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Sorcery and Animism in a South Pacific Melanesian Context

We had just finished our weekly shopping in a major grocery store in the city of Lae, Papua New Guinea (PNG). The young female clerk at the checkout had scanned all our items but for some reason the EFTPOS machine would not accept payment from my bank's debit card. After repeatedly swiping my card, she jokingly quipped that *sanguma* (sorcery) must be causing the problem. Evidently the electronic connection between our bank and the store's EFTPOS terminal was down, so we made alternative payment arrangements, collected our groceries, and went on our way.

On reflection, the checkout clerk's apparently flippant comment indicated that a supernatural perspective of causality was deeply embedded in her world view. She echoed her wider society's "existing beliefs among Melanesians that there was always a connection between the physical and the spiritual, especially in the area of causality" (Longgar 2009:317). In her reality, her belief in the relationship between the supernatural and life's events was not merely embedded in her world view, it was, in fact, integral to her world view. Darrell Whiteman noted that "Melanesian epistemology is essentially religious. . . . Melanesians . . . do not live in a compartmentalized world of secular and spiritual domains, but have an integrated world view, in which physical and spiritual realities dovetail. Melanesians are a very religious people, and traditional religion played a dominant role in the affairs of men and permeated the life of the community" (Whiteman 1983:64, cited in Longgar 2009:317). The French missionary anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt asserted that "Melanesian persons are not constructed the same way as persons are imagined in the West. . . [T]he person is more 'outside of himself' than inside; that is, the person is constructed of relationships with others, including beings in the spirit world" (Maurice Leenhardt, cited in Rynkiewich 2011:158).

Some years after the sanguma checkout quip, I returned to PNG to teach young Pacific Islanders in the School of Theology at Pacific Adventist University (PAU). During the second semester 2013 I taught a Contemporary Religions course, which incorporated a section on animism. The students were first year ministerial trainees; most of them were Melanesians from Papua New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. The final exam included a question on sorcery and its undergirding beliefs, and with the students' enthusiastic informed consent, this article shares their insights, together with appropriate commentary from relevant missiological and anthropological literature.

Sorcery in Melanesia

Sorcery has been a deeply troubling social issue in PNG in recent decades and has become especially troublesome in recent years. However, it is not just a recent issue, as James Chalmers, a pioneer missionary to PNG, also wrestled with the problem of witchcraft and sorcery (Chalmers 1887). In subsequent years anthropologists have explored Melanesian sorcery in great detail, across a multitude of cultures (see, for example, Forsyth 2013; Nachman 1981; Lindenbaum 1979; Lederman 1981; Meggitt 1981; Poole 1981; Tonkinson 1981; Westermarck 1981; Zelenietz 1981a, 1981b; Knauff 1985; Gibbs and Wailoni 2008; Kaima 2009; Haley 2010; Rio and Eriksen 2013). At the same time, sorcery-related murders are frequently reported on the front page of the nation's major newspapers (for example, see Toreas and Masiu 2013). Alarmed by these reports, the PNG Government through its Constitutional and Law Reform Commission established a Review of the Law on Sorcery and Sorcery Related Killings, on which Review I was privileged to serve as an Adventist Church and PAU representative (Constitutional and Law Reform Commission 2011a, 2011b). This law was subsequently rescinded with all sorcery-related killings becoming subject to the nation's criminal code.

Academic conferences have grappled with the issues, such as the "Sorcery and Witchcraft-Related Killings in Melanesia: Culture, Law & Human Rights Perspectives Conference" held at the Australian National University, Canberra, June 5-7, 2013. A follow-up conference and workshop, "Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusations: Developing a National Response to Overcome the Violence" was convened at the University of Goroka, PNG, December 3-5, 2013. It engaged the region's leading academics and politicians in an attempt to come to terms with sorcery and its violent impact on PNG society. The keynote address was given by the PNG Prime Minister, the Honourable Peter O'Neill.

