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Editorial
Geoffrey D. Dunn

Report on MATS 2021: Theology and Social Issues in Melanesia
Barrie Abel Jr

Peer Reviewed Articles

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The Soul within Oceania
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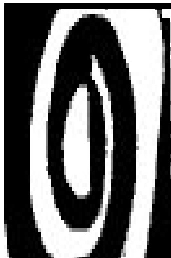
Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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The Soul within Oceania*

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Abstract
This article treats different understandings of the soul throughout the region of Oceania, with attention to underlying constructs such as the belief system, worldview, and conceptions of the self. In many places, the soul is though to be apparent in one's shadow or reflection, and that it may leave the body during dream. Commonly, the soul survives death a a ghost or spirit of the dead, which links with the importance throughout the region of the continuing role of ancestors of the departed. The study refers to changes with the influences of colonialism and globalisation. Nowadays, the majority of indigenous people in Oceania profess to be Christian, yet many, perhaps the majority, continue to be strongly influenced by traditional cultural understandings associated with the human person, death, and the conduct of funerals. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of theological implications if one considers the Hebrew Bible view of the reversal of death in progeny as a functional equivalent of the soul, or the indigenous view of the place or state of ancestors compared with the Christian gospel understanding of heaven.

Key Words
Soul, spirit, Oceania, worldview, shadow, death, ghost

INTRODUCTION

Oceania, sometimes called the "liquid continent,"[1] covers almost a third of the earth's surface including Aotearoa New Zealand in the south, the Mariana Islands in the northwest, Papua New Guinea in the west, Rapa Nui in the southeast, and Hawaii in the northeast. Australia is sometimes included within the geographical context. Central to the region are the Pacific islands, which in turn are often divided into three cultural areas: Micronesia,

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* Originally published as Philip Gibbs, "Die Seele in Ozeanien," in *Die Seele: Genese, Vielfalt und Aktualität eines vergessenen Konzepts* (ed. Patrick Becker, Steffen Jöris, and Annette Meuthrath; Quaestiones disputatae, Bd 318; Freiburg: Herder, 2021), 440–59.

[1] Glenine Hamlyn, *A New Voyage: Pacific People Explore the Future They Want*, The second consultation of Bread for the World Partners in the Pacific, November 2011 (Berlin: Bread for the World, 2013), p. 9. (https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Dialog/Dialog_11_a_new_voyage.pdf)

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Melanesia, and Polynesia, each with distinctive historical, political, linguistic, and social characteristics.[2] The cultures of Oceania are home to over 1,300 languages, which illustrates the cultural diversity of the region.[3]

Dealing with the "soul" leads to intriguing questions about life and death. What is the source of life in human beings and other animate beings? What happens at death? What aspect of the human person, if any, survives death? What ways can the living and the dead communicate? In this paper, I detail the different traditional understandings of the soul throughout the Oceania region, with attention to underlying constructs such as the belief system, worldview, and conceptions of the self. I will make mention of changes with the influence of colonial intrusion and globalisation, and close with a brief discussion of theological implications from the store of wisdom from the region.

Religious Belief Systems

Traditional belief systems in Oceania tend to be a combination of theism and animism. By theism I refer to belief in gods of some kind or a series of powerful spirit beings. By animism I understand the belief in a life-force found in humans, animals, plants, and in some cases, even inanimate objects such as stones.

Discussion of "religion" depends a lot on how one understands the term. Is one concerned with religion as belief in the supernatural or non-empirical dimension of life, or is it more helpful to focus on the function of religion as a symbolic meaning system? I consider both content and function as relevant to our discussion.

