

COMMUNITY THEOLOGY FOR PAPUA

LAND, CONFLICT AND
LEADERSHIP

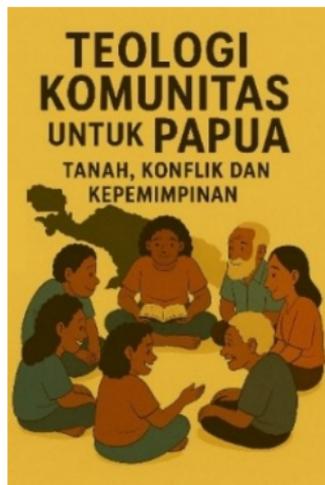


Background

This document came out of six online seminars that took place across 2024 and 2025 in Papua, Indonesia. Each half-day meeting had 12 – 20 participants. These had been preceded by a sequence of study visits to Scotland between 2012 and 2019, funded by private foundations, UK government aid and the West Papua Provincial Government. In the course of these delegates explored land reform, community empowerment, health and wellbeing and climate change adaptation, the participants having been provincial civil servants, elected Members of Parliament and community leaders (see Papuan [press](#), the 2019 [report](#), and older [reports](#)). The overall programme has been led by Seventy-three Foundation and Training for Transformation Papua.

We have found that a consistent request from grassroots communities has been for in-depth insights from liberation theology. This concerns integral human development, being “development” of the whole person towards becoming more whole people in a whole world. Such an approach is rare in most approaches to “development”, although it is implicit to several of the UN’s *sustainable development goals* and to UNEP’s advancement of [culture and spirituality](#).

As befits Papua’s demographic make-up, the following 32-page A6 booklet is mainly Christian, but with some Islamic insights included for interfaith appreciation. It is to support capacity building in village community groups. The Indonesian Bahasa version can be read [here](#).



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1. Welcome

They shared what they had – Acts 4:32

This booklet is for building strength in our communities. It asks: What is spirituality? What can it mean to live together with the land that God has trusted to us. Here is a story

The author comes from an island of Scotland. Nearly 50 years ago, he was a teacher in Papua New Guinea. But in truth, the village people of Melanesia became his teachers. When he and his wife returned to Scotland, they flew to Jayapura and then to Makassar. They had very little money, so they continued by cargo ship to Surabaya.

It was a three-day journey. The deck was full of people. The only place where they could lie down was underneath a row of birds in wire cages. They soon found out why nobody else slept there! At night, they moved up to the ship's bows. But there, the waves crashed over them.

The ship's captain was Javanese. He took them in and gave them his cabin. The crew shared their food. They were both Christians and Muslims. Their spirituality was their kindness.

That is how spirituality builds community. It is love in action. This is real “sustainable development”. It walks the paths of God. Let us explore further.

2. Land, community and spirituality

The vine and the branches – John 15:1-17

Land gives life. Through it, comes God's providence. We don't own the land, it is lent to us by God.¹ We are to care for it.²

In human hands, the land often gets corrupted by the rich and powerful. But the Bible anticipates this. The "land ethic" of Leviticus 25 requires that land should be redistributed every 50 years. This is called "the Jubilee", or "the acceptable year of the Lord". Jesus adopts this ethic in Luke 4, when he reads out his mission statement from Isaiah 61 and proclaims the "acceptable year".³

The whole life and teaching of Jesus is about liberation. It frees us from bondage, both socially and spiritually. This social approach to the gospels is often called "liberation theology". It is a way of reading and living the scriptures that arose amongst the landless poor in Latin America. It expresses God's "preferential option for the poor".⁴ Jesus said that whatever we do for the poor, we do for him.⁵

Spirituality is our profound interconnection, through God, to each other. Jesus demonstrated it with his image of the vine, or tree of life. Its roots are in the land that God has given. We are its branches. Love is the sap. The fruit ripens in God's sun. Therefore, said Jesus, "love one another", because "God is love".⁶ It follows that the deepest meaning of *community* is to be "members of one another".⁷

Each of us receives life by God's light.⁸ This is our spirituality, the life of the soul. Religion arises when we express this life together, organised socially and politically. A healthy religion is like a trellis in a garden. It helps the vine to reach the sun, to ripen fruit and make strong wine. But the trellis of religion is partly human-made. It may often need repaired in times of renewal or "reformation".

Wine is a symbol of the blood of Christ, similar to the Holy Spirit.⁹ Bread is a symbol of the matter of the universe. And so, "the Word became flesh."¹⁰ The Spirit entered matter. This lifts the meaning of our lives above materialism. It makes us more than just egos walking about on legs of meat and bone. It offers not just ordinary life, but promised life "abundantly".¹¹

The image of the Vine of Life reveals three gifts. Our relationship with the Earth as God's creation.¹² Our relationship with one another.¹³ And our relationship with God.¹⁴ These make community complete.

