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Peer Reviewed Articles

Melanesian Morality and Biblical Virtues

Kenneth Nehrbass

**Motifs of Death and Hell in the Teaching
of Jesus: Part 1—An Examination of Hades**

Kim Papaioannou

What About the *Wantok* System?

Andrew Murray

Summary Article

**Evil and Human Suffering in View of God's Plan of
Redemption in the Great Controversy Context**

Sussie Stanley

Book Review

Brandon Zimmerman

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



WHAT ABOUT THE *WANTOK* SYSTEM?

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Abstract

The terms “*wantok*” and “*wantok* system” elicit a wide range of feelings, from heartfelt thankfulness for close relationships to near despair when the *wantok* system intervenes to disrupt transactions in modern society. The terms are ubiquitous in common speech in Melanesia, but surprisingly little used in academic literature, unless dismissively. From the perspective of Aristotelian political philosophy, the affection felt between *wantoks* is the binding glue of the pre-political communities to which the people of single language groups belong. It is not to be dismissed. The challenge is to unite these communities into a single political community or country in a way that both acknowledges the value of the pre-existing relationships and enables a much broader range of relationships with different rules to flourish. There are signs that this is beginning to happen, and suggestions are made about how it could be fostered. Aristotelian political philosophy offers ways of understanding and dealing with these issues that are not available in modern political theory.

Keywords

Wantok, *wantok* system, kinship, reciprocity, respect, political community, modern state, Aristotle, *kastom*, change, human rights, virtue

INTRODUCTION

The terms “*wantok*” and “*wantok* system” occur surprisingly infrequently in the academic literature. When they do occur, they are often used in parentheses and with reference to difficulties experienced in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, such as failures of development projects or corruption in government. In common speech, however, the terms are ubiquitous and display a wide range of meanings and elicit a wide range of feelings. A *wantok*, literally “one talk” in *Tok Pisin*, the most widely spoken official language of PNG, is the speaker of a common first or indigenous language and so is a relative, friend, or neighbour in a manner that encompasses communal culture and kinship.

The *wantok* system is a network of relationships and obligations which we will explore shortly. A question frequently asked in response to discussions about political or economic development in PNG or Melanesia generally is: “What about the *wantok* system?” This article will explore the associated meanings and feelings with a view to gaining a more nuanced understanding of the *wantok* system, its place in Melanesian life, its value, the problems it causes, and how we might answer the question, what about the *wantok* system?

This article will work from an Aristotelian perspective and illustrate how the *wantok* system would be viewed from within that context. The writer has argued elsewhere that an Aristotelian political philosophy is more sympathetic to the cultures and needs of Pacific island peoples than that of the early modern philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and G.W.F. Hegel.¹ In particular, Aristotelian philosophy acknowledges pre-political communities such as families, villages, and clans as the foundation of human society, rather than beginning, as early modern philosophy does, with an imagined solitary individual. Further it proposes a political community built on affection rather than on the fear that forms the basis of the modern state through its control of the instruments of force. Aristotle also envisages a political community that can function well without the massive economic engines of modern Western states.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle examines the formal possibilities of human association beyond family and clan, that is, the possible ways in which a political community might constitute itself. He acknowledges that it is not strictly necessary to form these larger communities. They are founded “not only for the sake of living but rather primarily for the sake of living well.”² While it is natural for human beings to move in this way, it does not happen by nature. Human beings must use their reason to establish the best ways to organise themselves. The best is not the same everywhere but is defined by the pre-political communities out of which the political community or

¹ See A. Murray, *Thinking about Political Things: An Aristotelian Approach to Pacific Life* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016). In this book I lay out an understanding of Aristotle’s political thought in a manner available to non-philosophers and also argue against some of the modern presuppositions. The book also includes four essays on aspects of life in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. This article is based on the first essay.

² Aristotle, *Politics* III, 9 (1280131), in *The Politics*, trans. C. Lord (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 98.

country springs and by the material conditions in which they live – factors such as the character of the people, their current arrangements, culture, geography, history, and contact with other peoples. It is from this perspective that we will examine the *wantok* system.