Accurate generalisations of Oceanic religion are difficult to make. Traditional Polynesian religion is polytheistic and animistic, with a belief in

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[2] Today the Pacific Islands comprise twenty-five nations with varying political status reflecting colonial history from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: independent nations (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Aotearoa New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu), a US state (Hawaii), US territories (American Samoa, Guam), free association with US (Marshall Islands), US commonwealth (Northern Mariana Islands), free association with New Zealand (Cook Islands, Niue), New Zealand dependency (Tokelau), Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and territory of France (Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, French Polynesia). Rapa Nui is a dependency of Chile, Pitcairn Island a British dependency and West Papua is a state of Indonesia. The complex varied political status of these nations reflects a long history of global impact on the region.

[3] Papua New Guinea alone has approximately 840 living languages. Ethnologue.com

many deities and spirits, including the belief that spirits are found in non-human beings and objects such as animals, the waves, and the sky. They have elaborate origin myths and great depth in their genealogies. Polynesian people developed complex rituals as evidenced in the elaborately carved communal meeting houses (*wharenui*) in Aotearoa (New Zealand) or the huge stone figures or *moai* on Rapa Nui (Easter Island).

In Micronesia, religious ritual tended to be less lavish in display and ritual than that of their Polynesian neighbours. Micronesian religion includes sky gods, culture heroes, which anthropologist Jay Dobbin calls “patron gods”, and nature spirits hiding in the jungle or on the reef along with ancestral spirits. People in Micronesia tend to lump all these spirits together under a single term such as the Chuukic *énú*. Dobbin notes how the greatest rituals involve the souls of the deceased relatives who in the transition between death and their final destiny, could be either troublesome or helpful to their living relatives.[4]

Polytheistic pantheons of Polynesia tend to be absent from religious belief in Melanesia, yet, as Professor Gary Trompf notes, “sometimes the gods appear fully-fledged with powers and creativity impressive enough for any missionary to use the name of one of these gods as the vernacular equivalent of the supreme being.”[5] In other cases there is no clear distinction between deities and the dead. Anglican priest and anthropologist Robert Codrington noted the conceptual fluidity of terms associated with the spirit when he asked a Banks Islander (Vanuatu) what is a *vui*? and he was told, “It lives, thinks, has more intelligence than a man; knows things which are secret without seeing; is supernaturally powerful with *mana* [spirit effect], has no form to be seen; has no soul, because itself is like a soul.”[6]

A common aspect of religion throughout the region is the special role of ancestors of the departed. Attitudes vary, from veneration of the dead to fear of ghosts. Some might be called upon for aid in battle or in a fishing expedition. Others are to be feared or rejected because of their reputed power of bringing others to join them (in death). Trompf notes, “Those released from this life take their natures with them for good or ill, and are rarely thrust

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[4] Jay Dobbin, *Summoning the Powers Beyond: Traditional Religions in Micronesia* (Honolulu. University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 15.

[5] G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.

[6] Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 13.

out of the cosmos or the network of social relationships they leave behind."[7] Religion throughout Melanesia relies a lot on establishing relationships between humans and the spirit order, which in turn results in successful hunting, fishing, gardening, and the rest of life.

WORLDVIEW AND COSMOLOGY

Views of the universe also vary within the region. Traditionally, people in Kiribati, Banaba, and Nauru in Micronesia conceived of the universe as a huge clam that an eel helped the creator god to pry open, thus creating the earth and the heavens above. Dobbin notes how mourners wait for three to four days after a relative's death or burial for the soul of their kinsperson to leave the home and make its way up into the sky world, travelling on the smoke that comes from burning the deceased's moveable possessions on the grave. Access to the sky world is not guaranteed however, as there is a connection between the soul during life, especially in the way a person has been of service to the group, and its destination after death as a human spirit. The soul of the person that in life has violated community rules and taboos may not find an ancestor spirit to help it on its way to the sky world.

In Micronesian and Polynesian mythology, the final destination of the soul is often the end of a long journey and involves overcoming trials. Traditionally, people of Kiribati believe that in journeying to the mythic island of Matang, the spirit would first encounter an old woman:

> The hag looked for tattooing marks; if she found them, she let the spirit pass and, touching their eyes, gave the "vision of the spirits" so that the spirit of the deceased could see the way clearly. For those without tattoo makings, she tore out the pupils of the eyes and ate them, and they could never make it to Matang of Bouru.[8]

Māori have an ancestry that goes back to a formless void and the emergence of light from darkness. The void stirred and quickened and the stars were born.[9] Henare Tate writes on the Maori cosmic religious worldview:

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[7] Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 16.