3. Remembering, revisioning, reclaiming

Community with the land - Jeremiah 32:1-15

In doing liberation theology, we read scripture texts and discuss the different meanings that each of us might find.

Read the above Jeremiah text. Do it either alone, or in a small group as a Bible study. Like Mary in Luke's gospel, ponder it in your hearts.¹⁵ You can even make a play, a "Bibliodrama", with people studying and then in different roles, acting out the text. Imagine the scene! Hear the sounds, see the sights and smell the smells! Experience the story in your hearts.

Look at what is happening in the Jeremiah reading! The Babylonians are breaking down the gates of Jerusalem. God has told Jeremiah that their land is to be colonised. There is no point in fighting. The people are to become slaves for seventy years. Jeremiah has been thrown into prison for speaking this truth. But what does he do? He buys a field, and he puts the title deeds in a jar for safe keeping.

Is Jeremiah a property speculator? No! He asks the whole community to witness his prophetic act of faith. Why? Because: "The Lord plans for your welfare, to give you a future with hope."¹⁶ A time will come when normal life will be restored. The people once again will walk with God, together as one heart.¹⁷

The situation in Papua is different from Jeremiah's time. But Papua can learn from the prophet's gathering of the

community, his vision of future freedom, and his trust in the land that God has given.

Papua too can learn the ways to make “a new thing” happen.¹⁸ And if you study the Jeremiah text in a group, perhaps ask three questions. Discuss them perhaps assisted by the texts in the endnotes:

- What can we *re-member* about the land, our ancestors, and what they teach about our culture?¹⁹
- What can we *re-vision* for our relationships with the land (including the forests, mountains and the coast): a vision for the future, so that we do not lose control like the Israelites did?²⁰
- What must we *re-claim* for wise governance, so that our community is made strong in its vision, to restore the human values that give life?²¹

4. The stranger in our midst

Community with the alien – Ezekiel 47:21-23

If we are to *re-member*, *re-vision* and *re-claim* the life of the community it raises a question. Who belongs to the community?

This is a big question for indigenous Papuans, those of Melanesian ancestry. What might be their relationship with people from other parts of Indonesia, especially now that many are intermarried?

Ezekiel is challenging but liberating on the question of ethnic origins. He honours what is human in us all. The children of foreigners are to be given equal rights. From the second generation onwards, they are to be adopted by the Israelites, and given equal shares in the land.

Notice that the lineage of Jesus includes both Jews and gentiles.²² It starts with Abraham, a migrant from Ur in what would become today's Iraq.²³ It ends with Jesus fulfilling prophesy that the Messiah would come from the House of David. And how? Because Joseph adopted him.

This treats adoption as more important than blood lineage. It is spiritual family. It is why Jesus asked: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?"²⁴ It is why Paul said that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek".²⁵ We might remember, also, that angels may come disguised as strangers.²⁶

Instead of excluding the foreigner, Christian community welcomes them into the clan. That said, so that we do not get taken advantage of, we must be as “wise as serpents” while being “gentle as doves”.²⁷

What about different faiths? Jewish, Islam or traditional Melanesian beliefs? Are these wrong? If they are based on love, they may be different paths up the same mountain. Perhaps we should let God do any judging.²⁸ The Quran of our Muslim sisters and brothers puts it very wisely. “If God had willed, he would have made you one community: but his way is to test you with what he has given each of you. So do good, and to God you will all return.”²⁹

What about those parts of God’s creation that the modern world so readily treats like “strangers”? In this, do not forget the wisdom of much indigenous Papuan spirituality. It was here long before any missionaries came from the west. Both human ancestors and the lives of plants, animals and fishes were respected as God’s work. Read such Bible chapters as 12 and 36 - 38 of the Book of Job, Psalms 104, Hebrews 1:1-3 or Paul in Romans 8, to find a wisdom like the traditional Papuan way. This is why Melanesian peoples often talk about “the *Kundu* and the *Cross*”. We can value *both* the *kundu* (or *tifa*) drum of traditional ceremony and dancing, *and* the Christian way.

Remember also the words of God through the prophet Hosea. “For I desire mercy”, or, as some translations express it, “faithful love”.³⁰ If we walk with love, wherever we have come from and whoever we meet, we’ll find ourselves “just walking each other home” to God.³¹

5. Ego, power and leadership

Elisha's double dose of power – 2 Kings 2:1-25

To live together with justice and peace as a community is never easy! Power is likely be abused, both consciously and unconsciously. Leadership, and its relationship to power is therefore a frequent theme in the Bible. We must face up to it in our efforts for community “development”. But development for what? The original meaning of the word is to unfold what is folded up, like opening an envelope. To unfold our humanity, and therefore, leadership should be in service of that

But, there things can so quickly go wrong! Straight after Jesus was baptised, he went out to the wilderness. There, he was tempted by power. In the order of Luke's gospel:³²

- The first temptation was to turn stones into bread - to abuse nature's power.
- The second temptation was to acquire kingdoms - to abuse social power.
- The third temptation was to jump from the top of the temple - to abuse spiritual power.