WANTOK IN POPULAR DISCOURSE

One way to explore popular perceptions is through the press and here we will survey some of the uses of *wantok* in the Papua New Guinea newspaper, the *Post-Courier*. It is used with warmth of feeling: “I was privileged to spend the night with my good *wantok* ... and his wife at their house” (3 December 2004). Pride is also expressed: “PNG’s *wantok* system is one of the most vibrant customary social support systems operating worldwide” (8 April 2008). Particularly telling are the expanded uses of the term. It enters into the names of sporting teams such as the Mendi *Wantok* Off-Cuts (27 March 2012) and of businesses such as Highlands *Wantok* Supermarket (5 March 2013). Commercial interests attempt to package their products in a friendly manner: *wantok moni* is a way of transferring money using a mobile phone (6 June 2013), and “*wantok* fares” are offered by Air Niugini (5 February 2007).

There is also ambivalence, as was expressed in an article on 5 June 2012:

Papua New Guinea’s *wantok* system can be a blessing and a curse. And this is where the problem lies. Many critics and detractors of the *wantok* system argue that it is the biggest obstacle to development, change and progress in Papua New Guinea and is probably one of the underlying reasons for corruption that is eating away at the heart of our society today. This may be true, but one thing is certain. The *wantok* system that we have today has been tried and tested down the centuries and is the foundation on which more than 800 unique cultures and more than one thousand tribes stand.

The writer is clearly torn between adherence to a cultural system that is and has been for so long fundamental to the lives of so many people, and the difficulties that it causes in a time of change, difficulties that include disruption of attempts at development of the country as a whole. In the writer’s words, it is a blessing and a curse at the deepest levels.

Complaints against the effects of the *wantok* system are frequent. Many equate it with *nepotism*, which occurs when someone in authority gives a position or privileges to a clan member rather than to a more competent or deserving person. This makes it difficult, for instance, for people with otherwise good qualifications to find employment (24 June 2010) and conversely corrupts the businesses or government agencies that employ less than capable people (30 March 2006; 9 March 2010). Within organisations, bonds and reciprocal obligations between members of the organisation can also divert it from its purposes. Complaints are made about the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary's ability to discharge its constitutional duty (16 August 2005), about incapacity in the Defence Force (31 December 2012), and about "prison escapees roaming freely around the country" because of protection by their *wantoks* (7 December 2012). Problems internal to the *wantok* system are also raised: people given to gambling, knowing that their *wantoks* will support them (5 January 2012); women abused by their husbands without the protection of the law (10 July 2009); movement of people into settlements without land or work because their *wantoks* are there (28 February 2013); acceptance of inappropriate medicine from a *wantok* rather than going to a doctor (11 April 2008). At the political level, we hear that "people are not electing the best person during national elections. [They] vote for their *hausline*, *tambu* or *wantok* and this habit is alive and well" (2 November 2006).

Some writers show insight into what is happening and why the complaints arise. An economy based on money changes the way that people can reciprocate (14 January 2009) and life in urban areas among different peoples and with a cash-based economy puts the *wantok* system under stress (8 June 2012). Paul Barker put it in different terms.

While the public demands the provision of the best staff and services, under the prevailing system of patronage leaders appoint *wantoks* and mates to key positions in exchange for support. Some politicians blame the community and custom for pressuring them, but this is a cop-out. A modern state cannot function on personal favours and obligations, but requires firm policies, procedures and standards, followed transparently. (17 July 2009)

The issue here is change and, in fact, momentous change. A system that worked well for small closed communities living in tightly defined

geographical areas is challenged when it is drawn into a developing political system that embraces many peoples and that has to deal with imported ideas, technologies, and economies.