[8] Dobbin, *Summoning the Powers*, 195.

[9] Mānuka Hēnare, "Tapu, mana, mauri, hau, wairua: A Māori Christian Philosophy of Vitalism and Cosmos," in *Living in the Planet Earth: Faith Communities and Ecology* (ed. Neil Darragh; Auckland, Accent Publications, 2016), 59–67.

> Worldview is at the heart of Maori culture. From this basic standpoint, they understand that all things in creation, whether material or nonmaterial, contain a life-force that is independent of the thing itself. This life-force has its origin from the original source of life itself, namely the Supreme Being, Io matua kore.[10]

For Māori, Hawaiki is the place their ancestors came from and the place to which the soul returns.

One will hear in chants for the dead, *Haere ki Hawaiki nui, ki Hawaiki roa, ki Hawaiki pamamao* ("Go to great Hawaiki, to long Hawaiki, to distant Hawaiki"). Hawaiki may be considered a physical place and a spiritual place. It is a place explaining a people's origin and their destiny. Considered as a *wahi tapu* (sacred) it is a place where the souls of the dead can find a resting place. The point stressed is that people meet again after death.[11]

The Human Person and the Soul

Māori do not see themselves as separate from nature, humanity along with the rest of the natural world having descended from the Earth Mother (Papatūānuku). In that way humans belong to the earth. The philosophy of vitalism is expressed in a number of terms: *tapu* (potentiality and power), *mana* (authority), *mauri* (life essence), *hau* (life force or breath of life), and *wairua* (spirit) that interact in a relationship of reciprocity. The *wairua* leaves the body during dreams and departs the body permanently at death.[12]

From the Māori perspective, a portion of a person's *hau* (vital essence) adheres to any place that person has sat upon or walked over.

> Another person could, by "scooping up" the invisible *hau* from that seat, or footprint, and performing certain magic arts over it, slay the one who had sat down or walked on that place. People have been known to avoid paths and to walk in water wherever possible, so as to avoid leaving any footprints from which their *hau* might be taken by enemies.[13]

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[10] Henare Arekatera Tate, "Towards Some Foundations of a Systematic Māori Theology" (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2010), 70.

[11] *Poluto* is the term used in western Polynesian mythology. Paul Geraghty, "Pulotu, Polynesian Homeland," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 102 (1993): 343–84.

[12] Elsdon Best, "Spiritual Concepts of the Maori," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 9 (1900): 173–99, at 177.

[13] Elsdon Best, *Maori Religion and Mythology*, part 2 (Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1929), 51 (http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Bes02Reli-t1-body-d2-d3.html)

In Oceania there is great emphasis on how the human being becomes complete. In the Samoan cosmogony the creator spirit Talanoa invested coral with life-force (*mauli*), which wedded a woman whose son obtained a people-producing vine. The vine produced a hapeless mass (*ilo*) of maggots, which the creator spirit moulded into human form, giving them heart and soul.[14] However, the human person (tagata) is only a bare human unless he/she is connected to a genealogy (aiga), which gives them personhood. In some areas of Oceania personhood is distinguished depending on whether the person is male or female. Karl Böhm tells how on Biem Island in Papua New Guinea, traditionally people believed that the souls of men go into the tubes of bamboo flutes, whereas women's souls go to the spirit places in the vicinity of the chief's house.[15]

In the Trobriand islands, what distinguishes humans from other entities is that humans include *nona* (mind) and *namasa* (thought), which distinguish persons (*tamota*) from other beings. Ghosts and flying witches qualify as persons because they have qualities of mind and capacity for thought and hence humans and spirits such as witches can communicate with one another.