Furthermore, many significant books and articles specific to mission in Melanesia have been produced by missiologists and church writers in order to provide insights and assistance to the churches in dealing with the sorcery issue (see, for example, Bartle 2005; Darius 2005; Gibbs and Wailoni 2008; Gibbs 2009, 2010, 2012; Zocca and Urame 2008; Zocca 2009, 2010; Ahrens 2010; Aluvula 2010; Kuman 2011; Schwarz 2011; Gabutu 2012; Nehrbass 2012). A number of Adventist African researchers have provided insights that may be relevant to the Church in PNG (Donkor 2011). Regardless of extensive academic and missiological analysis, the thorny deep-rooted social issue of sorcery remains.

Sorcery and its related practices appear in many different forms across PNG. Despite the 800 or more languages that are spoken in the country (Rannells and Matatier 2005:94-95), there is an array of common sorcery-related expressions in the Tok Pisin lingua franca. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed descriptions of each expression, but an overview will suffice to provide an understanding of the extent that they permeate PNG society. Besides the major English terms of sorcery and witchcraft, observers will encounter such Tok Pisin terms as *sanguma* (sorcery), *puripuri* (witchcraft), *poisin* (black magic or sorcery), *glasman* (seer, spirit communicator), *masalai* (nature spirits), *tambaran* (ancestral spirits, ghosts) and *marila* (love spell, love charm), among others (Mihalic 1971; Volker 2008).

Melanesian Animism

Animism is a major undergirding belief of sorcery. PAU student, Zebulon Apua wrote that “they believe that all the things such as rivers, stones, mountains, trees, etc., have souls and consciousness . . . [which] will bring harm and destruction if it is not acknowledged or appreciated” (ZA). Raga Nama added that “Papua New Guineans believe in the spirits that live in nature and animals [masalai]: anybody can communicate to the spirits in nature (jungle bush, river, stone, birds, animals, etc.,) to gain power over danger, to protect him from sickness and death. The spirits of the ancestors who died some years ago are somewhere in untold places looking and watching over their family members. If the spirits are happy, blessings come. If they are not happy with the conduct of the living family members then sickness and other physical diseases occur” (RN). Chilon David described sorcery as a tool that accessed the spirits “for information, strength, wisdom and knowledge, healing, power and overall providences for hunting, fishing, gardening, and all [other] small[er] . . . activities” (CD).

Zebulon Apua added that “they believe that the soul of the corpse lives on with them after death” and “that when a person dies, he [is] still there but lives in another place. Then [he] comes to them in a spirit form to visit. If they grieve him, then he/she brings problems and sickness to the home. So they put food and water on the graveyard just to please him” (ZA). My research among the Hula people of the Papuan coast also revealed similar practices. While they said that such practices were diminishing, nevertheless they were still practiced by some Hula villagers. Food was left at the grave of a good canoe skipper and “some people went and talked to the spirits to come and help them to win the [canoe] race.

Jealousy: A Motivator for Sorcery

Jealousy appears to be a key contributor to sorcery. Brian Aufilu claimed that “when somebody nearby or a neighbour is having an improvement in their standard of living, people will feel inferior. This is when they try to look for *sanguma* or *puripuri* sorcery in order to kill the person. For instance, when someone builds a new house made of expensive materials, and they own cars and run PMVs [Public Motor Vehicles or mini-buses] the neighbour will feel inferior and cast a spell on the person or on their possessions” to destroy their wellbeing (BA). Philip Pukefenua expressed similar sentiments when he said that “the sorcerers, because of their jealousy, put a spell on others to eliminate those who have a huge potential of becoming rich and wealthy in their community” (PP).

This process instills fear of success within the community and discourages entrepreneurs. It reduces people to sameness due to the fear of being different, and thus a target for sorcery. For example, among the Wantoat yam farmers of PNG, “there is often a resultant sorcery attack if one is seen to have produced more and of higher quality yams. . . . Others who are not successful often try to kill the person through sorcery. Thus, when a person grows the best he gives the yams to his in-laws, often at night so that nobody sees it” (Kaima 2009:48). Jealousy, together with the resultant threat of sorcery combine to form a type of social equalization, albeit a potentially deadly one. In principle, this form of social equalization is similar to the Australian egalitarianism expressed in the “tall poppy syndrome.” This expression generally refers to the tendency of Australians to “cut down the taller poppies,” those who excel in any area of life above the average citizen. The Australian social commentator Hugh Mackay found that Australians generally applaud the success of “tall poppies,” providing that they do not flaunt their success. If flaunted, they are likely to be slashed and brought down to the level of everybody else in order to teach them a lesson in humility (1993:134-136).