Spiritual power is the deepest but the least understood type of power. Its abuse changes faith into the idolatry of cults and false prophets. An example is the “prosperity gospel” - the idea that if you give to the church of a pastor with a personality cult, God will bless you by making you as rich as he is.

The text from the book of Kings, with Elijah and Elisha, is about spiritual power. The younger prophet asks the elder to inherit a *double* share of his power. This is granted. But as Elisha walks up towards Mount Carmel, some children tease him for a bald patch on his head. It appears as if the prophet's ego is offended. He curses the children, and two female bears come out of the forest and tear apart forty-two of them. But Elisha just carries on towards the holy mountain. He seems to be unaware of what it is that he has done.

What can this story teach us if we are trusted with leadership and power in a community? Our power can be greater than we imagine. We may not realise what we do. We may not realise its impact on the vulnerable. And so we become greedy, or vain, and insensitive to those around us.

There is a Turkish proverb, that every rich man has a devil. But every poor man has two. Why two devils? Because the first is the one we've always known about. The second is the one that we only find out about when the opportunity to acquire wealth or power brings it out.

6. Facing conflict in the community

The roots of conflict from within – James 4:1-12

Moses and the bronze serpent – Numbers 21:1-9

The Bible is full of violence. Why? Because conflict is normal amongst human beings. God is not the Great Cosmic Health & Safety Officer, who stops every car crash and prevents us from causing harm. God leaves us free to choose. This choice is because true love must be free love.

Some early parts of the Bible are extremely violent.³³ But is it really that God commands violence? Or is it that these texts accommodate, or allow for, an evolution through time in how human beings understand God? And we can only understand within the limits of our capacity.

Repeatedly, the prophets told the Israelites that “God-sent” violence was what they had brought upon themselves. They had neglected to care for “the Quartet of the Vulnerable”, namely:³⁴

- The widow (or the bereaved);
- The orphan (or the bereft);
- The alien (or the stranger in your midst);
- The poor.

To neglect the vulnerable weakens the spiritual cohesion of a community. It becomes greedy, violent, and more likely to attract violence. Jeremiah tells how this led to the Babylonian conquest of Israel at the time when he bought the field.

For the apostle James, the brother of Jesus, conflicts have their origins in the greed, lusts and pride that we carry inside ourselves.³⁵ Wars can be a projection of these psychological forces onto the world around us. Only if conflict is recognised and named, can it be processed and reconciled. But how can we make its roots within ourselves visible?

This is the power of the story of Moses and the bronze serpent. As the Israelites travelled through the wilderness, they lusted for the consumer luxuries that they had known in Egypt. On hearing their complaints, God sent a plague of poisonous snakes.

What might such snakes symbolise? Perhaps, their own poisons. And so, what was the cure? God told Moses to make a serpent out of bronze and raise it high on a pole. Bronze shines in the sun like gold, and the sun is an ancient symbol of God. All who looked upon the gleaming serpent were healed.

In other words, if we can look upon the light of God, we can be healed from the toxins that we carry inside ourselves. This is what it means to understand ourselves. It equips us to be the “wounded healers” in our communities.

7. Nonviolence and the Cross

Community not of this world – John 18:33-38, 19:14-16

The Peruvian liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, defines *sin* as “the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings.” Another word for that, is *violence*. Violence can take many forms: physical, sexual, emotional, as economic injustice and destruction of the natural environment. In its history, Indonesia has experienced massive violence. Violence causes “trauma”, emotional injury to the soul. Like Moses with his healing snake, violence must be recognised. It must be held up in the light of God. If it is not, it will keep on breaking open, like a septic wound that never heals.

God takes no pleasure in the death of any person.³⁶ So it was that the later prophets looked towards a future when nations “will learn war no more.”³⁷ Likewise, when the angels announced the birth of Christ, they proclaimed “peace on Earth”, and Christ would later say: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the children of God.”³⁸

In these passages, we see an evolution of insight into violence. Some early parts of the Bible were very violent, but Christ both teaches and lives nonviolence. He chooses to die rather than to kill. This can show our enemies what it means to love, and to pray for those who oppress us.³⁹ When the New Testament says to “repent”, it translates a Greek word, *metanoia*. It means, a complete transformation from within ourselves.⁴⁰ That power can touch the hearts, even of our enemies.

It is true that Christ told the disciples to go out and buy swords. But this was only symbolic. It was to fulfil the prophecy that he would be treated as like a criminal, even, as a violent revolutionary.⁴¹ Peter then cuts off the high priest's servant's ear. But Jesus commands - "No more of this!" - and heals the wound.⁴² Symbolically, he restores the enemy's capacity to hear. Without it, there can be no reconciliation.