Anthropologist Dan Jorgenson provides details of the relationship between humans and other beings among the Telefol people of Western Province in Papua New Guinea.[16] Humans have *sinik*, and domestic dogs and domestic pigs do too. This is evidenced in their ability to hear and respond when people talk to them, because the ability to hear and respond to speech is intrinsic to *sinik*.[17] Wild dogs or wild pigs cannot respond to human speech and this indicates that they do not have *sinik*. Taro and tanget plants also have *sinik*. This means that these plants also hear human speech and can respond to it. Tanget plants, for example, are planted near an important place and

[14] Brad Shore, *Sala'ilua, a Samoan Mystery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 130.

[15] Karl Böhm, *The Life of Some Island People of New Guinea* (Eng. ed.; Collectanea Instituti Anthropos, vol 29; Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983).

[16] Dan Jorgenson, personal communication, 19 November, 2017.

[17] Similar ideas are found in other parts. R.B. Lane, "The Melanesians of South Pentecost, New Hebrides," in *Gods, Ghosts and Men in Melanesia* (ed. P. Lawrence and M.J. Meggitt; Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965), 250–79, at 255, writing from Vanuatu, tells how many people there consider that the pig, which lives in a symbiotic relationship with human beings, has a soul. "In the New Hebrides no other animal is so endowed by nature and by man with personality. In view of this it is not surprising that they are sometimes considered to have souls."

instructed to keep watch and warn humans of trespass. Taro likewise has *sinik* and can understand humans, and that is why one must be careful to watch one's language in a taro garden. If taro hears angry speech, its *sinik* may flee, or runaway and leave the garden. In that case the taro stalks will look healthy, but they will produce no food. Nor should taro be handled roughly for the same reason. Jorgenson tells how he once saw some people accidentally drop freshly-cut taro stalks in a garden, and an old man present snatched them up, performed the same gesture mothers do to crying infants, caressing with soothing words. This was to make sure the taro's *sinik* did not run away.[18]

The *sinik* of infants is thought to be poorly developed and only tenuously connected with them, so startling an infant, or frightening it with loud angry talk could lead to a momentary loss of *sinik*, which flees and the infant wails uncontrollably. People say that the *sinik* grows as the heart does. When it gets larger and "opens up" there is more room for the *sinik* there, and this is evident in the maturation of infants when they respond to speech and spend more time talking or responding than crying.

Custom in Bougainville illustrates the belief that the infant's soul is only insecurely attached to its body, at the fontanelle, and clings to the mother much of the time.[19] During the first few months of the infant's life, its soul is so closely dependent upon the mother that the latter should not leave her child for long, lest its soul follow her and perhaps become lost. When a mother of a young infant must leave it at home to go to the garden or the stream, she wears a small soul-rattle made of shells. That way the infant's soul, which accompanies her, will then hear the sound made by the rattle and so will not become lost. To stray too far from the mother and never be able to find its way home again would result in the death of the infant. The attachment between the infant's soul and its mother is so important that measures have to be taken to separate it if and when the mother should die. Relatives place a banana pod in the dead woman's hands in order to deceive her soul-ghost into believing that she holds her infant. Otherwise, her soul-

[18] Dan Jorgenson, personal communication, 19 November, 2017.
[19] Douglass L. Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society: Kinship and Leadership among the Siuai of Bougainville* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 182.

ghost would take along the infant's soul when she departs for the afterworld.[20]

SOUL, SHADOW, AND REFLECTION

In many parts of Oceania people see a close connection between the soul, shadow, and reflection. The soul is also thought to leave the body during dreams. The Telefol people mentioned above use the term *sinik* for "image" or "resemblance", as in photograph or as a facial resemblance. Among the Huli in the Papua New Guinea highlands, the *dinini* is the immaterial part of human personality, which survives physical death and persists indefinitely in ghostly form. As a person becomes drowsy it is thought that their *dinini* gradually gravitates from the head to the heart. Thus, a sleeping person should be wakened slowly to allow time for the *dinini* to return to its normal position. The same term is also used for human reflections and shadows. Anthropologist, Robert Glasse adds that these are but images of the soul, for the true *dinini* is invisible.[21]

The same term used for shadows and reflections can also be used for photographs. Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders destroy photos of the deceased, not wanting images of the deceased to remain, as a sign of respect, but also lest they interfere with the spirit going safely to the next world. Nowadays Australian television programs and films may include a title warning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that the following program may contain images and voices of people who have died."