Fear: A Root Cause of Sorcery

Christianity can contribute in a powerful way to dispelling jealousy and the accompanying threat of death through sorcery. The tenets of Christianity aim to build up, equip, and encourage people rather than tearing them down (Eph 4:12, 29; Heb 10:25). Christianity promotes the development of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22)—the very antithesis of jealousy and sorcery.

Numerous students attributed fear as a root factor in sorcery. Brian Afulu said that “people have fear of their enemies. . . . They trust that if they practice sorcery they can cool down the heart of their enemies from attacking them. For instance, when a man goes and kills a man from another tribe, the family of the murderer will use sorcery to cool down the minds of the enemies not to take revenge or payback” (BA). Edward Pano noted that “fear of being overpowered by spirits of other clans” contributed to retributive sorcery (EP), while Paul Ken added that villagers were in “fear to leave the belief, or they may not be part of the community” (PK), that is, they would be ostracized by their own kin if they took a stand against sorcery practices. Extended family relationships are essential for survival in Melanesian society, thus such a stance would be extremely difficult and may be akin to social suicide.

Raga Nama felt that the people were captives to fear. “If they don’t follow the instructions or practices passed down by their older generations, death will be the result. . . . In order to be protected, one must engage in the practices of the traditional beliefs” (RN), which as Jenshilo Darius stated had been “passed on from generation to generation” (JD). Sinias Ray remarked that the sorcerer’s “power will not work if they fail to follow the procedure or practice their rituals correctly. During their ritual ceremonies, they promised not to tell their secrets to non-sorcerers. If they do, the spirits will kill them” (SR). The anthropologist Shirley Lindenbaum observed that the Fore tribe of the PNG highlands taught “that knowledge is power, and that secrecy prevents the sharing of power with others. . . . To reveal information is to defuse it. . . . Once shared, their strength is diluted” (1979:123).

Sorcery and Ritual

Another student (who will remain anonymous) explained how a ritual involving a stone and a ginger plant invoked a dog spirit that assisted his Adventist uncles and grandfathers in tribal fighting in their islands. Don Richardson, renowned author of *Peace Child* and pioneer missionary to the Sawi people of Irian Jaya (now the Indonesian Province of Papua)

observed that “one of the beliefs which the Sawi had inherited from the distant past was the belief that it was unwise to attempt anything their ancestors had not previously sanctioned” (Richardson 1974:273). It was necessary to maintain the exact rituals, so that community order and identity could be maintained.

Rituals “help people remember who they are, recreate a world order, give people a sense of identity and belonging, relate them to the transcendent [the gods, spirits, ancestors and supernatural forces], and indoctrinate insiders and outsiders to the true values and perceived realities of a society” (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno 1999:300-301). Adventist missiologists need to be aware of the function of ritual in a particular society when evangelizing that society, otherwise social disintegration can occur. The missiological tools of critical contextualization, developed by Paul Hiebert (1984, 1987), and functional substitutes championed by Alan Tippett in the South Pacific (1967:269-285, 1987:183-202) can help alleviate the fears of the people by assisting them to not only discover the truths of the gospel that cast out all fear, but to discover it in a form that resonates with their cultural context.

Sorcery’s Lust for Power

In order to overcome fear, people consider that they need more power in order to gain control over their life situation. Brian Afulu saw that some people “practise sorcery because they want to gain power and maintain their status in society. For instance, people use sorcery to suppress those who want to supersede them in the community. This happens to the chiefs and leaders who don’t want to lose their positions in the community” (BA). Another anonymous student observed that “sorcery is practiced in the belief it is the way to gain power over others. When one is looking for higher status in rank, especially in the leadership of an organization or workforce, the lower status person practices sorcery in the belief that he/she would gain power over others [in order] to climb up the ranking position. The main purpose is to be a leader, and everyone should be under his/her command.”

