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Celestial Prasad Yejerla

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SUMMARY ARTICLES

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HELPING THE YOUTH OF GHATAPA OF THE SOUTH SEA EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN SOLOMON ISLANDS UNDERSTAND THEIR FAMILIAL IDENTITY IN CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF CHANGES BROUGHT ON BY GLOBALISATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Christian young people of Ghatapa society in Solomon Islands are in search of a global identity apart from their traditional identity. In the past, Ghatapa traditional society practised primal religion. They placed their belief in their ancestors, perceived as the living-dead. So traditional identity was an identity found in the living-dead and the living-living. But today Ghatapa society is influenced by forces coming from outside through globalisation.

Figure 1 shows the choice of three identities facing the youth of Ghatapa today. The two-sided arrows to and from the traditional and Christian identities denote who the young people are traditionally and in their familial Christian identity. The one-sided arrow that points outwards to the global identity denotes their search for a global identity.

In the milieu of the new ideas coming from outside through globalisation, the Christian youth of Ghatapa need to know their familial identity as members of the family of God: as children of God, as taught in Romans; as brothers and sisters, as portrayed in Hebrews; as privileged children, with Christ as the first-born, as explained in Colossians; and as the household of God, as found in Ephesians. The South Sea Evangelical Church should raise an awareness of their familial identity in Christ.

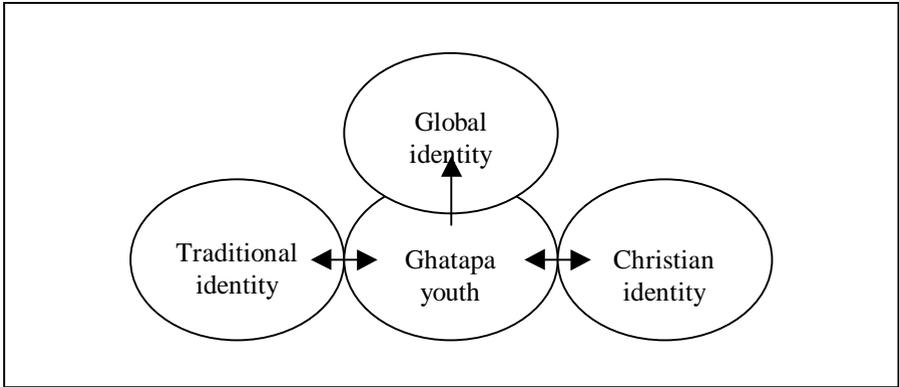


Figure 1. The three identities

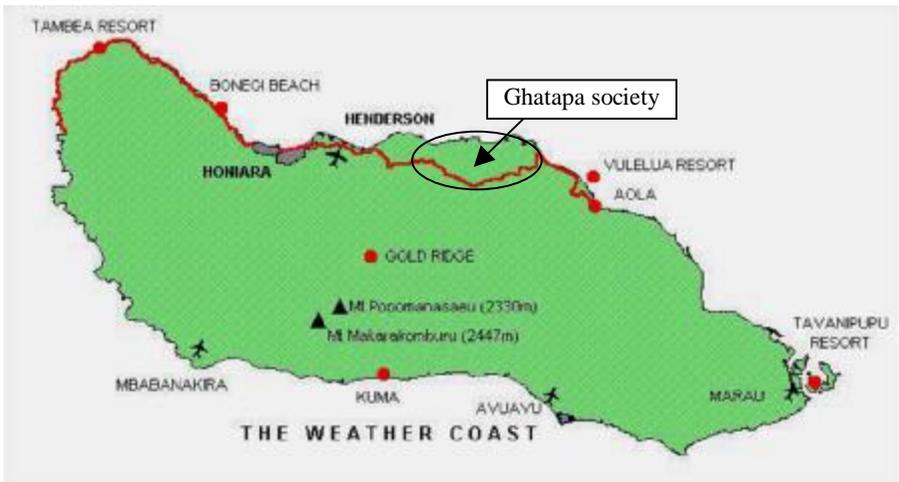


Figure 2. Map of Guadalcanal Island¹

¹ Guadalcanal Province, <<http://www.commerce.gov.sb/Gallery/Guadalcanal.htm>>, accessed Nov. 21, 2013.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN GHATAPA

Ghatapa society is part of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands (see Figure 2). The name is made up of three separate wards – *Ghaobata*, *Tathiboko*, and *Paripao* – and is a combined area with the acronym Ghatapa. It consists of five tribes: *Thogo*, *Ghaobata*, *Thibo*, *Lathi*, and *Nekama*.² The people of Ghatapa identify themselves with these tribes.