ANXIETY AT FUNERAL RITES

The ambiguity at funerals as to whether the spirit of the dead will help or hinder the living contributes of anxiety at funeral rites. The Enga of the Papua New Guinea highlands illustrate this point. Anthropologist Mervyn Meggitt explains the Mae Enga belief in a spirit (*waiyange*), which transform into a ghost at a person's death.

> The Mae believe that only some creatures possess an individual spirit or breath as well as a passive shade or reflection. These include people, pigs,

[20] Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society*, 182.
[21] R. Glasse, "The Huli of the Southern Highlands," in Lawrence and Meggitt, *Gods, Ghosts and Men*, 27–49, at 30.

> dogs, cassowaries and possums—all of which are socially, ritually, or economically significant in the culture. But only a human spirit can become an active ghost, able to consume or manipulate the spirits of the other animals when they die.[22]

The Enga believe that semen and menstrual blood combine to create a foetus, which after about four months (when the mother feels movement) is animated by spirit and given a personality. This spirit is not a reincarnation of any pre-existing person or ghost. Rather, in some way, it is implanted by the totality of the father's clan ancestral ghosts, which is located in the clan fertility stones or other centre of clan power such as a special pool inhabited by clan spirits.[23]

When a man dies his spirit leaves his body and becomes a ghost (*timongo*). It stays near the corpse until burial, after which it wanders freely around the clan territory. For the Enga, ghosts are dangerous, illness and death coming from a ghost "biting" the victim. Ghosts can know human thoughts and their presence can be detected by their soft whistling. They may also appear as fireflies or in dreams. During mourning, people may cut off fingers or slice their ear lobes to placate the ghost of the deceased. After killing someone the ghost goes off to join the group of clan ancestors.

It is notable that Enga traditionally believe that ghostly attacks occur within families. Hence one should fear the ghosts of close relatives such as father and mother or siblings and offspring who died. Meggit quotes an Enga man declaring, "The ghost of my father's father killed my father, and my father's ghost will kill me!" [24]

Not all cultures in Papua New Guinea have such a gloomy view of the spirits of the dead. With the Telefol, the bones of those who were good hunters or good gardeners were brought back from exposure platforms and installed in netbags in the spirit house. Their *sinik* remains with them (they were asked to remain by the living), and they were appealed to for assistance and protection.[25]

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[22] M. Meggitt, "The Mae Enga of the Western Highlands," in Lawrence and Meggitt, *Gods, Ghosts and Men*, 105–31, at 110.

[23] Meggitt, "The Mae Enga," 110.

[24] Meggitt, "The Mae Enga," 111–12.

[25] Jorgenson tells how in the conversion to Christianity, *sinik* was used as the gloss for spirit. A crucial decision elders had to make—following the Rebaibal (Revival) and conversions of the late 1970s—was whether they wanted to join their ancestors, parents, and deceased

Transition at Birth and Death

Polynesian myth highlights how the infant accomplished the transition into life by being born of a woman, while at the same time death is also seen as a transition through a woman. There is a well-known story of the death of the culture hero Māui who tried to bring eternal life to humanity. He intended to accomplish this by killing Hine-nui-te-po (the great woman of the night), the female personification of death.[26] Accompanied by his friends, the birds, Māui came upon her while she was asleep. His plan was to kill her by entering her vagina, passing through her body, and emerging at her mouth (the reverse direction of birth). He cautioned his friends not to laugh if they found the sight amusing, for fear of waking her. Naked, he proceeded to enter the sleeping woman. However, the birds found this so hilarious that they burst out laughing, which awakened Hine-nui-te-po who, discovering Maui attempting to enter her, clenched her thighs tightly together and crushed him to death, sealing the fate of all humans to die. But there is more to it because it was believed that human beings arrive at birth from the supernatural realm where they have a spiritual existence before birth, and at death they are thought to return to the spiritual realm as ghosts and eventually ancestral spirits.