Dowe Lunefa stated that “sorcery is used to gain power and wealth. . . . When someone in the community has great wealth or is called a ‘big man,’ the community respects them in terms of their possessions. . . . People in the community want to become leaders therefore sorcery is used as a means to gain the success of becoming a leader” (DL). While the status of the ‘big man’ appears to be diminishing in some areas, it remains a predominant and highly coveted value in many Melanesian societies (Strathern 1975; Orlegge 2009; Martin 2010). Consequently, some leaders, or aspiring leaders, are prepared to resort to sorcery to achieve their

leadership aspirations. Philip Pukefenua related that some hopeful leaders had “to practice sorcery in order to maintain their power, authority and control over people. In this case, their practice of sorcery is to bring good fortune to them and bad luck to their rivals or competitors. [This] . . . can also mean eliminating or killing them through casting a spell or by use of other means” (PP).

Sorcery and Causality

Sorcery is also “the way to explain events in the world. This belief. . . reveal[s the reasons why] the events . . . happened, and how it would happen. It is, in other words ‘fortune telling,’ revealing the past events, today’s events and future events” (anonymous student). In the PNG Wantoat society sorcery was also seen to be the causation for natural disasters, in a particular case, a landslide (Kaima 2009:47). Another anonymous student wrote that “when a person died of accident or sickness, people will always blame the sorcerers even if the sorcerer is innocent.” Karno Alison recorded that people “believe that they [the sorcerers] are responsible for causing disease or even the death of someone of whom they are jealous, or have grudges against, or may have some delayed credits” (KA).

On the other hand, Jullian Nayabbanung highlighted how the power of sorcery was used for “healing sickness and wounds” (JN). Among the Wantoats, it was firmly believed that all deaths resulted from sorcery and that “sickness is caused by traditional means and therefore cannot be treated in the health centre” (Kaima 2009:49), while in Madang a nurse recorded that “‘sik bilong ples’ is ‘sik’ that arises from the disruption of social relationships. It might be caused by sorcery, poison, ill feeling towards the patient, or the patient’s own worries about other’s intentions. Curing this ‘sik’ must first involve finding out who is cross with them. . . . Then any conflict that emerges must be resolved. . . . Resolving these conflicts will make hospital medicine effective” (Street 2009:56). Paul Ken realized that many people “cannot trust the scientific explanations” of death and in a “shame-honour culture, if one dies [one] cannot admit sickness or an accident, [so] they shift blame to maintain honour [and] defeat shame” (PK). “Gaining face, or public honor, is important,” particularly to people living within a communal relationship-based context (Plueddemann 2009:118; Epstein 1984; Flanders 2011), otherwise they feel as if they have been “stripped naked” and totally shamed within full view of their community (Nicholls 2001:234).

Sorcery as a Protective Force

Jullian Nayabbanung recorded how “the power of sorcery is used to protect the village or clan boundaries, in gardening, and for [everyday] household economics” (JN) and is used as a “form of gaining advantage

over others, especially in land disputes" (anonymous student). Traditional land is considered to be an inviolable asset in Melanesia, over which there have been many intertribal fights and consequent deaths. It is considered to be so valuable that it is worth fighting—and dying—for (Sullivan 2002; Rynkiewich 2001; 2004; Longgar 2008). Land is necessary for survival—for housing, for gardening, for forest resources, for building materials, for economic subsistence and so forth. It is also considered to be the abode of the ancestral spirits [tambaran] who are invoked when planting gardens. For example, the Samukundi Abelam people of PNG "often invoke their gwaalndu (clan ancestral spirits) when growing and tending yams. The link between a man, his ceremonial yams, and his gwaalndu is very close. Yams are of paramount social, symbolic, and religious importance to the Samukundi" (Scaglione 1999:214). Alternatively, invocation of sorcery can "even cause unproductive food gardens" (KA).

