



**A THEO-CULTURAL EXPLORATION ON THE SACREDNESS
OF LAND IN CONTEMPORARY LAURU CONTEXT**

BY

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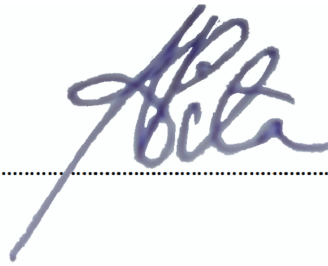
DECLARATION

As required by the University of KwaZulu-Natal regulations, I do hereby declare that the content presented in this dissertation unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, is my own original work that has never been submitted to any other University for any other degree award. Original ideas that have been borrowed during the course of writing this dissertation or any other forms of citations and references have been fully acknowledged to the best of my knowledge.

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Date. **31-08-2019**

DEDICATION

This Thesis is first and foremost dedicated to Rev. Leslie Boseto and his Beloved wife, Marama Hazel Boseto. As the founding father of “Grassroots Theology of the Land” in Solomon Islands and the wider Melanesian Communities, Rev. Leslie Boseto has offered invaluable traditional, theological and biblical insights on the Sacredness of Land as our mother, source of life and divine gift of God, that is much more relevant and contextually meaningful to our indigenous context in Contemporary Laurus and the wider Oceania Context.

Second, this Thesis is dedicated to you my beloved wife Doreen Qilanoba and children, Aletheia Ruth, Belinda Yahdiremsaar, Judy Loukras, lovely Iulah, and DoNeil Qemukula. You have persevered staying home without my presence as a father for a year during the course of writing this dissertation. In times of hardship, trials, hunger, sickness and challenges, you all remained calm, true and faithful to our family calling in God’s vineyard as we together serve him as family.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this Thesis to my *hero* and father Martin Luther Pitakaji, and my late mother Ruth Mabevavini, who raised me through the Grace of God to become who I am today.

All to the Praise, Glory and honor of the Holy Triune God.

“Do Not Separate us from our Land” (Leslie Boseto)

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This work is a result of collective efforts and contributions made by friends, family members, and my collaborations and mutual interactions in academic discussions both formal and informal, with Lecturers and international students of the University of Kwazulu Natal.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BPSI: British Protectorate Solomon Islands

CPG: Choiseul Provincial Government

ESSI: Ecological Solutions Solomon Islands

JPIC: Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation

LLCTC: Luru Land Conference of Tribal Community

NGO: Non-Government Organization

NLBT: New Living Bible Translation

SPREP: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program

UCSI: United Church in Solomon Islands

WCC: World Council of Churches

ABSTRACT

The study focused on the Island of Lauru to explore a Theo-Cultural Sacredness of Land in the Contemporary Lauru Context in Solomon Islands. A rapid decline of Solomon Islands rainforests due to unsustainable logging activities throughout the country has been recently confirmed in studies and reports by the Ministry of Forestry and Research, and further by Non-governmental organizations working in the country. During a recent *National Resource Management Symposium* held in 2017, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Forestry and Research reported for instance, that in the year 2016 alone, a total of One hundred fifty six licenses were approved for logging operations throughout the country, of which the Island of Lauru alone had twenty eight. This calls for a critical exploration on its impact on the sacredness of the land resource in the region.

This study held that due to the massive unsustainable harvesting of rainforests by multinational companies, most of the islands in which logging operations are happening have experienced ecological crises. This includes but not limited to crises such as environmental pollution, river pollution, dying of coral reefs in the coastal areas and land degradation. The study argued that the current massive exploitation of natural resources especially in the area of logging activities implies that the land has been perceived as merely a commodity for economic gain. This can also be linked to colonial residues and capitalistic ideologies of uncompromising profit-making attitude, which have had great impact on the mindset of the Lauru people, among whom this study focuses.