TRADITIONAL IDENTITY IN GHATAPA

Ghatapa traditional identity is similar to other Melanesian societies which identify themselves with the spirits of their ancestors. It represents a whole set of relatives with a formal base for social cooperation.³ It is a composite of kinship identity, family identity, and clan and tribe identity.

1. Kinship Identity

Traditionally, Ghatapa society included the ancestors (as shown in Figure 3). It was a web of relationships with the living-dead and the living-living.⁴ Both relationships were very important because they gave people their sense of identity in the society. This kinship identity also provided a worldview that the present depends on the past and that the past determines the future.⁵

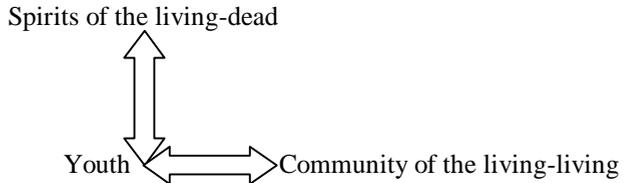


Figure 3. Kinship identity

² I.H. Hogbin, *A Guadalcanal Society: the Kaoka Speakers* (London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 4.

³ I.H. Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization: the Effects of European Culture on a Native Community of the Solomon Islands* (London: Routledge, 1969), 42-43.

⁴ E. Mantovani, "Traditional Values and Ethics," *Point 5* (1994): 203 (195-212).

⁵ N. Bartle, "Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea: Developing a Textual Theology in Melanesia," *Point 29* (2005): 33.

The living-living depended entirely on the ancestors for the well-being of the community.⁶ This was seen in the activities of fishing, hunting, harvest and fertility, and in security.⁷ Abiding within the rules of well-being of the community was very important to the young people of Ghatapa, just as Daimoi observes that in Melanesian society “the community takes precedence over the individual.”⁸

2. Family and Clan Identity

The family was the closest of all the relationships within the society. It was like the centre of the circle of all familial relationships. In such an atmosphere there were precise obligations and expectations in the community which gave a sense of security to the young⁹ and covered people like social security,¹⁰ protecting them in times of danger and providing for them in time of need. The saying “I am not my brother’s keeper”¹¹ was reversed to “I am my brother’s keeper.”

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE IDENTITY SHIFT

Solomon Islands has now changed from a traditional structure to a society which involves a new form of social organisation.¹² In this regard, we see young people are transitioning or shifting in their worldview. The changes that affected the traditional system of the country were: first, the coming of the explorers; second, the traders; third, the missionaries; fourth, the British protectorate; and, finally, World War II and the independence of the nation from the British rule.

⁶ Mantovani, “Traditional Values and Ethics,” 202.

⁷ Bartle, “Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World,” 207.

⁸ J. Daimoi, “Understanding Melanesians,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 17.2 (2001): 11 (6-22).

⁹ Mantovani, *Traditional and Present-day Melanesian Values and Ethics* (Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute 7; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1993), 9.

¹⁰ Bartle, “Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World,” 27.

¹¹ H. Gaudi, “One Gospel: Globalization and Pacific Regional Theology,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* II.17 (1997): 55 (54-64).

¹² V.S. Lockwood, “The Global Imperative and Pacific Island Societies,” in *Globalization and Culture Change in the Pacific Islands* (ed. V.S. Lockwood; Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2004), 1 (1-39).

1. The Explorers

Guadalcanal was first sighted by Alvaro de Mendana, the Spanish explorer, on April 9, 1568.¹³ Some 30 years later, Mendana came back and discovered the eastern part of the Solomons. He came with men and women to found a Spanish colony in Gracious Bay in the Santa Cruz Islands of the Solomons but, sadly, everything did not go well with him. Mendana fell sick and died.¹⁴ Quiros, one of Mendana's navigators, arrived in the Islands on April 7, 1605. For many years after that no European ships reached the Solomons until Carteret came to North Malaita in 1767.¹⁵ D'Entrecasteaux, a Frenchman, discovered the Central Solomons in 1792, and D'Urville, another Frenchman, returned in 1839.¹⁶ The first contact was very difficult for the Europeans as it was the first time that the Solomon Islanders had seen Europeans. While they were not welcomed in some islands, they did receive hospitality in some areas.