Double Soul

Some cultures, particularly in Micronesia, explain life after death through the depiction of the double soul. Each living person has two spirits or souls—a good one and an evil one. "The good soul becomes the helping spirit, which can possess its living kin, choose mediums and in general divine and inspire for the living. Evidence for the dual soul comes from the Chuuk Lagoon, the Mortlocks, and Yap."[27] The Chuuk belief is that in late pregnancy the person develops a good spirit and then a bad spirit is born with the body and bound to it during life. Then at death the good spirit is released from the body and become *enu* (spirit of the dead). The good spirit makes its way up the layers of the sky ending up in a sky layer below the gods. During life, this good

siblings in the traditional Bagelam, or whether they wanted to join their wives and children in heaven. Virtually all chose the latter and converted.

[26] Maui Pomare and James Cowan, *Legends of the Māori*. Vol. 1: *Mythology, Traditional History, Folk-Lore and Poetry* (Wellington: Whitcomne and Tombs, 1930), 17–19 (http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Pom01Lege-t1-body-d3-d3.html)

[27] Dobbin, *Summoning the Powers*, 16.

spirit can temporarily leave the body, resulting in dreams. "The dream is a kind of window through which humans from this world are given a glance into the beyond and allowed to experience things and processes that could not be experienced without the dream."[28]

The bad spirit is bound to the life of the body and after death appears as something other than human (as a ghost). The struggle between good and bad spirit in life comes to a climax at death with the bad spirit trying to eat the good spirit. The bad spirit is thought to be afraid of light, so people light a fire or carry a lamp in order to protect themselves from the bad spirit.

Dobbin says that "the heart of the old death and mourning ritual was the soul."[29] It was a time of ambiguity. People were not sure whether the good soul would become a helping spirit for the family and lineage, remembered through a medium in the family, or whether it would rise from the body and go to a place in the sky world to join the ancestors. They also had to deal with the bad spirit and whether or not the house and land would have to be exorcised to get rid of it.

Anthropologist Charles Valentine reports how the Lakalai people of New Britain in Papua New Guinea have names for three soul-like entities. The individual human being is represented by one of each. First the *halulu*, usually best translated as "shade", is generally thought of as the shadow, reflection, mirror image, and in the modern context, the photographic representation of the individual. This soul is said to disappear at death.[30] The second soul-like entity is an invisible spirit double of the living person, called the *kalulu*. This double leaves the individual in sleep and unconsciousness, and goes and witnesses and participates in events experienced in dreams. It can be captured by spirit-beings that cause illness, and it is permanently separated from the individual's remains at death. This spirit double survives the death of the individual.

Third there is the *hitu*, which can be translated as "ghost" or spirit of the dead. All three soul-like entities are part of the living person. Nowadays

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[28] Dobbin, *Summoning the Powers*, 33, citing Lothat Käser, *A Chuukese Theory of Personhood: The Concept Body, Mind, Soul and Spirit on the Islands of Chuuk (Micronesia). An Ethnological Study* (Eng. ed.; trans. Geoffrey Sutton and Derek Cheeseman; Nürnberg: VTR Publications, 2016), 240.

[29] Dobbin, *Summoning the Powers*, 37.