It is in this very context that this study under the title “A Theo-Cultural Exploration on the Sacredness of Land in the Contemporary Lauru Context” emerged to re-visit the traditional and cultural values of the Sacredness of Land in Lauru. In doing so, the study moved further to integrate traditional and cultural belief systems with sound theological understanding of land in relation to Christian beliefs and practices. Although the thesis mainly focused on the Island of Lauru, it also made reference to findings of scholars and researchers regarding how different people from other parts of the world viewed the importance and sacredness of land.

This study utilized the theological view and concept of the sacredness of land as proposed by Leslie Boseto (1995a). According to Boseto, the Sacredness of land has its roots in divine origin, rooted in the Creator and Sustainer of life. This theological approach upholds that the sacredness

of land is embedded in land itself as the very source of life. Therefore, this study argued for the sustenance of land and natural resources as custodians of life and not for mere economic gain.

KEY WORDS

Church, Lauru Island, Theo-Cultural, Sacredness the Land, Solomon Islands

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Church

The church in the context of this study refers to a Christian community of Faith/believers who play or ought to perform an important role of stewardship over God's creation. This Christian community of believers constitutes specifically the denominational institution within the United Church in Solomon Islands and its congregational members in the context of Lauru Island.

Lauru Island

The Study purposefully refers to Lauru Island which is also known as Choiseul Island. The name "Choiseul" was given by the colonial authorities having named the Island after an 18th century French military officer Étienne François, duc de Choiseul. Lauru Island is one of the many islands that constitute Solomon Islands. It is located in western part of the country-Solomon Islands between 6.5° and 7.5° S latitude and 156.5° and 157.5° E longitude. In this study we opted for the name "Lauru Island" instead of "Choiseul" because in the local vernacular, this island is known as Lauru Island by the local people.

Theo-Cultural

Theo-Cultural is a coined term in this study to refer to viewing God in cultural lenses. It proposes seeing God and understanding God through human cultural perspectives.

Sacredness of the Land

This phrase is used in this study to acknowledge that the land we refer to in this study has a direct connection to God as creator. The study therefore uses this phrase to emphasize that land should be treated with great respect as it is sacred.

Solomon Island

Solomon Islands is a name of the country to which Luru Island belong. It is one of the countries within the Pacific region countries. The country consists of many Islands that lie within the Solomon Sea.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 General introduction

This chapter focuses on some of the key motivational factors that led the researcher to the study area of a Theo-Cultural Exploration on the sacredness of land in contemporary Lauru context. The chapter introduces the general background of study context; states the key research question, sub-questions, and briefly outlines the objectives of the study. Further, in this chapter the study states both the theoretical framework and the research methodology which guided the study. The chapter concludes by presenting a general outline of the study as presented in various chapters.

This study focused mainly on the island of Lauru, and also explored what other scholars are saying regarding the sacredness of land in other parts of the Pacific region and the world at large.¹ My intention as the researcher was to further re-visit and explore the people of Lauru and their traditional beliefs on how they perceived and related to the land in the past and present. Further to this, the study critically examined some of the factors and modern concepts that the researcher assumed may have influenced and shifted the mind-set of Lauru people on how they perceived and related to the land in contemporary Lauru communities. Moreover, this study further probed and analyzed some of the negative impacts of logging activities in the island of Lauru. These activities are mainly carried out by multinational companies operating on the island for selfish economic gains under the cover of development rhetoric.

While giving the contextual background to study, I made use of two dialects from the Island of Lauru namely *Babatana* and *Varisi*. This was subject to a need for further illustration of the discussion in my local context. Further, I discussed certain key themes pertinent to the general background to the study. These are as follows:

- Sacredness

¹ Lauru Island also has a western imposed name called Choiseul. However, throughout my discussion I prefer to use the indigenous name Lauru, unless I cited any source that may refer to the name of the Island in its western imposed name

- Mother Earth
- Degradation
- Ecosystem
- Environment
- Indigenous belief system
- Colonialism
- Capitalism

Additionally, I discussed the gap difference between the past generations and the current generation's perception on Land. It should be noted that in contemporary Lauru, there is a big gap between how the younger or the new generation perceive and relate to the land, and how our forefathers perceived the same in the past, or how the Elders in communities currently perceive and relate to the Land. This gap difference on land perceptions, points to a great shift in the mind-set of contemporary Lauru people and the past generations.

