obedience to the will of God draws men together, for it is that will that they should love and serve one another; obedience to the craving for pleasure drives men apart, for it drives them to internecine rivalry for the same purposes”.<sup>47</sup> James offers a similar theme to what has already been stated, our sinful nature is overruling our Christian nature. Douglas Moo notes, “Some battles, to be sure, need to be fought. But even then they must be fought without sacrificing Christian principles and virtues.”<sup>48</sup> Knowing which battles must be fought is important. Does every insult, or wrong suffered, mean that violence can erupt, so long as it is fought with Christian principles and virtues? Moo comments, “With penetrating insight, then, James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence, or national conflict – the cause of them all can be traced back to the wrongful

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<sup>46</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, pp. 786-787.

<sup>47</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible, revd edn, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1976, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p. 181.



lust to want more than we have, to be envious of, and covet, what others have, whether it be their position, or their possessions.”<sup>49</sup> The examination of the just-war tradition will help us understand when it is appropriate to fight.

Ralph Martin observes, “Since James and his community were situated in a Zealot-infested society, and since it is quite conceivable that (at least) some of the Jewish Christians were former Zealots (cf. Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), the taking of another’s life is not out of the realm of possibility for the church members, as a response to the disagreement. . . . While James’ community may have not yet experienced and engaged in literal murder on a mass scale, the contingency is a very real one and must be warned against.”<sup>50</sup> Martin is particularly insightful in analysing tribal fighting. Understanding what James is teaching will be critical to the church responding to tribal fighting. Martin writes, “These passions – lust for power, popularity, authority – had caused the wars and fightings within the ranks of the members of the church”.<sup>51</sup> The problem that faced the early church is a similar problem to that facing the church in Melanesia. People lust after position in the church and community. Fighting can break out between old enemies over a perceived wrong.

Another word to examine is murder. Martin points out, “To say that all James means here is ‘hate’ (Matt 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15) overlooks the fact that the letter of James was most likely written in a period when murder was accepted as a ‘religious’ way to solve disagreements”.<sup>52</sup> One of the rumours during the tribal fighting between Aserangka and Onamuna was that the pastors were openly encouraging the men to fight. Because the two sides were different denominations, one side was rumoured to have claimed that it was their “religious duty” to kill the heretics. Martin asserts, “Yet, despite such killing, the perpetrators of heinous crimes still do not have what they desire. Might it be that James is seeking to offer several lessons here,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco TX: Word Books, 1988, p. 144.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

namely, (1) that killing has not freed anyone from Roman rule, and (2) that those so bent on killing are enmeshed in a vicious cycle, setting up a train of consequences that promotes violence, but never satisfaction? . . . Until God's peace reigns in the church, James' readers will reflect the spirit of the world around them, and will be 'earthly, unspiritual, and devilish'."<sup>53</sup> Martin's comments on James penetrate to the heart of the issue of tribal fighting. Neither side gained more territory, and seven people were killed. Applied to tribal fighting in other parts of Melanesia, communities may recognise what Martin has stated, that nothing changed because of the fighting.

### *1 Peter 3:8-9*

Throughout the Bible, God tells His people not pay back evil for evil. "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing" (ESV).

Edwin Blum states, "The natural response to hostility is retaliation. . . . The great desire of Christians must not be revenge, but for God to grant the gift of repentance to those who do not know Him."<sup>54</sup> Blum's statement is a challenge for Christians everywhere, but the statement is particularly difficult in Papua New Guinea, where payback is so ingrained in the culture. Commenting on the historical purpose of Peter's writings, J. Ramsey Michaels notes, "[T]he terminology is more closely related to catechetical tradition largely preserved in Paul's letters. The likely purpose of such tradition was to instil among new converts, in the simplest way possible, the core of Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation."<sup>55</sup> Karen Jobes writes, "Peter instructs Christians to forgo the usual verbal retaliation that would be necessary to successfully defend one's honour, and the reputation of one's community. Given the tendency of human nature to retaliate, coupled with the social expectation to do so, the Christian who refrains from verbal

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Blum, Edwin A., *1, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1996, p. 238.