What might be the solution? Some call for ethical standards (13 May 2013) and for appointments on merit (9 May 2013). A rule at Port Moresby General Hospital states that there is “no entertainment of the *wantok* system” (12 June 2013). One writer in the *Post-Courier* had a broader suggestion:

The concept of *wantoks* needs to be extended, to broadly encompass the idea of Papua New Guineans being an actual united race of people. All Papua New Guineans must consider themselves part of one great *wantok* race. This is not such a hard thing to do. Whenever a Papua New Guinean sees a fellow countryman overseas they recognise and greet each other first and foremost as Papua New Guineans. They know that, in the wider world, their tribal origin matters much less than the fact that they are from the same country. They are both essentially *wantoks* regardless of what tribe either may originally come from. When the Kumuls played against the Junior Kangaroos recently in Port Moresby, there were no Engans in the crowd, there were no New Irelanders, no Taris, no Papuans nor Sepiks. There were only Papua New Guineans urging on the Papua New Guinean team. (15 November 2005)

These discussions and many like them carry a great amount of wisdom. The *wantok* system is deeply entrenched in Papua New Guinean culture and will not go away. It gives people a sense of belonging to a community and the obligation of reciprocity ensures that people are looked after. It does, however, create difficulties when it is joined to modern systems of governance and organisation. During the remainder of this article we will rely on the academic literature to examine these issues and look at possible ways forward. This is not to say that a solution to the tensions will be easy or come quickly, because the change being experienced by Melanesian peoples is enormous. Especially in the case of PNG, it is complicated by a large population of extraordinary diversity and by geographical obstacles. We should, however, appreciate the large volume of intelligent discussion that is going on at the popular level.

WHAT IS THE WANTOK SYSTEM?

The term *wantok* arose in colonial times, when Papua New Guinea indigenes found themselves working on plantations away from their families and traditional lands. A communal people, they sought others with whom they could relate and on whom they could rely. Where possible, these were people who spoke the same language as them, although they lived in a land of some 830 languages. Ideally, they were kin or from the same clan or tribe. The *wantok* system, therefore, has its roots both in pre-colonial kinship systems and in the increasing disruption to traditional life brought by European contact. Prior to contact, kinship groups tended to be small and geographically isolated from their neighbours. People were divided into kinsfolk and strangers.³ Although trade was practised, groups were largely self-sufficient and depended on subsistence farming. Kinship systems varied greatly across New Guinea and the islands of Melanesia, but it was generally common to them that members were related by marriage and descent and that reciprocity and the giving of gifts were critical dimensions of these cultures. In colonial and post-colonial times, movement of peoples has meant that the range of a person's significant relationships has grown to include not just kin but also people from the same language group, from the same geographical area and, more recently, from the same religion, the same province or from the whole country.⁴ The term *wantok* is what philosophers call an *analogous concept*. It begins with a core or original meaning and extends, maintaining that core meaning but also allowing difference.

The wantok system is a set of arrangements that defines who is in a particular group and that organises how the members of that group relate to one another. The relationships are personal and built on affection. Respect is a significant virtue. Reciprocity—the giving and receiving of gifts—is

³ See H.I. Hogbin, *Kinship and Marriage in a New Guinea Village* (London: Athlone Press, 1963) 13–37. Literature abounds on kinship systems. See, for instance, R.M. Berndt, *Excess and Restraint: Social Control Among a New Guinea Mountain People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). See also A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart, *Kinship in Action: Self and Group* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011). For a helpful article on how to negotiate kinship relationships, see R.D. Shaw, “Understanding Kinship and Social Structure,” *Catalyst* 10 (1980): 92–104.