According to Boseto (1995), our forefathers perceived land as mother and source of life, whereas contemporary Lauru people recognize land as mere asset and commodity for economic gain. This shift of mind-set that shapes the mentality of contemporary Lauru people has led many tribal groups to allow their traditional tribal land for multinational companies to enter and do logging activities.

1.2 The Context (Study Background)

Lauru Island is one of the Islands in Solomon Islands that has experienced the challenge and impact of climate change due to the ongoing logging activities taking place in the Island (Lipsett-Moore, *et al.* 2010). The incoming of foreign multinational companies, and unsustainably harvest the remaining resources of the island creates unfavorable context that I see as problematic for Lauru people.² This prompted me to find ways in which I could contribute to the academic discussion on this area of study by raising the topic on a *Theo-Cultural Exploration on the*

² In this research I situate myself as an insider, because I come from this region where I also minister as a Pastor. I have personally experienced these activities for a long time in Laura Island and have come to knowledge concerning the way how multinational companies operate in harvesting trees in large numbers under the disguise of development, job creation and economic growth.

Sacredness of Land in contemporary Lauru context. I believed this would, to some extent, help the people of Lauru to revisit and see for themselves the Theo-cultural and traditional values of the sacredness of their land, and how the land was historically respected and guarded by our ancestors as mother and source of life.

Lipsett-Moore, *et al.* note that,

In the past two decades, commercial logging has changed the physical and social landscape of Lauru, and as we look to the future, we must prepare ourselves for the growing threat of climate change that must be tackled at local, provincial, national and global scale (2010: iv).

Logging industry has been regarded as one of the major contributions to the economy of Solomon Islands. Katovai, *et al.* (2015) pointed out that logging as an economic activity has always been regarded and seen as one of the major contributions to the national economy of the country from the past till now. While Katovai *et al.* see the economic benefits brought about by the logging industry in the country on the one hand, the scholars on the other hand hold reservations regarding the process. They hold that logging activities are at times major causes of tribal conflicts amongst tribal members due to the dishonest and corrupt practices it involves along the process. Katovai *et al.* further argue that most of the conflicts currently taking place within tribal groups in the context of Lauru Island have to do with the so-called chiefs of the tribes and their failure to consult tribal members on land matters.

Usually, there is a tendency of giving preference to individual interests over the public good. For instance, a few people who claimed to be chiefs tend to hold private discussions with managing directors of multinational companies that end up in bribery. Through these private meetings the corrupt chiefs are paid and in return, they sign agreements that give consent for their customary land to go through timber right hearing. Fraenkel (2004) additionally admits to this state of affairs. He adds that most Asian companies that venture into the logging industry in Solomon Islands, practice bribes and cunning schemes in order to gain easy access to logging licenses and timber cutting rights. It should be noted that the problem here does not only affect local people but also the environment and human population. Mataki, *et al.* holds,

Logging operations in Choiseul are a major drive of degradation of land and aquatic ecosystems. Further, the influx of foreign logging workers, combined with logging

royalties into the local economy, has contributed to anti-social behaviors such as alcoholism and teenage pregnancy (Mataki, *et al.* 2013:15).

Mataki *et al.* further express that there exists such problems as ecological exploitations. Here, rivers are polluted by oil spillover from the company machineries which end up polluting coastal areas and corals. Moreover, the operating companies do not care about what they left behind after their operations. Rusty irons remains of old machines and boats are left lying in most areas where logging activity takes place. There exist several areas where these waste materials can be located. In my experience, I have sighted Moli region and So'po'zai (Supizae) Island which is next to Taro Island the provincial Headquarter of Lauru Island. In these regions I identified abandoned rusty oil tanks most probably used formerly for fuel storage, an old bulldozer, abandoned log trucks, and an old tug boat all of which seem to have laid there for several years.