2. Traders

The whalers used to call in to one of the islands, Santa Cristobal (Makira), for water, food,¹⁷ and repairs.¹⁸ The traders began to visit the Islands in search of beche-de-mer, sandalwood, and turtle shell.¹⁹ They were also looking for opportunities to trade goods with the Islanders and to find a place to settle. As well, they had recruitment of labourers in mind for sugar plantations in Fiji and Australia. They introduced coconut plantations which led to what became known as the "coconut economy."²⁰ These activities changed the cultural values of the people.

(a) Labour Recruitment

Labour recruitment began about 1865 when the Solomon Islanders were induced to go to Fiji to work in the plantations. The real slave trade began in 1867 when people were taken to Fiji and Queensland to work on the sugar

¹³ J.C. Beaglehole, *The Exploration of the Pacific* (London: A. & C. Black, 1934), 57.

¹⁴ C.E. Fox, *The Story of the Solomons* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1975), 10.

¹⁵ K.R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 282.

¹⁶ D.L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 162.

¹⁷ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 10.

¹⁸ Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 13.

¹⁹ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 10.

²⁰ Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, 162-63.

cane plantations.²¹ Some of the people were forced and others enticed to go, while some Islanders went willingly because they came to understand the benefits of the use of money and life in Australia.²² It is true that many islanders were wounded and many died or were killed while on boats on their way to these destinations.²³ According to Tippet, “The influence of the Europeans in the Solomon Islands before the encounter with Christianity was tragic.”²⁴ Later, the people’s outlook and attitude towards European missionaries were influenced by their previous experiences of the kidnapping trade by the Europeans.²⁵ In 1901 labour recruiting was abolished through legislation by the Australian government.²⁶ The decision of the government was that all the islanders were to be sent home from the plantations by 1906.²⁷

(b) *Plantations*

Plantations were initially established by private enterprise in the Solomon Islands in 1905. In that year Levers Plantation Limited came and took a large tract of land.²⁸ Other plantation companies, such as Burns Philp, the Malaita Corporation, and then W. R. Carpenter, also established their trade in the islands.²⁹ That was the time when people from different islands in the Solomons went from island to island to work for the Europeans because they wanted to earn money and get tools.³⁰ This was also the beginning of communal breakdown and the initial stage of individualism. When they returned home, they took with them their changed attitudes and new ideas, one

²¹ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 10.

²² Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 28.

²³ Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 28.

²⁴ A.R. Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 20.

²⁵ Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, 20.

²⁶ J. Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1992), 83.

²⁷ A. Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands: the Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Solomons* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1977), 22.

²⁸ Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, 163.

²⁹ Taken from *Pacific Islands Year Book and Who’s Who* (9th ed.; ed. R.W. Robson; Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1963), 413.

³⁰ I. Scales, “The Coup Nobody Noticed: The Solomon Islands Western State Movement in 2000,” *Journal of Pacific History* 42.2 (2007): 193 (187-209).

negative effect being the introduction of drinking and gambling, which brought a decline in the social life of the community.³¹ The other element of change in those early days was trade stores.

(c) *Trade Stores*

Following the plantations, trade stores were introduced in the country. This was the beginning of selling and buying things with European money. Cooperative stores were also established, but they were poorly managed because of the *wantok* system.³² This stimulated some islanders to start cooperative societies in their communities. Some enterprises continued well while others failed. It is surprising that the venture of cooperative societies failed. Even though the Islanders were known as a communal society, they could not work together with the western idea of cooperative societies. The reason was a lack of good organisation.³³ People did not know how to organise the cooperative societies well because it was a foreign system, which did not operate in the island way. Another reason was that there was no accountability on the part of those who managed the cooperative societies.

3. Missions

The next newcomers were the missions. The missionaries who arrived in the Solomons in the 19th and early 20th centuries were the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglicans (the Church of Melanesia, or COM), the Methodists, the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), and the South Sea Evangelical Mission. These early Christian missions were the ones who first broke through the strongholds of cannibalism, headhunting, and black magic.³⁴

According to Hogbin, “[i]n 1845, the French Mission of the Society of Mary sent out a party consisting of a Bishop, six priests, and a number of lay brothers.”³⁵ Their leader, Bishop Epalle, was murdered, and so the survivors of the team withdrew from the Solomons.³⁶ Later, in 1898, the mission moved

³¹ Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, 178.