Sorcery was considered to be valuable for protection. Leeroy Nosi saw that "many people today still practice sorcery because it helps them to escape from their enemies" (LN), while Ishmael John saw that sorcerer's magic was believed to help prevent "enemy attack and give power to weaken the enemy" (IJ). On the other hand, in order to protect themselves against sorcery, "out of fear, people take precautions by having certain plants such as kavavar (ginger) and tanget [cordyline plants] planted around their houses for protection" (KA). These plants, while used for sorcery practices, are also considered to be potent counter-sorcery measures. Similarly, the Hula people of the Papuan coast had traditionally also taken counter-sorcery measures by building their houses "up to a kilometre (about two-thirds of a mile) out in the lagoon to distance themselves from their enemies'" attacks and the deadly effects of their enemies "powerful hinterland sorcery, which they believed was neutralized by the saltwater" (Humble 2012:119).

Philip Pukefenua claimed that "feeling more secure with the protection of ancestral spirits is also a factor that undergirds the practice of sorcery. People do not feel the closeness and protection of the Holy Spirit and Jesus as they did with their ancestral spirits. Furthermore, the fact that they had experienced real life instances where their ancestral spirits had helped them win tribal wars and assisted them in difficult times encouraged them to hold on and use sorcery" (PP). This revelation poses a huge challenge for Adventist pastors and missiologists to relate God's power to the lives of the "grass roots" people in such a way that it ministers to them in their everyday needs. It may also involve power encounters (Tippett 1971:81; 1975:844-857; Kraft 1999:408-413), processes where God's power challenges the alternative powers, in a similar fashion as occurred on Mount Carmel where Elijah confronted the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18).

Sorcery's Contribution to Well-Being

According to Chilon David, sorcery was seen from a pragmatic perspective to be “a tool to be used to satisfy their wellbeing” (CD); to succeed in life and avoid poverty (anonymous student); to “provide good luck” (IJ). Dowe Lunefa stated that sorcery is also believed to “be applicable to use in academic settings in order to be the best” (DL) but on the other hand it could be used for “education failures to students and closure of businesses” (KA). It is used “to bring success sufficiently and quickly” (JN) and it does this “because it’s easy and faster than praying to God, and asking Him will take a while” (JD). These statements highlight the need for the Church to assist people in understanding the will of God, the place of prayer in a Christian’s life, and how God responds to prayer.

Missiologists also need to be aware of the penchant for cargo cults in sectors of Melanesia—movements that are awaiting the delivery of modern goods in fulfilment of traditional hopes and aspirations. As sociological and anthropological phenomena, they have attracted a plethora of books and articles (see, for example, Haddon 1919; Lawrence 1964; Burrige 1970; Worsley 1970; Strelan 1977; Trompf 1977; Steinbauer 1979; Trompf 1984; Loeliger and Trompf 1985; Trompf 1989; Chowning 1990; Macintyre 1990; Trompf 1990a; 1990b; 1991; Lattas 1992; Trompf 1994; Leavitt 1995; Whitehouse 1995; Stephen 1997; Lattas 1998; McDowell 1999; Schmid 1999; Derlon 2008; Jeudy-Ballini 2008; Lattas 2010a; 2010b; Wilson 2010; Tabani and Abong 2013). Cargo cults are in part based on the Melanesian worldview value of *gutpela sindaun* (also referred to as fullness of life) which incorporates “the sum of everything positive a Melanesian heart desires and the absence of everything a Melanesian heart rejects” and “comprises security, health, wealth, growth, prestige, good relationships, meaning. . . . Negatively it implies lack of sickness, decay, barrenness, death” (Mantovani 1991:5, 6). Many of these values resonate with the Old Testament concept of *shalom*, a peace that included “physical well-being and material prosperity” as well as “just relationships between people and nations” (Widjaja 2007:279).

Sorcery and the Church

My students excelled in their understanding of sorcery and its implications. One of them said, “I did not need to study for that exam question. The worldview of sorcery is within my culture” (anonymous student). The second part of the exam question asked for suggestions of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church could assist both its members and the general public in dealing with the issue of sorcery. It must be remembered that these students were first year theology students, a number of them

fresh from high school and with limited ministry experience. Until this point in the discussion I have made occasional comments on how the Adventist Church can assist in various matters relating to the issues of sorcery. I will allow the students to continue.