<sup>55</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas TX: Word Books, 1988, p. 177.

retaliation, and, instead, offers blessing, would give unbelievers pause.”<sup>56</sup> Again, the difficulty is for the believer to contradict the social and cultural norms. Further, Jobes notes, “If it is difficult enough to simply refrain from retaliation, it may seem superhuman to return blessing for evil and insult”.<sup>57</sup> Only the Holy Spirit living inside a Christian can accomplish this “superhuman” feat. The teachings of Peter in this passage are clear, and are a challenge to the church today.

### *Summary*

Has the church failed to teach principles of reconciliation instead of retaliation or revenge? Has the church failed to transform culture by being salt and light? Trompf reminds us, “The gospel, for its part, posed a serious threat to many old customs, such as fertility rites, polygamy, sorcery, and the like; yet it was, nevertheless, a potent message of love between all people, and of hope for ‘the abundant life’ ”.<sup>58</sup> Christians in Melanesia need to take the message of reconciliation to their nation. For cultures that value fighting as a way to establish and maintain relationship, the New Testament teaches that Christians must actively seek reconciliation with their enemies.

### *Just-War Tradition*

In addition to the previous passages, the just-war tradition focuses primarily on two passages of scripture; Rom 13:1-4 and 1 Pet 2:13-17. The tradition has been expounded by Ambrose, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. In light of the just-war tradition, one can compare the requirements for a “just war” to the violence that occurred between Aserangka and Onamuna. Firstly, the two passages will be examined. Secondly, the development of the tradition will be explored. Thirdly, the current definitions of the just-war tradition will be explained. Finally, the three questions of the just-war tradition will be examined regarding tribal warfare: Firstly, is there a legitimate authority to declare war? Secondly, is there a just cause to have the war? Thirdly, is there a right motivation for

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<sup>56</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2005, p. 217.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>58</sup> Trompf, *Payback*, p. 168.

the war? While all of the above points are worth examining in depth, this paper will focus on the parts applicable to tribal fighting.

*Romans 13:1-4*

Paul addresses Christians living in the capital of the Roman Empire. Rom 13:1-4 reads:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer (ESV).

Paul places the responsibility for passing judgment on the state, not on the individual. The state or government determines who is authorised to execute judgment. Within Papua New Guinea, the government is elected every five years. If individuals or communities do not like the way that judgment is executed by their government, they can vote to change the government. Schreiner argues, "The judgment of the state against evildoers in history anticipates the eschatological judgment of God at the end of history. . . . The government's function is to inflict wrath, to vindicate justice (an avenger for wrath on the one practising evil) in the case of the one who flouts the law and does what is evil."<sup>59</sup> The role of the government is clear. The punishment of evildoers is the prerogative of the government; provincial or national.

Calvin writes, "A second part of the function of magistrates is their duty to repress by force the insolent behaviour of the wicked, who do not willingly allow themselves to be governed by laws, and to inflict punishment on their offences as God's judgment requires. Paul explicitly declares that

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<sup>59</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 684-685.

magistrates are armed with the sword, not just for empty show, but in order to smite evildoers.”<sup>60</sup> Calvin notes that only the government (national, state, and local) has the right to use force to prevent violence. Only the institutions duly authorised should be authorised to execute judgment. Charles and Demy state, “A state’s authority exists for the purpose of preserving and defending the rights of its members. Its authority is legitimate to the degree that it carries out this mandate.”<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Charles and Demy argue, “If, however, we understand that, in the infliction of punishment, the magistrate is not acting *of his own accord*, but in fact is executing justice as God requires of him, then the issue is not an embarrassment to the Christian”.<sup>62</sup> The separation between the person and the office is important. The office, not the person, has the right to pass judgment. The person serves as a representative of the government, and, as a representative, is responsible to the government for the proper execution of the law. If the person who holds the office is abusing the office, then that person should be punished by the government for abuse of power. The rights of the government cannot be superseded by the individual who desires revenge.