Later, Jesus tells Pilate that his kingdom does not belong to this world. If it was worldly, his followers would take up the sword and fight.⁴³ In so choosing, he accepts the way of the Cross. He chooses to die for love rather than to kill for power. Because of his solidarity with people who were poor and marginalised, the corruptly powerful wanted him out of the way. They incited the crowd in favour of a violent revolutionary. In calling for Jesus Barabbas rather than Jesus Christ, they chose violence over nonviolence.⁴⁴

Is this defeat? No, because life is not limited to space and time. Jesus' life, and even our lives, are resurrected in God in eternity. As he said to Martha: "I am the resurrection." We can see, then, that just as Moses raised up the bronze serpent, so to gaze upon the cross in prayer shows up the toxins, or "sin", or violence of the world. Paul sums up the result in his Epistle to the Ephesians. It is *the Good News* of "peace to those of you who were far away and peace to those who were near".⁴⁵ In other words, a peace that can reconcile the peoples of the world, even across our many divisions.

In the "Passion" of such cosmic love, *the cross absorbs the violence of the world.*

8. Discernment in servant leadership

Service before self-service - Mark 10:42-45

Choosing what gives life - Deuteronomy 30:19-20

The art and practice of nonviolence cannot wait until fighting breaks out. Like removing fuel from a fire, we must work constantly to take away the roots that nourish conflict. Therefore, nonviolence is a way of life. This way of life does not depend on “domination systems” like colonialism, racism or sexism, where one group controls another. Instead, it is based on “servant leadership”. It requires that we “choose life”, so that we can “live long in the land that God has given” to our ancestors,⁴⁶ to our “father and mother”.⁴⁷

But to choose is not always easy, especially if a whole community is participating in trying to make a difficult choice. To help with this, spiritual life offers a tool called *discernment*. To discern, whether individually or collectively, is to see with spiritual eyes. At the deepest level, it is to search and listen for God’s calling. The very first words of Jesus to the disciples were: “What seek ye?”⁴⁸ That is the fundamental question of discernment. It opens us to a new heart and a new spirit.⁴⁹

When the disciples chose Matthias, they undertook a group discernment.⁵⁰ They searched for shared clarity, direction and a decision that led to action. One way in which discernment is carried out by Christian groups such as the Quakers and the Jesuits, is a process called Meeting for Clearness.

Clearness allows vision. As Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall *see* God.”⁵¹

How might such a process work? Imagine that your group has to find unity in deciding a challenging question. First, clarify and agree the wording of the question. Next, choose a facilitator to guide the meeting. Then, open it in an attitude of prayer that allows plenty of space for silent reflection.

Whenever somebody speaks to the question, encourage it come from the place of prayer and not out of the self-interest of the ego. Listen to each other but try not to argue. Ask each other open questions, ones that deepen the reflection but do not try to lead the answer. If you feel moved to speak, try not to speak from the “me”, or even from the “we”, but as God’s Holy Spirit might guide you.

After some time, the facilitator should call for stillness, and draft a minute that expresses the “sense” or mood of the meeting. This should be read back and amended if necessary. Try not to vote. Try to find an opening of the way that everyone can unite around. Try to “choose life”.

9. The Healing of the Nations

The river of life – Ezekiel 47:1-12

Never forget God’s words to Jeremiah: “If you act justly and do not oppress the alien, the orphan, the widow or shed innocent blood, then I will dwell with you in the land that I gave to your ancestors.”⁵²

Never forget your source of strength. It comes from the power “who made heaven and earth.”⁵³ The prophet Amos pictured this power as a mighty stream of righteousness, of justice, that never runs dry.⁵⁴ Ezekiel saw it as river breaking forth from underneath the threshold of the temple. It gives life and waters trees on both sides of its banks.

Notice that the water benefits the trees that grow on *both* sides. The water is not just for our own side. The crew of that Javanese ship sailing from Makassar did not just keep their food and shelter for themselves. They shared God’s providence with us, the strangers in their midst.

The New Testament closes with the same image as Ezekiel’s vision. Here, we are told that the leaves of the trees are for “the healing of the nations.”⁵⁵ We see here that community theology is about much more than just the “me”, and whether or not I will be “saved” or have prosperity in this life. It is for all people and all the nations. We must not make our Christ too small. “O taste, and see that God is good!”⁵⁶

10. The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

Like a river that cycles back into the clouds to rain again, so spiritual water is also a cycle. We too must turn back and face the source to keep it flowing. The Lord's Prayer therefore sits at the heart of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. One catechism calls it "the summary of the whole gospel."⁵⁷ But what is prayer?

Prayer is more than asking God for a list of wants. Prayer is our connecting to God, to the world around us, and to other people. Once, on a bus in the Highlands of Scotland, I got talking to an old woman. She was a Catholic sister who lived alone as a hermit. All her life she had been an obstetrician in Africa. She had worked in hospitals in war zones, often treating women who had suffered terrible violence.