[30] C. A. Valentine, "The Lakalai of New Britain," in Lawrence and Meggitt, *Gods, Ghosts and Men*, 162–97, at 166.

people using Tok Pisin refer to all three as *teven* (*teven* blong man—"soul of man").[31]

Reincarnation

In his PhD thesis, Christiane Flack tells of the experience of having a woman approach with great affection and then asking for her address and mobile phone number.[32] It seems that the woman though Christiane was her deceased son returning. This is not an isolated experience. Trompf tells of an experience at a Bena Bena village in the eastern New Guinea highlands, "… an old woman wept before me for half an hour, believing that one of my little daughters was the reborn soul of a child she had lost years before."[33] The belief in the return of the dead is also an essential part of the so-called cargo cults, which include the return of the dead.

An interesting case of reincarnation is found with the people of the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea. Traditional Trobriand belief holds that people live in Boyowa, which is the visible, material world. However, there is also Tuma, which is a hidden, invisible dimension of reality. The two realms are like mirror reflections of each other and are not physically distant but coincide. "It is through this intimate, simultaneous, coterminous mystical connection of the two realms, the visible and the invisible, that living humans of Boyuowa are able to communicate and interact with ancestral and other spirits."[34]

Humans have *baloma* "souls", which upon dying enter the invisible world of Tuma to become immaterial but nonetheless human *baloma* "spirits" until such time as they are reincarnated and reborn in human form back into Boyowa where they are intimately involved in virtually all aspects of earthly life: magic, reproduction, kinship, chieftainship, sacrifice, mortuary ritual, and reincarnation.

In Tuma the *baloma* spirit's hair grows grey and it develops the features of old age. Eventually it is forgotten. Then the *baloma* sheds the aged forms

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[31] Tok Pisin *teven* is derived from the English "devil". Sometimes people use the expression *tewel* in Tok Pisin.

[32] Christiane Falck, "Calling the Dead: Spirits, Mobile Phones, and the Ttalk of God in a Sepik Community (Papua New Guinea)" (PhD diss., James Cook University, 2016).

[33] Trompf, *Melanesian Religion*, 46.

[34]Mark S. Mosko, *Ways of Baloma: Rethinking Magic and Kinship from the Trobriands* (Malinowski Mnographs; Chicago. Hau Books, 2017), 121.

in the manner of crabs, snakes, and prawns to emerge with new, youthful hair, teeth and skin. After undergoing several deaths and rebirths, the decrepit *baloma* desires to return to the visible material realm of Boyowa. It goes to the seashore to bathe, with the waves peeling off the aged skin once and for all. All that is left is the memoryless, watery, *waiwaia* spirit child ready to be transported from Tuma to the womb of a Boyowan woman. Thus, the internal *baloma* soul of a living person originates in the implanted *waiwaia* (spirit child).

A *waiwaia* fetus is essentially the detached residue of a *baloma* spirit that emerges from the spirit's decomposing body in Tuma. The *waiwaia* assumes a liquid form when it is transported by another *baloma* spirit of Tuma to be deposited into the womb of its human mother.[35] Once deposited in the mother's womb, during the pregnancy and even after being born, the *waiwaia* can be fed by various donations from the father to build and grow the fetus. Through his donation in sexual relations, the image (*kekwabu*) he imparts can shape or form the infant child so as physically to resemble him.[36]

Modernity and Globalisation

Christian evangelisation in the Pacific began in 1668 with Jesuit priests and brothers coming from the Philippines to Guam—what were then known as the Ladrones (Thieves) Islands. The missionaries lost no time and baptised 13,289 people within a year and 30,000 people by the beginning of the third year. The Spanish were supplanted in the Pacific by incoming merchants, explorers, and scientific expeditions, sent out by the Dutch, British, French, and Germans. The USA took over Guam after the Spanish-American war of 1898, and Spain sold the northern Mariana Islands and its other Micronesian "possessions" to Germany.[37] Global politics, mercantile manoeuvrings, whalers, traders, sandlewood buyers, beachcombers, with the accompanying spread of fatal diseases and the introduction of firearms meant radical changes for people of the Pacific. Christianity was established in Oceania in