#### *1 Peter 2:13-14*

Peter urges Christians to obey the government. “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by Him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (ESV). The reason is for God’s sake, not the sake of the government.

Michaels declares, “The charge of ‘doing wrong’ is a serious charge because civil government exists for the express purpose of punishing wrongdoers”.<sup>63</sup> Peter understood the purpose of government, and was encouraging his fellow Christians to be obedient, because, ultimately, all governments are responsible to God. J. N. D. Kelly notes, “The repression of crime, disorder,

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<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Romans and to the Thessalonians*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>61</sup> Charles, Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 126.

and injustice is always a function of the state”.<sup>64</sup> Kelly’s point is important. The purpose of the state (or government) is to protect the innocent, and punish wrongdoers. An individual, or a community, is not allowed to replace the function of the state. An overlooked aspect of the state is the time it takes for justice to be executed. By allowing time to pass, the hot emotions associated with a wrong suffered, and the time that judgment is passed, should allow those hot emotions to cool somewhat, and be satisfied that the wrongdoer is properly punished.

## HISTORY OF JUST-WAR TRADITION

At this point in the paper, one may ask, “Where does the just-war tradition fit in with tribal fighting?” Given that the participants in tribal fighting refer to the battles as warfare, it is appropriate to respond with similar terminology to correct the apparent misconception. Those on both sides of the fighting between Aserangka and Onamuna believed that they were justified in the fight. Anthropologists, who have studied tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea, note the mindset of the participants is similar to warfare on a national level. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the just-war tradition before concluding the paper.

John Davis defines the just-war tradition, “The just-war tradition in the history of the Christian church holds that, under some circumstances, the Christian may participate in war for the sake of the preservation of justice. This tradition holds that some, but not all, wars are morally justifiable”.<sup>65</sup> Two points are important to note. Firstly, Christians may participate in a war if the purpose of the war is to correct an injustice. Secondly, not every war fought in the name of Christ is morally justifiable. “Hence, one finds in Aquinas the strong distinction between *duellum*, the private quarrel or duel, and *bellum*, war. Insofar as war is a public matter, *bellum* must be adjudicated by political-legal means, and not private citizens.”<sup>66</sup> A difficulty in Melanesia is the highly-relational nature of people. Private matters

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<sup>64</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, London UK: Adam & Charles Black, 1969, p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> John Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 3rd edn, Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2004, p. 246.

<sup>66</sup> Charles, Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 129.

quickly become public matters, because of the proximity of the people, and the innate desire to bring balance to the relationship.

Davis further refines the definition by quoting the three requirements given by Thomas Aquinas. The three requirements are that the war is declared by a legitimate authority, a just cause is required, and right motives.<sup>67</sup> The Reformers also agreed with Aquinas on the requirements for just war. John Calvin asserted, “But kings and people must sometimes take up arms to execute such public vengeance”.<sup>68</sup> From Aquinas to present, the three requirements have not changed.

The idea of just war did not begin with Aquinas, but with Augustine. For approximately 1,600 years, the church has taught the just-war tradition. Justo Gonzalez summarises Augustine’s position:

The first is the purpose of the war must be just – a war is never just when its purpose is to satisfy territorial ambition, or the mere exercise of power. The second condition is that a just war must be waged by properly-instituted authority. This seemed necessary in order not to leave the field open to personal vendettas. . . . Finally, the third rule – and the most important one for Augustine – is that, even in the midst of the violence that is a necessary part of war, the motive of love must be central.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Current Definitions***

Within the modern discussions of just war, there are two areas that are distinguished. The first is *jus ad bellum*. A *jus ad bellum* criterion is defined as “the decision whether or not a given war is justified”.<sup>70</sup> The second is *jus in bello*, which is “used to evaluate given lines of conduct,

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “Whether it is always sinful to wage war?”, in *Summa Theologica*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS\\_Q40\\_A1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS_Q40_A1.html), accessed February 10, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes: abridged edition*, Donald McKim, ed., Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 168.