⁴ See S. Dinnen, *Law and Order in a Weak State: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 11–16.

central to the morality of the group, so that most transactions of goods are more than simply commercial. There may be calculation of value, but the exchange is more significant for the relationship it sustains. The arrangements are set in custom (*kastom*) rather than legislation and groups are generally led by a *bigman*, who has demonstrated ability in managing relationships and generosity in caring for the group and seeing to its external relationships. Solomon Islander, Gordon Leua Nanau, summarises the system in this way:

The “*wantok* system” is a way of organising a society for subsistence living that ensures the survival of a group of people. It emphasises reciprocal networks and caring for each other’s needs as and when necessary and ensures the security of members from external forces and threats.⁵

The *wantok* system, therefore, provides safe relationships so that people can, for instance, move from their village of origin to the city and be assured of accommodation, basic sustenance and company. Reciprocity ensures that those living in the city do not lose touch with their village and are able to return. Communities can function well and care for persons even under difficult circumstances, although carers do have their limits and failure to reciprocate can lead to gradual exclusion.⁶ Nevertheless, at times, the obligation to reciprocate can strain the recipient’s limited pool of resources.

From the Aristotelian point of view, a *wantok* group is a pre-political community. It is this rather than a political community for two important reasons. First, because life is governed by *kastom*, it does not imagine that its rules can change. In fact, *kastom* does change but only either slowly over an extended time or more quickly in response to generally external

⁵ G.L. Nanau, “The *Wantok System* as a Socio-Economic and Political Network in Melanesia,” *OMNES: The Journal of Multicultural Society* 2 (2011): 35 (31–51).

⁶ See M. Monsell-Davis, “Urban Exchange: Safety-Net or Disincentive? *Wantoks* and Relatives in the Urban Pacific,” *Canberra Anthropology* 16 (1993): 45–66. Monsell-Davis also compares the *wantok* system to the Fijian *kerekere* system. See also M. Goddard, “From Rolling Thunder to Reggae: Imagining Squatter Settlements in Papua New Guinea,” *Contemporary Pacific* 13 (2001): 1–32. See also E. Gilberthorpe, “Fasu Solidarity: A Case Study of Kin Networks, Land Tenure and Oil,” *American Anthropologist* 109 (2007): 1 (1–112).

threats, pressures, or opportunities. This does not mean that *wantoks* do not engage in “politics,” but rather that they are not engaged in thoughtfully and constantly amending their laws and customs in search of better arrangements. Secondly, at least in its primary form, members are kin rather than people who are different. Nevertheless, Aristotle builds his political community out of existing pre-political communities and he sees the *polis* or country as bound together by affection or friendship (*philia*). In contrast, the Idea of the Modern State does away with pre-political communities so as to make the “individual” the basic unit of the political community and imagines a state bound not by friendship but by fear in the form of the coercive powers of the state itself. Security and opportunity are found in the guise of rights and a state capable of enforcing them.⁷

Even, therefore, in the formation of a large and diverse country, the *wantok* system can be seen in a positive light. At present, most of the population of PNG live in rural areas away from cities and towns and at some distance from government. The *wantok* system underpins community order and tribal governance. It ensures systems of care and of restorative justice through village courts. It is the cultural energy that holds communities together. It is not unreasonable to hope that, as PNG forms as a nation, this same energy will generate a force for socio-political ordering.⁸ The extension of the term that we noted earlier need not just be a play on words. It can, rather, denote an extension of the deep communal relations that bind kinship groups to relations that bind the whole country. The political question is, how do you construct a constitution and institutions in a way that recognises the networks of relationships that are already working in the country?

WHEN DOES THE WANTOK SYSTEM BECOME DISRUPTIVE?

It is not surprising, on the other hand, that the *wantok* system is frequently regarded as disruptive in the face of modern development. This disruption,

⁷ This is not to say that fear is absent from traditional PNG life. Hostility from neighbours and the practice of sorcery have long been present. See N. Bartle, *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit World in the Highlands of New Guinea* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 2005) and F. Zocca, *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft and Christianity in Papua New Guinea* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 2009).

⁸ Suggested by Bal Kama in a private communication.

as we have seen, is born out of the dislocation that followed colonisation. In addition, as can be seen clearly in the case of PNG, the amount and rate of change that the people of Melanesia are undergoing is immense, and change usually disrupts people's lives. Although Britain and Germany proclaimed protectorates over East New Guinea in 1884, it was not until the 1930s, when planes flew over New Guinea, that the outside world recognised that large populations lived in the Highlands, and it was not till the 1960s that the majority of these people experienced contact with government officers (*kiaps*). If we recognise that the world as a whole has had difficulty coping with the rate of technological, social, economic and political change, the challenge to PNG is made clear. It is made more difficult not just by ethnic diversity, but by the fact that the different regions – Papua, Momase, New Guinea Islands, and the Highlands – have had different experiences along different time lines. There are, however, deeper reasons.