God as Protector

Brian Aupilu believed that “the Church can tell them [those involved in sorcery] that life is more meaningful when you have a simple and humble life rather than having power and trying to maintain it. God will raise you up when you humble yourself. And also God can provide everything for us because riches and wealth are His. And lastly, but not the least, true protection of life is from above. When you have Jesus as your personal Saviour then God will protect you from your enemies” (BA). Chilon David added that the church needed to provide “help and hospitality,” and that it “has to redeem and deliver them with love and compassion. She has to bring them and show them how to worship the holy God and worship in holiness” (CD).

A number of students advocated conducting sorcery awareness programs to educate both the church members and the general public by broadening their understanding of the impact of sorcery on their communities and the nation. They also suggested the Church help people deal with the fear factor in sorcery, while at the same time helping people understand the “fear” of God and “what the Scripture teaches about true beliefs in God [versus] . . . the beliefs in sorcery.” They felt that the Church needed to be “gaining power from God to deal with the issue.” Dowe Lunefa agreed that the focus must be on “God as He is the only one that has greater power over sorcery and witchcraft.” He lamented that “some church members are still holding on to sorcery and witchcraft practices and yet on the other hand they still become active Sabbath School members and are holding on to some of the key positions in church like elder, deacon, deaconesses, etc.” (DL).

Another anonymous student claimed that “the belief in animism and sorcery is being mixed with the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church must put a foot down on this practise . . . by preaching the story, ‘Satan is defeated’ and correct the cultural beliefs in spirits. All the church has to do is preach the right message. The church must know the heart of animism which is fear and strike it with the love of God.” Karno Alison agreed that people needed to be “educated that all the works of sorcery are only a network of the works of Satan who is already defeated by Christ on the cross” (KA). Sinias Ray claimed that “sorcerers think they are controlling the spirits but are being fooled by the Devil.” He

thought that exposing this fallacy by emphasizing the light of the Great Controversy between good and evil would be of assistance to both church members and the general public. Zebulon Apua saw the need to expose Satan's deceit by showing that "objects such as stones, mountains or rivers are not living. . . . There is no soul in them or consciousness in them" and that "church members should be encouraged to understand that when a person dies he/she knows nothing," and that they will remain in the grave until Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven. He stressed the importance of "impress[ing] the teachings of the Bible about death on the members so that they will not be deceived" (ZA).

Community Anti-Sorcery Education

Leeroy Nosi reminded us that "the SDA Church has a strong belief system that killing is against the will of God. Therefore, it must teach the people that killing people and practicing sorcery are both practices of the Devil. . . . Jesus Christ is our only hope, He is [our] living Protector and [provides] guidance. He is our only sustainer for our needs" (LN). Paul Ken believed that "the Christian churches including the SDA Church have played a pivotal role in decreasing the issue of sorcery. The church has preached sermons explaining the truth about evil spirits and declaring God's power is greater, and that believers can be victorious." He felt that the Church needs to do more by running public campaigns on the subject of sorcery together with giving Bible studies to help the community at large come to terms with the issues (PK).

Philip Pukefenua advocated a kind, loving, non-judgemental approach in community interactions regarding sorcery via sermons and community awareness programs. At the same time he felt that while sorcery was a difficult issue to address, it needed to be known that Jesus himself condemned the practice. He suggested that new church converts needed particular care and nurture in their spiritual development to "ensure their lives were guided by the Holy Spirit and not other supernatural spirits" (PP). Philip's plea for nurture is supported by Mathias Zahniser in his call for discipling in traditional religious societies, where he advocates "how to use symbols and ceremonies—adapted to Christian life and health—for discipling" (Zahniser 1997:13). This was a call that resonates with the earlier comments about rituals within the context of functional substitutes and critical contextualization.