"What do you do now that you are retired?" I asked her. "I study the medical and military literature of torture," she said. "And then I pray for all the people who are being tortured now."

"How do you do that?" I asked. "I do it," she said, "*by holding them in God.*"

And I understood: "That is the meaning of prayer." That is the never-ending river, its beginning and its end.⁵⁸

10.1 *Our Father ...*

Starting with the word “our”, the Lord’s Prayer is entirely in the plural. This is not a prayer about the “me” or the “my”. It is not about personal salvation. It is not focussed on whether or not “my” soul is “saved”. Instead, Jesus is showing us how to live in community in right relationship with one another.

By addressing God as “father”, we see that God is not an impersonal spirit or a distant “energy”. But neither is God an old man in the sky! Instead, the image of “father” is used to demonstrate intimacy.

However, we must not think of God as male. The book of Genesis states that we are created both male and female “in the image of God”, and in just one of its chapters, The book of Job twice pictures the creation as being born from out of God’s “womb”.⁵⁹ Jesus likens himself to a protective mother hen, and Paul says that in Christ we are beyond male and female.⁶⁰

These texts remind us that both women and men are equal before God, and God is beyond any gender. It is important to have different ways to think of God, especially because some people have had painful relationships with their biological fathers. We might remember that Moses experienced God in a burning bush, and when he asked God’s name, he was told: “I AM WHO I AM.”⁶¹ God’s essence is pure being.

10.2 *Which art in heaven ...*

These words set out God's cosmology, the relationship between heaven and earth. The outer world, or material world, is visible. It contains the Earth, the stars and distant galaxies. But there is also an inner universe, the spiritual world. It is visible only to the soul, the inner heart. It is the world that we glimpse in prayer and other spiritual experiences.

How do we know if God is real? We can only know what we experience. We can look up to the sky and start to count the stars. But how did they come into existence? Was it by magic? Or is the whole world in God's hands, and we are conscious beings inside God's cosmic vision?

Some people believe in God by faith. Others have experienced God, what is called mystical or spiritual experience. Many people have described this, often when in prayer, when alone in nature, or when close to death. We can all learn from their accounts.

Examples in the Bible are the accounts from the roads to Damascus and Emmaus.⁶² These experiences break into the material world. They offer us a glimpse of the spiritual world. They are common in the villages of Papua and amongst other indigenous peoples, where the bonds of community remain strong. The Lord's Prayer reminds us that heaven is real, and we're just walking home.

10.3 *Hallowed be thy name ...*

Here Christ calls us to holiness. To hallow is to make holy, or to recognise the holy. Holiness is a quality of God that we can feel. These words draw us into heaven's sacred space. As the Psalms remind us, we are invited to bless God's holy name.⁶³

But why does this seem like such a big issue for God? Is God like an insecure person, who needs their ego stroked? Of course not! God's needs are not human ones. Instead, this is about grace. Grace concerns the gifts of God. But like the river returning to the clouds, "the gift must always move."⁶⁴ Therefore the saying: "What goes around, comes around."

What is it that lubricates the cycles of grace, and keeps the goodness flowing? It is gratitude. Gratitude acknowledges relationships. It multiplies goodness. That is why some people "say grace" before a meal, to remember the relationships.

God's blessing does not work by manipulation, corruption or power over others. God's blessing is the free flow of grace. Reciprocity towards that is why we hallow, or bless, God's holy name.

10.4 *Thy kingdom come ...*

What is meant by “kingdom”? Jesus was speaking to the world as it was in his time. The Holy Land was not a democracy. It was a kingdom that was under colonial control from Rome. When the Lord’s Prayer says “*Thy kingdom*”, it pictures a sharp contrast between God’s realm and the corrupted realms of worldly rulers.

But what did Jesus mean by God’s “kingdom”? In God’s world, sovereignty is held in service of *the community*. As the Reformed theologian, John Calvin, put it: “Mankind is knit together with a holy knot ... we must not live for ourselves, but for our neighbours.”⁶⁵ We might translate “thy kingdom come” as: *Thy community come*.

Notice the difference that it makes if we pray: *Thy community come*. A text that started in the context of its times, now becomes alive in the context of our times. This is what it means to do “contextual theology”. After all, Jesus said his teachings are for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. He encouraged us to hear his words not just literally, but imaginatively.⁶⁶

This part of the Lord’s prayer reverses the social order of domination systems. As some translations of Psalms 146:9 word it, “The ways of the wicked he turns upside down”.

10.5 *Thy will be done ...*

What is meant by the “will” of God? Does it mean that God, like a human being, applies their willpower?

The Lord’s Prayer, like most of the New Testament, was written in the Greek language. The word that is usually translated as “will” can also mean “desire”. So it is that God *desires* that we choose life and do so by walking “the paths of righteousness”.⁶⁷

In spiritual practice, this process is called *discernment*. To discern is to seek and to see deeper and deeper levels of truth. It is like panning the gravel to find gold. It is what it means to hold a person, a concern, or a question in prayer. We might imagine such “holding in God” to be like holding a precious object tenderly in our hands. We would turn it around in the light, feel it and explore it from many different angles to come to know it better.