PNG became an independent country in 1975, Solomon Islands in 1978, and Vanuatu in 1980, which in the current world political system meant that they became sovereign states recognised by the United Nations and took on the form and structure of the modern *state*, also called the *nation-state*. The claim to be such a state implies certain assumptions. First, it assumes a *nation*, that is, a single people who are culturally and ethnically one and who recognise themselves as such so as to be able to live together peacefully. Second, it assumes an array of institutions in which officials act strictly in accord with their function and the rules surrounding it rather than in accord with personal allegiances and motives or in hope of gain. The most important of these institutions are the legislature or parliament, composed of democratically elected politicians usually belonging to ideologically formed parties; the government, composed of ministers and officials in the bureaucracy; and the judiciary, which is independent of both parliament and government and impartial towards those whom it judges. Third, it presupposes a large economy that generates financial surpluses sufficient to run the apparatus of government and to allow the government to provide a wide range of services, particularly in education, health, transport, communications, and security.

Left unchecked the *wantok* system has the potential to disrupt all of these assumptions.⁹ If *wantok* groups in Melanesian nations are too strong and too singular in their commitment to their own group to the exclusion of others, how can a nation be formed?¹⁰ At the level of state institutions, Melanesia has an unfortunate legacy from colonial times in which many view the state as a source of material goods, that is, as a kind of patron, rather than as an institution in which all participate and in which political actors work constructively for the good of the whole.¹¹

Indeed, the *wantok* system has shown that it is able to subvert most institutions. Politicians are often accused of showering beer or other goods on small parts of an electorate, generally *wantoks*, in order to gain power and get access to government “slush funds.” Public servants may feel pressured to give preference to their *wantoks* rather than to strictly follow law and policy. Finally, judges and magistrates are often pressured by their *wantoks*, or are perceived to favour them. PNG, in particular, has great natural resources, especially in minerals, gas, oil and timber, and these are generating increasing revenues; but there are complaints that the money is not managed properly and services are diminishing across the country, and that this can be attributed to the failure of its institutions.¹²

⁹ J. Connell, *Papua New Guinea: The Struggle for Development* (London: Routledge, 1997), covers a broad spectrum of the problems confronting development in PNG.

¹⁰ See, for instance, A. Ploeg, “Cultural Politics among the Siassi, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 768–80. D. Akin, “Compensation and the Melanesian State: Why the Kwaio Keep Claiming,” *Contemporary Pacific* 11 (1999): 35–67, explores the rather strong resistance of the Kwaio people of Malaita in the Solomon Islands to integration into a nation or even to recognition of the national government.

¹¹ See L. Goldman, “‘Hoo–Ha in Huli’: Considerations on Commotion and Community in the Southern Highlands,” in *Conflict and Resource Development in the Southern Highlands of New Guinea* (ed. N. Haley and R.J. May; Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 85 (69–88). See also R.J. Gordon and M.J. Meggitt, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands: Encounters with the Enga* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), esp. Chapter 6, “The Politics of Spoils.”

¹² See S. Dinnen, “In Weakness and Strength: State, Societies and Order in Papua New Guinea,” in *Weak and Strong States in Asia-Pacific Societies* (ed. P. Dauvergne; Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998), 38–59. P. Larmour, “Corruption and Governance in the South Pacific,” *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 1997.5* (<<http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ssgm/>>, accessed 15 July 2013), gives a sensitive account of the issues around corruption and traditional practices such as gift-giving. His later paper,

A final word needs to be said about how the *wantok* system can disrupt local life. First, it can make it impossible to run a small business successfully. Any business, whether it is a shop, a piggery, or a chicken farm, needs to gather sufficient money and resources to begin, and then to protect its profits so as to replenish stock or resources that have been sold. If the *wantok* system intervenes so that those resources are taken up in the cycle of gift-giving, the business will collapse. Second, there are growing claims that the *wantok* system makes living in urban areas more difficult. Although it assists those who have recently arrived in a town and those who have experienced hardship, as cities develop people have to rely on the cash economy, and money that is easily let go is soon dissipated altogether.¹³

HOW MIGHT *KASTOM* AND MODERNITY MEET?