<sup>69</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol 1, San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1984, p. 214.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, p. 248.

once war has commenced”.<sup>71</sup> For the purposes of this paper, only *jus ad bellum* will be used, since the author is concerned with preventing additional tribal fighting, not having the church serve as a referee between tribes.

Davis explains, “The *jus ad bellum* criteria include competent authority, just cause, proportionality of proposed means, and the probable costs in the light of the probability of success, exhaustion of peaceful means of resolution, and right intent”.<sup>72</sup> An important unspoken element in the just-war tradition is time. The time between a wrong suffered and the execution of war is not a matter of minutes or hours, but of days and weeks. *Jus ad bellum* evaluates each step before a war is declared just. It is not reacting to a perceived wrong. As stated above, the competent authority for declaring war does not reside at the local community level.

### ***Difficulties Applying Just-War Tradition***

The hard part in applying the just-war tradition to tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea is the first criteria, as defined by Thomas Aquinas, “First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged. For it is not the business of the private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Moreover, it is not the business of a private individual to summon together the people, which has to be done in wartime.”<sup>73</sup> The recurring theme in tribal fighting in Papua New Guinea is a small group, a clan, or a village, waging war against another small group, clan, or village. The right to declare war resides with the government of Papua New Guinea, not the lower levels of tribal leadership. The Constitution of Papua New Guinea states, “The Head of State, acting with, and in accordance with, the advice of the National Executive Council, may publicly declare that Papua New Guinea is at war with another country”.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>74</sup> “Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea”, <http://www.igr.gov.pg/consitution.pdf>, accessed February 10, 2014.



Some may argue that a person has the right to defend themselves, and they do have that right. The right to stop a hostile person from harming oneself or one's family is permissible. Where does that right end? If a person seeks out the aggressor, and commits physical violence, then that person has gone too far. The immediate threat of danger is not present. If one is being beaten, and strikes back, then one is justified in defending oneself.

Garry Trompf writes, "What concerns us here, however, is the continual process of 'score-keeping' that has been kept in vibrancy during the history of each group's interactions, such shared memories not being easy to come by".<sup>75</sup> Trompf's point makes it difficult to ever get to the root cause of the fighting. Generations of fighting, competing claims on the same land, a house-line moving closer to jobs, are all deeply embedded into the minds of Papua New Guineans. The local church must be quick to intercede when the rumours of war begin. "Death (not just blood) was their argument; and, considering sorcery, we must remember death could occur off as well as on the battlefield."<sup>76</sup>

To answer Aquinas' second question of a just cause for the warfare is difficult, because of the cultural differences between the author and Papua New Guineans. Banks observes, "Social relationship, identities, and land are the things that matter in Melanesia, and to believe that conflicts of any kind, even 'resource' conflicts, can be primarily about anything else is an illusion".<sup>77</sup> However, there is a biblical standard that needs to be applied.

How does one measure motivation? For one group of men, they were shamed, and needed to regain their "manhood". For another group of men, their territory was invaded, and a man killed, while simply working in his garden. If Christians in Papua New Guinea express biblical ideals, and willingly confront aspects of their own culture that are contrary to biblical norms, then proper motivation can be determined. The author cannot and will not attempt to measure the motivation of others concerning tribal warfare.

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<sup>75</sup> Trompf, *Payback*, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>77</sup> Banks, "Understanding 'Resource' Conflicts", p. 31.

## **GOSPEL RESPONSE**

Within Melanesian culture there is a deep desire to restore relationships to their proper place. Jesus is the reconciler of man to God, and God's desire is that all men be reconciled to Him. As Christians are to imitate Christ, we should be the chief reconcilers of relationships. Pastors, church leaders, lay leaders, and Christians in general should actively seek to reconcile relationships. The church must speak loudly and clearly on the issues of tribal warfare, or the church will, as it has in the West, lose its power to influence the community. Charles and Demy point out, "It is the collective witness of the New Testament, indeed of all scripture, that peace is present only in the context of right relationships – that is to say, where justice has been affirmed".<sup>78</sup> Law and order must be practised within local communities. Retaliation must be addressed in a culturally-appropriate manner by the churches in Melanesia.