[35] Mosco, *Ways of Baloma*, 221. This is the origin of the "virgin birth" theory associated with the Trobriand Islands, where a father is a "stranger" to his children.
[36] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Baloma; The Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* 46 (1916): 353–430.
[37] Vicente M. Diaz, *Repositioning the Missionary: Rewriting the Histories of Colonialism, Native Catholicism, and Indigeneity in Guam* (Pacific Islands Monograph Serie; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 12.

the midst of these changes. Modern-day influence of globalisation reaches into even the most isolated islands. Nowadays the majority of indigenous people in Oceania profess to be Christian.[38] Yet, though lifestyle, and cosmology may change, many, perhaps the majority, continue to be strongly influenced by traditional cultural understandings associated with the human person, death, and the conduct of funerals.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: SPIRITS AND ESCHATOLOGY

In the Hebrew Bible, the idea of an individual soul that survives death is a foreign concept.[39] A person's life force (*nepes*) was not immortal. However, if individuals are fundamentally embedded in their families, then their own deaths, however frightening to contemplate, lack the finality that death carries with it in comparison with a culture that has a more individualistic understanding of self.[40]

Modern individualism is grounded in modernity's location of the self in the inner depths of one's interiority rather than in one's social role or public relations. Life and death do not have the same meaning in a world that stresses social identity. The modern ideal has society composed of two entities: the state and the individual, with little room for family identities and roles. Fulfilling those roles is relegated to private choice. However, in the Hebrew Bible we see a different understanding, where God fulfils God's promises to Abraham or to Moses, long after both of them as an individual has died. One sees the individual, dying a good death, gathered with their kin. The functional equivalent of death would be loss of a descendent. Job (42:13) loses his children, but then has more. Admittedly they are not the same as the individuals who died, but in the highly collective family context, that is not quite so important. Birth is the reversal of death and the functional equivalent of afterlife or the resurrection.[41] With the continued importance of social identity in many parts of Oceania it would be worth considering the Hebrew Bible view of the reversal of death in progeny as a functional equivalent of the soul in Oceania.

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[38] The main exceptions are settler countries such as Australia and New Zealand, where an increasing percentage of the population claim to have no religion.

[39] Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 112.

[40] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israe*l, 109.

[41] Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 116.

Māori theologians suggest that the idea of the Hawaiki as the place their ancestors came from and the place the soul returns to may be treated as a "seed of the Word" prompting us to relook at what Christians call "heaven". The inexplicable aspect of 'heaven' is summed up in scripture "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered the heart of men or women the things God had prepared for them that love God" (1 Cor 2:9). Christian faith refers to the resurrection of the body to life everlasting. Heaven, like Hawaiki, is understood as a place or state where we hope that our ancestors, and in our turn, we ourselves go after death as our final destiny. Māori historians tell how it was heaven as a state of eternal happiness, rather than some form of half-existence of the customary notion, that influenced many Māori to convert to Christianity. One cannot simply interchange Hawaiki and heaven, but surely Hawaiki helps one to develop and appreciate the gospel understanding of heaven. A similar reflection could be based on Tuma of the Trobriand Islands, and other places of final destiny for the soul.

Popular western Christianity tends to be dualistic, regarding life after death as the resurrection or ongoing existence of the soul. Classical Pauline theology and the creeds speak of the "resurrection of the body" or a "spiritual resurrection". While this concept is very difficult for western believers it is not so difficult for Oceanic ones where concepts of body/soul and alive/dead are much more permeable and where myths and narratives help envision the transition between such concepts. The ideal of having Christians who are truly Māori or truly Papua New Guinean is illustrated by a Māori saying: *Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou. Ka ora te manuhiri* ("With your food basket and mine, guests will be satisfied").[42]

[42] Philip Cody, *Seeds of the Word Ngā kōkomo o te kupa: The Meeting of Māori Spirituality and Christianity* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2004), 8.