There is growing recognition among researchers that the modern state in its standard forms may not suit countries such as those in Melanesia. Rod Nixon puts it this way:

How realistic is it to superimpose the structure of the modern state indiscriminately, and expect in every instance that societies will reform their social and administrative systems in accordance with the model, even

“Evaluating International Action Against Corruption in the Pacific Islands,” *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2007.1* (<<http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ssgm/>>, accessed 15 July 2013), examines efforts to reduce corruption across the Pacific. A. Tivinarlik and C.L. Wanat, “Leadership Styles of New Ireland High School Administrators: A Papua New Guinea Study,” *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 37 (2006): 1–20, study the efforts of school principals to balance modern administration and communal values. See also J. Turnbull, “Solomon Islands: Blending Traditional Power and Modern Structures in the State,” *Public Administration and Development* 22 (2002): 191–201.

¹³ See, for instance, M. Umerzaki and R. Ohtsuka, “Adaptive Strategies of Highlands: Origin Migrant Settlers in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea,” *Human Ecology* 31 (2003): 3–25. For other experiences, see K. Barber, “The Bugiau Community at Eight-Mile: An Urban Settlement in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea,” *Oceania* 73 (2003): 287–97; and B.Y. Imbun, “Mining Workers or ‘Opportunist’ Tribesmen? A Tribal Workforce in a Papua New Guinea Mine,” *Oceania* 71 (2000): 129–49.

when this contradicts the momentum of their own economic and cultural realities?¹⁴

Similarly, Sinclair Dinnen declares:

Contrary to much of the prevailing policy discourse, international state-building is not simply a technical exercise of capacity-development, but also raises important issues of politics and legitimacy.¹⁵

Questions are also raised about whether people want the kind of development they are being offered.¹⁶ The frequently asked question, however, is: “What about the *wantok* system?” We will conclude this article with three suggestions from the academic literature and a couple of common-sense observations.

The first suggestion is that Papua New Guineans, Solomon Islanders, and ni-Vanuatu continue to build linkages between one another that go beyond their own immediate groups. We saw in the quotations from the *Post-Courier* that this is happening in Papua New Guinea, and in our analysis of the term *wantok* we saw that it is used analogously, extending possibly to the whole country. The meaning of the term is extended, but it can still carry a sense of connectedness and affection. We might call this *nation-building*, and there is evidence that it is happening.¹⁷ The *wantok* system has the potential to provide the cultural energy for this growth. Much of the change is occurring by means of smaller groups, such as regional associations, churches and sporting clubs, which develop linkages among people who previously saw themselves as very different. “These ongoing developments are part of organic processes contributing to the

¹⁴ R. Nixon, “The Crisis of Governance in New Subsistence States,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36 (2006): 81 (75–101).

¹⁵ S. Dinnen, “State-Building in a Post-Colonial Society: The Case of the Solomon Islands,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 9 (2008): 52 (51–78).

¹⁶ For a sensitive account, see M. O’Collins, “What if they Don’t Want your Kind of Development? Reflections on the Southern Highlands,” in *Conflict and Resource Development in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (ed. N. Haley and R.J. May; Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 135–48.