This is how we seek the opening of God’s way, God’s desire or “will”, that leads us unto life. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the way of heaven is called the *dharma*. In Islam, the very first *surah* of the Quran says: “Show us the straight way.”⁶⁸ The Jewish faith through the prophet Micah reminds us “to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”⁶⁹ And in Christianity we seek “the way, the truth and the life” through Christ.⁷⁰

10.6 *In earth as is in heaven ...*

This part of the Lord's Prayer is about the transfiguration of the world. It happens as God's way comes alive inside us, because the community of God, and communion with God, waits deep in the heart of every one of us.⁷¹

The prayer is central to the world's ecological crisis. Ezekiel says that we have lost the Garden of Eden, because of the scale of our business activities led us to be "filled with violence."⁷² Isaiah says that our turning away from God means that "the earth dries up and withers".⁷³ Jeremiah blames the idolatry of consumerism. The people "have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves — cracked cisterns that cannot hold water."⁷⁴ But humanity is on a long learning curve. The New Testament says that "the whole of creation groans as if in pain of childbirth", and "a time will come of the restoration of all things".⁷⁵

When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek", the Greek word that is translated "meek" means a God-given gentle strength. It is these, the gentle-strong, that will "inherit the earth".⁷⁶ In this beatitude, Jesus is drawing on a passage in the Psalms, where "the Earth" means land for the poor and oppressed.⁷⁷ This part of the prayer is for both social and ecological justice.

10.7 *Give us this day our daily bread ...*

The first thing to notice here, is the word “daily”. Again, it is helpful to look at the original language of the New Testament. The Greek translated as “daily” means bang on the essence! As a mechanic would say, “top dead centre” over what gives life!

It has been said: “If in doubt what to do with your life, feed the hungry.” But what is meant by “bread”? Bread is food for the body, but also, Christ is “the bread of life”.⁷⁸ This part of the Lord’s Prayer therefore speaks to both our physical and spiritual needs.

We see this double concern also in the beatitudes, or blessings, of Christ. Both Luke’s and Matthew’s gospels say “Blessed are the poor.” The Greek word translated as “the poor” means the utterly destitute, the poorest of the poor. But Matthew adds, “... in spirit.”⁷⁹ Both the outer life and the inner life are to be nourished.

Again, when Jesus says to feed his sheep, both are implied and the flock is the whole community.⁸⁰ Notice also, that when he raised Jarius’ daughter, straight away he told her parents to feed her.⁸¹ The gospels stress that she was twelve years old, the age of becoming a woman. In the patriarchal world of her time, what kinds of “daily bread” might have kept her spiritually alive?

10.8 *And forgive us our debts ...*

The passages on forgiveness are the heart of the Lord's Prayer. They are how *the cross absorbs the violence of the world*. This is because the Jewish people of the time believed that to atone for their sins, they had to make a blood sacrifice. The animals had to be paid for with the temple's own currency. It made the money-changers rich.

Jesus knew that the later prophets had preached against such rituals. God not want blood. God wants peace, love and justice.⁸² That is why he overturned the tables of the temple's corrupt economic system.

He made a whip, but a careful reading of the original Greek suggests that this was not for use on the people. It was to drive out the animals and save them.⁸³

Some Bibles translate the word "mistakes" as "debts". This is because the Greek suggests a bond of obligation, a debt that must be paid back. Forgiveness liberates each party from the bond. It renounces violence, and releases the flow of life back into the community.

This has been an important teaching for many Melanesian societies. Often, the payback system kept communities locked in violence to repay violence. It is why Christianity was welcomed so widely.

10.9 *As we forgive our debtors ...*

It is one thing to ask for forgiveness, but quite another to be able to grant it after we have been wronged. This part of the prayer is for help with how to love our enemies. It is essential to heal trauma, whether it is personal or in the whole community. It means breaking “spiral of violence”, the pay-back system where, as Mahatma Gandhi said during India’s struggle for independence, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

In the Hinduism of India, the knock-on effect of one action upon another is called *karma*. Therefore: “Only forgiveness breaks the law of karma.”⁸⁴ But forgiveness is not something that most of us can do as an act of will. It is not like turning on a switch. Forgiveness is a grace that comes from God. It must be asked from God, and then it blesses both the wrong-doer and the wronged.

Jesus made himself “a ransom” or, as it can also be translated, “*a liberation*” for humankind. He asked God to forgive his torturers.⁸⁵ In this way, the cross absorbs the violence of the world. The fire of love consumes it. It breaks the knock-on effects of karma, by not repaying violence with violence. It frees us from our self-created hells.