³² The word *wantok* means one language or culture. It stands for helping a person belonging to one’s own language or clan.

³³ Tippett, *Solomon Island Christianity*, 178.

³⁴ Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 25.

³⁵ Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 13.

³⁶ Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, 291.

to Guadalcanal.³⁷ The Catholic approach was to establish catechist schools where they gathered children to be trained as catechists.³⁸

The Anglican Mission first arrived in the Islands in the 1850s.³⁹ Bishop Selwyn proposed to recruit promising youth from the islands so that they may “be taught the English language, arithmetic, writing, ‘all social and civilised habits,’ and the saving truths of the Christian faith.”⁴⁰

A Methodist missionary by the name of George Brown arrived in the Solomons in 1898 and in 1902 the Methodist Mission started their work in the Western Solomons.⁴¹ John F. Goldie and Stephen Rooney arrived at Roviana on May 23, 1902. They had two approaches. One was to bring young people to the main station and give them education. Tippett observes that it developed the fellowship of the church but it separated the people from their normal society.⁴² And the other was to train young people in their own societies. The Fijian and the Samoan Methodist evangelists worked within the cultural structure of the people rather than from the central stations.⁴³

The next missions were the Seventh-day Adventists and the South Sea Evangelical Mission. The Seventh-day Adventists started their work in the Islands on May 29, 1914.⁴⁴ They were invited by a trader and encouraged by the government to enter the Western Solomons.⁴⁵ Forman states that the SDAs believed firmly in creating separate Christian villages, introducing cleanliness, dietary regulations, health services, small businesses, and English education.⁴⁶

³⁷ C.W. Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982), 50.

³⁸ I. Shevill, “*Pacific Conquest*”: *the History of 150 years of Missionary Progress in the South Pacific* (Sydney: Pacific Christian Literature Society, 1949), 98.

³⁹ D. Hilliard, *God’s Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), 15.

⁴⁰ Hilliard, *God’s Gentlemen*, 9.

⁴¹ G. Brown, *George Brown, D.D. Pioneer-missionary and Explorer: an Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), 528.

⁴² Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, 56.

⁴³ Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, 56.

⁴⁴ R. Dixon, “The Pacific Islands,” in *Seventh-day Adventists in the South Pacific 1885-1985: Australia, New Zealand, South Sea Islands* (ed. Noel Clapham; Warburton: Signs Publishing, 1985), 200-32; quoted in *Globalization and the Re-shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands* (ed. M. Ernst; Suva: Pacific Theological College, 2006), 183.

⁴⁵ Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, 53.

⁴⁶ Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, 53.

The South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) originated from the Queensland sugar plantations in Australia. Florence Young, a member of a Plymouth Brethren family, started a Sunday class for the islanders.⁴⁷ A number of islanders were converted, the most famous among them being Peter Ambuaofa. Ambuaofa came back to the islands and started to witness to his people and called for help from Queensland.⁴⁸ In response to his call, the SSEM established its first mission in the Solomons in 1904 on the island of Malaita.⁴⁹ Their approach was “[s]alvation before education or civilisation.”⁵⁰

We see here different approaches taken by the missions. The Catholic approach was through catechist training. The Anglican was evangelisation by civilising. The Methodists’ approach was industrial mission and cultural structure. The Seventh-day Adventist’s was education in cleanliness, dietary regulations, health services, small business, and English education. The SSEM’s approach was salvation before education or civilisation.

Thus Christian missions paved the way for further integration of change in the society. Fox states that “Christian missions came to the islands 50 years before the British Government,”⁵¹ and so the later influence on the people was the government establishment.

4. Establishment of the British Protectorate

The British Protectorate established its rule in the islands in 1893⁵² to end the blackbirding and to ensure that the people of the Solomon Islands were not exploited. Thus, the coming of the British Protectorate united the islands into one entity. It also paved the way for the introduction of changes. As these changes were beginning to take root the country came under bombardment in 1942 during World War II in the conflict between the Japanese and the Allied forces.

⁴⁷ Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, 42.

⁴⁸ Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, 45.

⁴⁹ Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, 151.

⁵⁰ F.S.H. Young, *Pearls from the Pacific* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1925), 39.

⁵¹ Fox, *The Story of the Solomons*, 31.

⁵² Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 14.