Jenshilo Darius recommended radio programs as a good mechanism to educate the public about the deleterious social effects of sorcery. She proposed that the Church should interface more with people who practice sorcery by "spending more time with them, visiting them, and showing

them the love of Christ by simple acts [of kindness]" (JD). John Solomon thought that "the Church should now fight strongly . . . [against] the practice of sorcery. We are created in God's image and there is no need for killing each other. . . . Only through God will we all find peace and real joy. Whether you are a sorcerer or a cult worshipper just come to Jesus for salvation" (JS).

Sorcery-Proofing the Church

Jenshilo Darius suggested a raft of advice including "helping church members through prayer and visitation, addressing the current issues in the church, [explaining] how it [sorcery] will affect the Christian life, and why we have to do away with some of our cultural beliefs and substitute them with Christian beliefs." She saw great value in "helping Church members with their spiritual needs, physical needs and above all spending more time with them having Bible studies." As a young woman herself, she saw that the "involvement of young people in church is also important. By including young people in church activities, we are building their faith in spiritual things. Discuss with them the issue of sorcery in schools and let them be aware of it in schools and teach them how to go about [addressing] it, when they come across small groups in schools, [that are] passing on [cultic] generation names" (JD). PAU researcher Unia Ape investigated such groups in a PNG high school and made significant recommendations that could assist the Church in addressing the cultic issues faced by high school students (Api 2010:65-84).

Jullian Nayabbanung proposed using the various ministry departments of the Church to minister to sorcerers and those affected by sorcery, "namely, Adventist Community [Services], the Good Samaritans, Women's Ministries, and YAPA [incorporating the Church's four youth programs—Youth, Ambassadors, Pathfinders, and Adventurers]" or maybe a "special organization to reach out to the hearts of these people with the love of God through Christ, and help them physically and spiritually to understand the state of their being, and the consequences they face in continuing the practice" (JN). Raga Nama added that the "Church and government in partnership [should] deliver basic services such as schools, aid posts, and farming projects to engage people" in earning a living in a costly cash-oriented society. He believed that "exposing people to new ideas and environments changes their minds and attitudes" and that programs that reached out in faith would transform lives (RN).

Conclusion

It is quite possible that in some ways this article on Melanesian animism and sorcery could assist the Western church to see God more clearly! How could this be possible? While this is a radical statement, it should be realized that Western compartmentalization has often isolated God and spirituality from the daily activities and the normal round of everyday life. An animistic world view, on the other hand, views life through the lens of spirituality. Everything is interrelated—there is no artificial separation between secular and sacred.

Similarly, Adventist theology and practice is highly holistic in its approach—the interrelation of the mental, physical, and spiritual has been foundational for much of its mission. Pioneer missionaries not only preached the gospel, but often ministered through an incarnational ministry approach with the people at the “grass roots” level that included a literature ministry and the establishment of schools and medical clinics that attempted to minister to every aspect of a person’s being. This even included such items as diet, in the belief that not only the corporate Church, but also its individual members, are “temples of the Holy Spirit.” However, the tides of atheism, agnosticism, postmodernism, and numerous other isms have beaten relentlessly against Western Christians to the extent that for many their daily life and their Christianity have sometimes become dichotomous. While animism and sorcery run counter to many of the principals of the kingdom of God, an animistic world view offers insights that should provoke Christians into examining their faith as it relates to their actual daily life. And of course animism and sorcery provide negative examples from which the Church can also learn. However, the main aim of attempting to gain an understanding of Melanesian sorcery and animism is not necessarily for any intrinsic values contained within those practices, but rather so that missiological insights and opportunities to minister to Melanesian sorcerers and animists can be understood in the light of the gospel within their particular context.

As I marked my students’ sorcery examination question, I was intrigued by the wide spectrum of insights my students provided into sorcery and its underpinnings. At the same time I was reassured by the high degree of unanimity in both their observations of the status of sorcery and also their suggestions for the Church in attempting to address the problems emanating from its practice across Melanesia. Their youthful frankness in providing such candid vignettes of sorcery and its implications for ministry and mission will be beneficial for the Church as it ministers both now and in the future across Melanesia. We hope that their observations will also be of benefit to the wider Church.

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