Therefore, the wise have said: “Hell could not hold such love as this.”⁸⁶

10.10 *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...*

Why should God lead us into temptation? In 2019 in the Catholic Church, Pope Francis approved a new translation, “Do not let us fall into temptation” But these words are less faithful to the original Greek.

There are times in the Bible where God allows the devil to test or tempt people. Examples include the book of Job, or the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the Devil.⁸⁷ One way of reading this part of the Lord’s Prayer, is that God gives us choice: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses: therefore, choose life”⁸⁸ That choice is our freedom.

Another reading, is that human compassion can influence the humanity of even God. An example, is where Abraham pleads for Sodom, and beats God down from fifty to just ten righteous men. Jeremiah even gets it down to one!⁸⁹ Another example, is where the gentile woman – a Canaanite or Palestinian in today’s geography – persuades Jesus to heal her daughter even though she is not Jewish.⁹⁰ Jesus was persuaded by her faith.

Sometimes, the God-inspired action of just one righteous person in a community can keep it on the straight path, and thereby, deliver it from evil.

10.11 *For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory ...*

This ending of the Lord's prayer does not appear in Luke's gospel. It is considered to be a "late addition" to Matthew, because the words are absent from the oldest manuscripts. This is why both the TB and the TB2 translations into Indonesian Bahasa place them in brackets.

What we think of as "The Bible" has been selected and edited down the generations from many different sources. Differences between manuscripts are one of the reasons why some churches say that the Bible "is" the word of God, while others say, more selectively, that it "contains" the word of God.

Jesus used the scriptures selectively. In Luke's gospel, he reads from Isaiah to announce his mission. However, when he reaches the passage that proclaims the Jubilee – that is, the social justice of "the acceptable year of the Lord" - he stops abruptly. "Then he rolled up the scroll ... and sat down."⁹¹

If he had he carried on to the end of the sentence, he would have had to proclaim "... the day of our God's vengeance, to comfort all who mourn."⁹² This would have preached "the Myth of Redemptive Violence", the payback idea that violence requires violent punishment.⁹³ But this was not Christ's teaching. He taught forgiveness as love in action.

10.12 *For ever, Amen.*

These words complete the late addition to Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer. They bring it to a powerful ending. Even though they are not in the early manuscripts, we might consider them to be led by the Holy Spirit. They sink the prayer into our hearts, from where it echoes like the ocean in a shell.

What does "for ever" (or "for ever and ever") mean? It means beyond space and time. The Greek philosopher Plato said that time is "a moving image of eternity."⁹⁴ We live out our lives "in the hands of time, falling slowly."⁹⁵ These are God's hands. As the Psalms recognise, God sees the fulness of our lives from all of heaven's eternity.⁹⁶

The final word, *Amen*, means "so be it". We might remember that Mary's response to the angel was: "Let it be"⁹⁷ Mary may not have had a God's-eye-view, but she had faith. She knew that the Holy Spirit cuts through time.

This kind of faith is vital in community work. Very often, things will go wrong. But to trust in God's time, the long wave of the ocean, gives us patience. We begin to become "participants in the divine nature."⁹⁸ The Korean theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung, says: "Asian women view God not as an individual but as a community."⁹⁹ And in all three of the faiths of Abraham – Jewish, Christian and Islamic – *Amen* is the response of the whole community together.

11. How to use this booklet

There is a child's toy called a kaleidoscope. It is a long tube, like telescope. Inside are mirrors, prisms and fragments of coloured glass. When you look through, you see a beautiful pattern. If you give a little shake, it changes to another pattern. It is the same with studying scripture. Bible study is kaleidoscopic theology. Each of us can help one another to see new patterns.

The purpose of this booklet is to strengthen the capacity of community groups in Papua and beyond. You can read it on your own, or discuss it in churches or other community groups. Study the scripture references and use them to open out discussion about your lives and the needs of others. Remember, re-vision and re-claim what is needed to give life.

This work has developed over many years with community leaders from Papua, other parts of Indonesia and other islands of the South Pacific. It is part of the work of *Training for Transformation* (TfT Papua). TfT began as liberation theology in Africa. Its founders point out that transformation (or *metanoia*) is a Christian concept, and wherever people are working “to build a just society, the Holy Spirit is at work among them.” May we recognise this in other faiths too. As our Muslim colleagues might say - *Fi Amaan Allah* - “May God protect you.” *Amen*.