5. World War II

World War II was one of the global forces that hit the Solomons in 1942. The Japanese invaded the islands and the islands became the scene of some of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific theatre. Notable among these was the battle of Guadalcanal. After the war, a movement called the Ma'asina Ruru (brotherhood together)⁵³ sprang up in Malaita between the years 1946 to 1950 as an anti-British movement. It was a revolt against the British rule because the indigenous people did not benefit from the land they gave to the foreign-owned plantations and the wages they received.⁵⁴ Their leaders were put in prison but later released. After the movement ceased, the country was still ruled by the British Protectorate until it gained independence from Britain in 1978. This resulted in the initial shifting of identity by the youth in Solomon Islands and in Ghatapa, in particular, towards a global identity.

PRESENT-DAY GHATAPA YOUTH SEARCHING FOR A GLOBAL IDENTITY

The historical changes that we have seen in the country of Solomon Islands brought the islands together as a nation. Ghatapa society is one of the areas where big companies, such as the GPOL (Guadalcanal Plains Oil Limited) and the Gold Ridge Mine in central Guadalcanal (on the outskirts of Honiara), have their operations. Besides this, a number of private businesses have sprung up, dealing with the export of cocoa and copra. Ghatapa youth are now brought up in this changed environment. There are many such outside influences, but I will focus my discussion on two areas: the influence of the media and technology, and the influence of individualism.

⁵³ Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, 137.

⁵⁴ Ernst, *Globalization and Re-shaping of Christianity*, 165-66.

1. The Influence of the Media and Technology

Young people are influenced by ideas through media and technology. They connect to the outside world through Facebook and mobile phones, or by watching television and DVDs. Their minds are filled with information and ideas coming through the media which are foreign to their traditional values and Christian principles.⁵⁵

The outcome of these practices all over the world has brought about a culture which Sam George describes as a “techno-culture.”⁵⁶ The youth in Ghatapa also have an urge to identify themselves with what is happening around the world. Through globalisation the new generation is taken into an open world where they are open to new ideas which their parents never knew.⁵⁷ Nongkas comments that “the media bring the latest fashions in clothes, shoes, caps, music, hair styles ... Young people are informed about the developments in the youth culture around the world.”⁵⁸ They now aspire to identify themselves with what is happening globally.

2. Individualism

Present-day youth are drifting from the control of their parents and elders towards individualism. They earn their own money with little obligatory duties towards their parents and elders. The process of urbanisation has also caused alienation of youth from meaningful participation in the mainstream of life. In this situation, the youth are forming their own culture through habitual use of marijuana, home-brewed alcohol, and avoidance of accountability to traditional leaders.⁵⁹ At this juncture, we may take note of Gemo’s suggestion that being critical of foreign cultures helps us to know what new ideas we can adopt, and what things in our own culture we can hang on to.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ O. Gemo, “The Impact of Communication Media,” *Catalyst* 21.2 (1991): 197 (191-98).

⁵⁶ S. George, “Emerging Youth Cultures in the Era of Globalisation: Techno Culture and Terror Culture,” in *One World or Many? The Impact of Globalisation on Mission* (ed. R. Tiplady; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 33 (33-53).

⁵⁷ Ernst, *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity*, 47-48.

⁵⁸ C. Nongkas, “The Impact of Mass Media on the Spirituality of Young People in Papua New Guinea,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 12.2 (1996): 25 (24-33).

⁵⁹ Ernst, *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity*, 170.

⁶⁰ Gemo, “The Impact of Communication Media,” 196.

THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVER'S IDENTITY

In the midst of this shift from traditional identity towards a global outlook, believers in Christ among Ghatapa youth must also understand their identity in Christ. In Mark 8:27-29 Jesus asked his disciples what people thought about his identity: “Who do people think I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” If we can ask the same question of ourselves and the youth of Ghatapa, it would make us know who we are in Christ. Skrzypaszek poses this question, “Is Christian identity determined by its beliefs or is it an outcome of the faith-relationship with God?”⁶¹ This question can be answered with an understanding that Christian identity is a result of the faith-relationship we have with God through his Son Jesus Christ.

Figure 4 shows this relationship in our vertical and horizontal identities. It depicts who we are in Christ as children of God and who we are to one another as brothers and sisters in the household of God, with Christ being the first-born. The first relationship we will discuss is the vertical relationship the believer has with God as a child of God in Christ. The second relationship to be discussed is the brotherly and sisterly aspect of the family. The third is the first-born aspect of the family, and the fourth is the household aspect. Christian identity shows itself in the believer's vertical relationship with God in Christ as a child of God.