¹⁷ See S. Feeny, M. Leach, and J. Scambray, “Measuring Attitudes to National Identity and Nation-Building in Papua New Guinea,” *Political Science* 64 (2012): 121–44.

emergence of new groupings and identities beyond traditional local ones. They include a slowly developing sense of national identity.”¹⁸

The second suggestion is that Papua New Guineans and the neighbouring Melanesian nations themselves develop and articulate properly national ethical positions. There is reason to suggest that the public ethical language of human rights does not fit well with Melanesian values and that in any case there may not be the means to enforce these rights.¹⁹ Collaborative efforts between Melanesian scholars and various communities could “help define ethical standards, based on: ideas of what the “good life” is, how it is attained, and how it may be destroyed; how people should conduct themselves in business; how wealth should be distributed; how the family (in the extended sense) should be included in the running of business; and so on.”²⁰ What are the qualities of character that will allow Melanesian life in its changing circumstances to flourish? It is not romanticism to suggest that Melanesians have the resources in their culture, religion, and experience to answer these questions.²¹ In fact, Bernard Narakobi began articulating these ideas for PNG in the 1970s.²²

The third suggestion is that researchers and professionals should work on culturally effective technical solutions to institutional problems. In 2005, Abraham Hauriasi and Howard Davey studied accounting in Solomon Islands.²³ They concluded that:

Core indigenous values are increasingly threatened by the integration of the Solomon Islands into the global economy and the dominance of narrow economic values. It is important to highlight how compatible or otherwise

¹⁸ A. Regan, “Clever People Solving Difficult Problems: Perspectives on Weakness of State and Nation in Papua New Guinea,” *State Society and Governance in Melanesia Working Paper* 2005.2, <<http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/ssgm/>>, accessed 15 July 2013.

¹⁹ See O. O’Neill, “Agents of Justice,” *Metaphilosophy* 32 (2001): 180–95.

²⁰ E. Huffer, “Governance, Corruption, and Ethics in the Pacific,” *Contemporary Pacific* 17 (2005): 132 (118–40).

²¹ A. Arua and D.J. Eka, “Wantok System,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 18 (2002): 6–17, attempt to do just this.

²² See, for instance, B. Narakobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Boroko: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1980).

²³ A. Hauriasi and H. Davey, “Accounting and Culture: The Case of Solomon Islands,” *Pacific Accounting Review* 21 (2009): 228–59, available at <www.emeraldinsight.com/0114-0582.htm>.

these western values are with these indigenous values and to consider how these conflicting values could be adapted to engender positive outcomes.²⁴

They drew up a series of proposals for how both accounting practices and Solomon Islands culture might adapt to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

A good deal can also be learned from common sense and from shared experience, as we saw in the excerpts from the *Post-Courier* in the first section of this article. Two points will be sufficient here. First, all people learn to live in more than one community and “system,” whether they be families, clubs, workplaces or sporting teams. Each of these groups have different rules and people know what they are and are able to act rightly at the right time. Where a tightly defined *wantok* system has dominated, balance needs to be asserted by the other “systems.” People need to attend to the system they are working in at the moment and to follow its rules. We saw this functioning in the hospital notice—“no entertainment of the *wantok* system.”

Second, Papua New Guineans and their Melanesian neighbours would be wise to look around and see where local solutions have been tried and tested. If a businessman has found a way in which to separate money and resources that are his to share with his *wantoks* from money and resources that belong to the *bisnis* and so are not to be shared, this may demonstrate a technique that can be used by others. Government officials have put signs on their office doors saying, “No *wantoks* allowed.”²⁵ Papua New Guineans, Solomon Islanders, and ni-Vanuatu could also look more broadly to solutions found by Polynesians and Micronesians, who have confronted similar problems but who live in smaller and less complex countries.

²⁴ Haurisi and Davey, “Accounting and Culture,” 252.

²⁵ Michael Kouro was proud of such a notice on his office door when he was Public Solicitor in PNG.

SUMMARY ARTICLES

This section of the journal contains summary articles of graduate student research which have not been peer reviewed. Contributors are asked to identify the key components of their argument and to edit and, where necessary, rewrite their master's thesis so that the published "article" can stand on its own as a piece of work and, thereby, obviate any need for the reader of the journal to access the thesis itself.