فِي أَمَانَ اللَّهِ

- [1](#) Leviticus 25:23.
[2](#) Genesis 2:15; Jeremiah 2:7.
[3](#) Luke 4:17-19; Isaiah 61:1-2.
[4](#) Isaiah 58:1-9.
[5](#) Matthew 25:35-40.
[6](#) John 15:17; 1 John 4:16.
[7](#) Romans 12:5.
[8](#) John 1:9.
[9](#) 1 John 5:7-8.
[10](#) John 1:14.
[11](#) John 10:10.
[12](#) Psalms 24:1.
[13](#) John 13:34.
[14](#) Exodus 20:3.
[15](#) Luke 2:19.
[16](#) Jeremiah 29:11.
[17](#) Jeremiah 32:37-44.
[18](#) Isaiah 43:19.
[19](#) Deuteronomy 32:7.
[20](#) Proverbs 29:18; Psalms 104.
[21](#) Deuteronomy 30:3.
[22](#) Matthew 1:1-17.
[23](#) Genesis 11:28-31.
[24](#) Matthew 12:46-50.
[25](#) Galatians 3:28.
[26](#) Hebrews 13:2.
[27](#) Matthew 10:16.
[28](#) Luke 6:36-37.
[29](#) Quran, *Ma'idah* 5:48.
[30](#) Hosea 6:6.
[31](#) Ram Dass, *Walking ...*
[32](#) Luke 4:1-13.
[33](#) Numbers 31:1-24.
[34](#) Zechariah 7:10; Jeremiah 7:5-7.
[35](#) James 4:1.
[36](#) Ezekiel 18:32.
[37](#) Micah 4:3.
[38](#) Luke 2:14; Matthew 5:9.
[39](#) Matthew 5:43-44.
[40](#) Mark 1:4.
[41](#) Luke 22:35-38; Isaiah 53:7, 12.
[42](#) Luke 22:52; Matthew 26:47-56.
[43](#) John 18:36; Matthew 26:53.
[44](#) Mark 15:7; Matthew 27:15-23.
[45](#) John 11:25; Ephesians 2:14-17.
[46](#) Deuteronomy 30:19-20.
[47](#) Exodus 20:12.
[48](#) John 1:35-39.
[49](#) Ezekiel 36:26-27.
[50](#) Acts 1:45.
[51](#) Matthew 5:8.
[52](#) Jeremiah 7:6-7.
[53](#) Psalms 121:2.
[54](#) Amos 5:24.
[55](#) Revelation 22:1-2.
[56](#) Psalms 34:8 (34:9 in the TB)
[57](#) Catholic Catechism, 2761.
[58](#) Revelation 21:6.
[59](#) Genesis 1:27; Job 38:8, 29.
[60](#) Luke 13:34; Galatians 3:28.
[61](#) Exodus 3:14.
[62](#) Acts 9:3-9; 24:13-35.
[63](#) Psalms 103:1; 145:2.
[64](#) Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*.
[65](#) Calvin, on Acts 13:36.
[66](#) Matthew 13:10-16.
[67](#) Psalms 23:3.
[68](#) Quran, *al-Fatihah* 1:6.
[69](#) Micah 6:8.
[70](#) John 14:6
[71](#) Luke 17:20-21.
[72](#) Ezekiel 28:11-19.
[73](#) Isaiah 24:4-14.
[74](#) Jeremiah 2:13.
[75](#) Romans 8:18-25; Acts 3:21.
[76](#) Matthew 5:5.
[77](#) Psalms 37:11, 22.
[78](#) John 6:35.
[79](#) Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3.
[80](#) John 21:15-19.
[81](#) Mark 5:21-43.
[82](#) Isaiah 1:10-17.
[83](#) John 2:13-17.
[84](#) Panikkar, *Nine Sutras*
[85](#) Mark 10:45; Luke 23:34.
[86](#) Livi of the GalGael Trust.
[87](#) Job 1:6-8; Luke 4:1-2.
[88](#) Deuteronomy 30:19.
[89](#) Genesis 18:16-33; Jeremiah 5:1.
[90](#) Matthew 15:21-28
[91](#) Luke 4: 20-21.
[92](#) Isaiah 61:1-2; (58:6).
[93](#) Walter Wink, *Engaging*
[94](#) Plato, *Timaeus*, 37c-e
[95](#) Moody Blues, *Candle of Life*.
[96](#) Psalms 33:12-15.
[97](#) Luke 1:38.
[98](#) 2 Peter 1:4.
[99](#) Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*.

The Lord's Prayer

(KJV-based Version)

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father, which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever.

Amen.

Introduction by Alex Rumaseb

Chair of the Board of Training for
Transformation Papua (YP3SP)



Spirituality is our deep connection through God to one another. We love one another, because God is love. Therefore, the meaning of community is to be members of one another. The way to build spirituality is to build community in action. This is real sustainable development. It walks in God's path.

This booklet has been written by a friend from Scotland who brings 15 years' experience working with communities and the provincial government in Papua, Indonesia. The booklet explores how Papuans relate to: Land, community, and spirituality; Strangers in our midst; Ego, power, and leadership; Facing conflict in society; Nonviolence and the cross; and the Healing of the nations. It concludes with an unfolding of the Lord's Prayer.

Such an approach to spirituality guides our lives in close connection to the spiritual life, and this, so that our ongoing differences in Papua might be resolved through God's love.

Jayapura, 2026