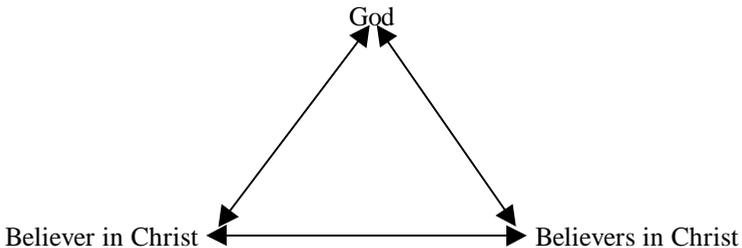


Figure 4. The believer's identity

⁶¹ J. Skrzypaszek, “Conversion and Identity in the Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Faith Tradition,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 28.1 (2012): 63 (61-77).

1. Identity as a Child of God in Romans 8:14-17

Paul wrote Romans as an epistle to the Christians in Rome (Rom 1:1), the capital city of the Roman Empire at the time.⁶² It was a multicultural and multi-religious city, as “the traditional religions of Greece and those of Rome underwent significant changes in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods.”⁶³ When we look at the mixture of cultures in Rome, we can identify it with our situation today in Ghatapa.

In Romans 8 Paul explains the Christians’ identification, position, privilege, and status in the family of God. Not only are there blessings that we have as children of God, but we must also know that our relationship with God includes our identification with Christ through suffering (Rom 8:17) in this world, in order for us to share in the glory that God is preparing for his children.

When a person is born into the family of God their status has been transformed from being a slave to the status of an adopted son.⁶⁴ Bruce explains that believers “are joint-heirs with Christ because the glory which they will inherit by grace is the glory which is his by right.”⁶⁵ Bruce notes that the word “*Abba* is an Aramaic word ... which came to be used among the Jews ... as the familiar term by which children address their father.”⁶⁶

Paul’s emphasis on a Christian believer’s identity in the family of God as sons *huiioi* (vv. 14, 19) and children *tekna* (vv. 16, 17, 21) is noteworthy. Bruce observes that “Paul is using the two substantives interchangeably.”⁶⁷ Dunn says that that the distinction between the two words “can only be stylistic.”⁶⁸ But, according to Vine, Unger, and White, Paul uses these two words in two different situations: as children (*tekna*) with a birthright to

⁶² D. Alexander and P. Alexander, eds., *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1988), 581.

⁶³ E. Ferguson, “Religions, Graeco-Roman,” in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. D.G. Reid; Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 891-96.

⁶⁴ J.D.G Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Word Biblical Commentary 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 452.

⁶⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 167.

⁶⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 166.

⁶⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 167.

⁶⁸ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 455.

inheritance, and as sons (*huioi*) in their likeness to God's character.⁶⁹ As a Christian, you cannot live the reality of one without that of the other.

2. Identity with the Family of God in Hebrews 2:11

Hebrews highlights the identity of Christian believers in the family of God as brothers and sisters in Christ. Here, we mean the universal or global family of God. In this context Galatians 3:26 is relevant: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith." The barriers of differences were broken. Through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, Raymond Brown notes, they become his sons (2:10), brothers (2:11-12; 11:16), and children (2:13). Now Christ receives as children (3:6) those whom God has given him and they will be his forever.⁷⁰

In Hebrews 2:12-13 the author quotes the words of both the psalmist (Ps 22:22), "my brothers," and the prophet (Isa 8:17-18), "I and the children whom the Lord has given me." Lightfoot observes that the one who makes the believers holy, that is Christ, and those who are made holy have a common origin or source which is God.⁷¹ Montefiore uses the phrase "have a common parent" and explains, alluding to God's universal fatherhood in Acts 17:26, that as holiness belongs to God alone, so the origin of the Sanctifier and the sanctified is God himself.⁷² Christ has made a way for us to be holy and made us able to share his glory.⁷³ The redeemed men and women of God have a new status in Christ (2:11b).

3. Identity with Christ as the First-born in Colossians 1:15-18

In Colossians Paul encourages the Christians to be rooted and built up in Christ and not to allow themselves to be taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition (Col 2). Their real life is hidden in Christ in God (Col 3). Christ is also the first-born (Col 4),

⁶⁹ See "Son," in *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (ed. W.E. Vine, M.F. Unger, and W. White Jr; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 99, 585.