Church leaders and pastors must teach and preach on what the Bible teaches on violence, retaliation, and revenge. Lev 19:17-18 reads, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD." This is the passage that Jesus quoted when asked, "Which commandment is the most important of them all?" (Mark 12:28b). Reconciliation, not revenge, must reign in the hearts of Melanesians. Gary North reminds us, "Civil law also cannot enforce an attitude of love; hence, civil law is not the focus of the command to love one's neighbour, except insofar as love is defined judicially: treating the neighbour legally, that is, love, as the fulfilling of God's law. . . . By prohibiting personal grudges, and requiring personal love, this verse makes it clear that the concern of the civil portion of this civil law is the elimination of privately-imposed vengeance."<sup>79</sup> Love must be the theme of the church in Melanesia. The responsibility of the church is to serve as Christ's representative here on earth. We are compelled to declare the good news to

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<sup>78</sup> Charles, Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 275.

<sup>79</sup> Gary North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary*, Tyler TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994, pp. 264-265.

all people. As North clearly proclaims, “The state possesses a monopoly of vengeance and violence”.<sup>80</sup> The church should not trample on the rights of the state.

Trompf recommends, “[T]he human predicament is the better handled by the depletion of hostilities, suspicions, accusations, sullen withdrawals, and so on, and by the reinforcement of life-enhancing elements – appropriable in Melanesia itself from local traditions, and from introduced sets of values or ideas claiming universal ramifications”.<sup>81</sup> Within the context of Papua New Guinea, tradition holds that there needs to be balance and compensation. Trompf is correct in asserting that the church must handle violence by stressing the importance of life. Losing face is not balanced out by taking a life. The church of Melanesia must hold up the mirror of the Bible, and address the culture of violence.

Trompf warns, “Without constant self-criticism, Christianity, or any religious tradition for that matter, is susceptible to being used for people’s own ends – to justify violence, turpitude, unsociability, and all the opposites to ‘unconquerable goodwill’. And, unless Melanesian traditions are ‘vetted’ by an undebased Christianity, they will easily reactivate old ethno-solidarities for divisive purposes, or tame the Christian faith’s astounding universalism into forms of neo-tribalism.”<sup>82</sup> The proper application of the just-war tradition by the church in Melanesia is critical to bringing true peace. As Charles and Demy remind us, “[J]ust wars *may* be necessary in a world of injustice and unjust peace”.<sup>83</sup> In another place, Charles and Demy argue, “But a strength of the just-war tradition is precisely this: that it is an ongoing moral, legal, ethical, and religious dialogue that spans the centuries”.<sup>84</sup> It is a dialogue that Melanesians can readily engage in, and bring new questions to be answered.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>81</sup> Trompf, *Payback*, pp. 458-459.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>83</sup> Charles, Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity*, p. 139.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is beyond the means of the author to answer two critical questions. These questions require an emic point of view, not the etic. Firstly, is there an internal conflict (within the individual person or community) between being a Christian and the old ways of gaining prestige? If there is an internal conflict, what can be the functional substitute? Secondly, does Christianity upset the traditional cultural structure of leadership in villages? If Christianity is upsetting the traditional cultural structure, what should be done? How does the church address these issues?

## SUMMARY

Tribal warfare continues to plague parts of Papua New Guinea. Fighting between two house-lines in the Highlands may cause fighting to erupt in Lae or Port Moresby, because members of the two warring communities now reside in these cities. The church has the responsibility to address the issue from a biblical perspective, a historical perspective, and a moral perspective. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that God is the Ultimate Judge. God has established governments to execute His judgment on wrongdoers, now. Ultimately, God will judge each person for his or her actions. Traditionally, the church has taught that the state has the right to declare war, provided it meets the criteria of *jus ad bellum*. Finally, the church has the moral responsibility to speak to the communities about the dangers of payback. Failure by the church to teach on the wrongs of repaying evil for evil will bring God's judgment.

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