⁷⁰ R. Brown, *The Message of Hebrews: Christ Above All* (Leicester: IVP, 1982), 63.

⁷¹ N.R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: a Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 76.

⁷² H.W. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 62.

⁷³ T.D. Kassa, "Hebrews," in *Africa Bible Commentary* (ed. T. Adeyemo; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1493.

and the “image of the invisible God.” This means that “the very nature and character of God have been perfectly revealed in him.”⁷⁴

In interpreting this passage we should also take into consideration Christ’s pre-existence. Hanson observes that the “first-born” should not be misunderstood as first created.⁷⁵ It consists of two themes: the pre-eminence of Christ in relation to creation (Col 1:15-17), and the pre-eminence of Christ in redemption in relation to the church (Col 1:18-20).⁷⁶ In the Old Testament the term “first-born” was used in a figurative sense when God told Moses to tell Pharaoh that Israel was his first-born son (Ex 4:22).⁷⁷ In Psalm 89:27 God says that he will make David his first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. So the “first-born” has nothing to do with being born as the first in the family, but rather has to do with prominence and being held in high esteem.

In Colossians 1:18 Christ is called “the first-born from among the dead”. The reference is to his resurrection. Lucas gives two meanings of this phrase. First, it means “the first to rise from the dead to be followed by an innumerable company of general resurrection”⁷⁸ (Acts 26:23, Rev 1:5). Second, “he is now the ‘author of life’, that is, the one who gives new life in the Spirit to all God’s people (Acts 3:15).”⁷⁹ So, in our identity with Christ as the first-born in the family of God, we relate to him as our elder brother.

4. Identity with the Household of God in Ephesians 2:19

In Ephesians we learn about the Christian’s identity with the “household of God.” Kunhiyop states that “the household of God consists of the whole extended family of believers in Christ”.⁸⁰ Paul begins v. 19 with the word “consequently” to mean “as a result” and, thus, in this one verse Paul states the new status of the Gentile believers. In 2:20-22, Paul highlights the building of God’s spiritual temple composed of Gentile and Jewish believers.

⁷⁴ P.T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco: Word, 1982), 43.

⁷⁵ D. Hanson, “Contextual Christology for Papua New Guineans” (DMiss diss., Western Seminary, Portland, 2012), 125.

⁷⁶ Hanson, “Contextual Christology for Papua New Guineans,” 125.

⁷⁷ W. Macdonald, “Colossians,” in *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (ed. A. Farstad; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1993 (1985-2020).

⁷⁸ D. Lucas, *Fullness and Freedom: the Message of Colossians and Philemon* (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 50.

⁷⁹ Lucas, *Fullness and Freedom*, 50.

⁸⁰ S.W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 152.

In Christ Jesus they have now been brought near through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Bruce observes that the status the Gentiles have now is that of the members of the family of God.⁸¹ Their identity is changed from being an outsider to a new identity of an insider in the household of God.

TRADITIONAL IDENTITY AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY CONTRASTED

The contrast between traditional identity and Christian identity helps Christian believers to value their identities in both these contexts and decide upon an identity that is enduring and eternal in nature. Christian young people should be engaged in serious discussion of these contrasts so that they may not drift in their search for a new identity in the midst of the changes that are happening around them.

1. *The Vertical Relationship*

In the traditional identity the vertical relationship with the ancestral spirits engendered fear; but the social advantage of the worship of the ancestral spirits was unity in the community. However, people did not have the freedom to do what they wanted to do because of the fear that they might offend their ancestors and face the consequence of suffering misfortune.

The Christian identity, on the other hand, offers believers freedom and power. Believers have freedom to come to God at any time without fear because we have the Spirit of God in us (Heb 4:16). We have power given to us by the Holy Spirit to live a life that is pleasing to God.

In the traditional identity the priest had the access needed to have a close relationship with their ancestral spirits. There was no recognisable relationship of community or fellowship with the ancestral spirits. But in the Christian identity faith in God and in Christ's death and resurrection results in a father-son relationship. As explained by John in his epistle, "truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3b). All Christian believers have access to enter into the presence of God their Father.

⁸¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 303.

2. The Horizontal Relationship

In the horizontal relationship in the traditional sense the community must come first and then comes the individual's needs. However, the identity of a person in relation to the community was very significant. This became obvious during the time of the paying of bride price, at the time of the death, and at wedding ceremonies and feasts. Though it is outwardly seen as a loving practice, it is motivated by self-interest. To invest in somebody would mean receiving a benefit in the future.

However, in the Christian practice of helping others, the aim is to act in love without a benefit in view. The Christian's help flows out of love and there is no place for fear as in the traditional communal life. In God's family, to which we belong, we are to show love and kindness equally to all the members. Jesus has become the first-born of the family and so we are all members of the household of God as brothers and sisters.

3. Relationship with the First-born

In traditional Ghatapa society, the one (he or she) who is the first-born in the family is the most important person besides the parents.⁸² When there is a problem in the family, the first-born is the one to be consulted first. They cannot be overlooked as they are responsible for their brothers and sisters during their lifetime. But when they die their status and function as being the first-born ceases. This is not so with our first-born brother, Jesus. He is the first-born not only when we are still alive, but also when we die as he is ever still our first-born brother. He is also the first-born from among the dead and thus is different from earthly first-born persons whose status and function are temporal.

4. Relationship with the Tribe and Clan

Members of the traditional society identified themselves with the tribe and clan to protect themselves from outside people. I do not have any disagreement with that; but when a person does something against other people, instead of seeking to correct or punish the wrongdoer, everyone in the community rallies around the person to protect him or her from any accusation from the wronged party.

⁸² Ghatapa is a matriarchal society, so female first-born have the same status as male first-born.

However, Christian identity in the family of God is different. When someone in the family of God falls into sin or does something wrong against another brother or sister, a Christian brother or sister must go and correct them. We cannot overlook or support the wrong that they have done. By correcting one another, we identify ourselves with one another horizontally, and do not support one another in wrongdoing.

The Christian's identity is not only with our heavenly Father through Christ, but it also shows itself in our relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in this world. The family of God is greater than the family in the traditional society with its clans and tribes. God's family is universal and has no boundaries.

Kalasi notes, "the indwelling Spirit will give us the assurance which we share as co-heirs with Jesus."⁸³ In contrast to this, in the traditional communal society, the inheritance was temporal, limited to the life span of the person who enjoyed it. On the event of death the next of kin would get the inheritance. But being co-heirs with Christ entails all believers in having an eternal inheritance.

5. Integration of Christian Identity

To help the Christian youth of Ghatapa know who they really are in the family of God, the church must strengthen its teaching ministry to mentor them in the area of knowing who they are as children of God, and what is expected of them in their workplace, in their schools, wherever they go, and in whatever they do as children of God living among the people of this world. We should provide the youth with the ministry of mentoring and a good model to follow. The mentoring and teaching ministry of the church should cover personal areas, such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, inferiority, singleness, interpersonal areas of relationships, sexuality, violence, addictions, and abuse.

As Paul spoke to the philosophers of his day during his stay in Athens (Acts 17:18-33), in the same manner the church should engage in contending for the faith against the globally-transmitted ideas that are influencing the youth of today. The church should develop a strategic use of apologetics to teach our young people how to defend their Christian identity as children of God, by knowing what they believe and why they believe in God. By leading

⁸³ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 303.

our young people to truly know the one true God, we will help them find their true sense of identity, purpose, and destiny in life. Then they will be fortified spiritually, morally, and emotionally to stand strong in the face of today's culture.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

Solomon Islands is now experiencing changes in its society as a result of influences coming in through the process of globalisation. Consequently, the youth are in a period of identity shift from seeing themselves as Ghatapa youth and Solomon Islands' youth to being global youth. This situation calls for an understanding of a Christian identity that the Christian youth of Ghatapa should have.

The Christian identity of the youth of Ghatapa should be that of being "sons of God" and "children of God," and those who are led by the Spirit of God. This familial identity takes into account the fact that Jesus is the first-born of the family in importance, as the One who is in the beginning and is sovereign over the whole creation. Therefore, believers in Christ see Christ as their first-born brother or the eldest brother, in the sense that they share in the risen life of Christ, and because of this those who place their faith in Christ are called brothers and sisters. This takes us to a further understanding of our familial identity in Christ as those who belong to the household of God. This identity is to be lived out by the Christian young people in Ghatapa in the present-day world as members of the household of God whose privileges cannot be taken away.

⁸⁴ J.D. McDowell and B. Hostetler, *Beyond Belief to Convictions: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Stand Strong in the Face of Today's Culture* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2002), 16.