Another major problem that is very common amongst the tribal groups of Lauru indigenous people, is the formulation of false genealogies, which gave rise to more conflicts. Some newly formed genealogies exclude others within the same tribe and do not even recognize their birthrights as members of the same tribal grouping. Graham Mark (2017:4) termed this practice as “exclusion strategy”.³ Prior to the coming of these multinational companies to the Island of Lauru, there was never such a thing as exclusion strategy as mentioned by Mark. This exclusion strategy is a phenomenon first introduced as logging activities took place in the Island of Lauru (Mark 2017). This is a new culture of excluding certain tribal members, denying their tribal and traditional rights as members of the same tribe. I am strongly convinced that this new culture of excluding others was purely motivated by human greed, by people and so-called tribal chiefs, who miserably failed to recognize the sacredness of the land that unites them to their tribal members. Mark further laments about the logging practices in Lauru Island; “Our biggest threat in Lauru today is Asian intrusion. Today we watch helplessly as loggers come and go taking turns in raping our motherland” (Mark (2017:4).

One of the major contributing factors that lead to inviting many logging companies to the small Island of Lauru is the western notion of wealth and riches, which is very deceptive in nature. A

³ The exclusion strategy is a phrase used by Graham Mark during his address to the LLCTC Executive Meeting on the 3-4 October 2017, in Taro the Provincial Headquarter of Lauru, in which he refers to tribal leaders whom because of pride and arrogance excluded other tribal members in the same tribe by formulating false genealogies.

critical reflection on the economic history and political leadership of Solomon Islands reveals as Fraenkel mentions, a clear trace of colonial residue (Fraenkel 2004). This is associated with the very early trading of such assets as iron tools, tobacco, and calico which had great impacts on Luru Islanders' way of thinking. The people here began to see wealth in terms of monetary economy and materialism brought by Western foreigners. This notion of seeing wealth and riches in the form of monetary economy and materialism continues to survive as a prevalent western cultural ideology in our contemporary society in Luru Island. This impact on the people's ways of seeing and thinking does not only occur in the area of wealth and riches but also in other areas such as in the food we eat today. For instance, most people tend to prefer processed canned foods and rice from shops to local foods direct from gardens. Canned beef, tin fish labeled as '777', noodles, cream biscuits, butter, sweet cakes and so forth are like real food to contemporary Luru people (Keykavousi *et al.* 2016:194).

Jansen and Qusa (2010) affirm this historical fact in relation to diet. They state that the inhabitants of Luru Island have lost their local traditional food diet over the years and have opted for processed canned foods. This can be described as 'a Western invasion of local indigenous mindset'. In the case of logging practices, the common phrase echoed by many so-called chiefs is, *Ma gu'ki ne to nguni vasiki kesae lua ko bovoeni sinani ma le ba ramu*. This is in Babatana dialect, and in Varisi dialect, *Ma ge zaqe to kadia kesana pua qa batu ne nara le ba ramu*. To translate this into English, it simply means, 'Let me eat some of the money out from the land I was entrusted or appointed to be chief over before I die'.⁴ Another phrase so common today in the Luru Island is: In Babatana dialect, *Kola va baroe aqu to ba?* In Varisi, *Qa za va baruekigokaega*. In English it means, 'I never make garden there'.⁵ The motive behind this phrase is this; so why worry about this land? It is too far for us; let us give it to the logging company. This phrase has always been echoed in the context where the custodians of land live in a very far geographical location from the land with its virgin forest, in which they have traditional rights over.

Regarding food consumption preferences, most people in contemporary Luru describe processed canned foods as Fresh. The normative is to bring all the local foods from the garden, sell it in markets, and later use the earned money to buy bags of rice, sugar, tea leaves and other

⁴ Own translation

⁵ Own translation

processed canned food. When strong appetite arises one would easily hear common phrases as these: In Babatana, *Mara gu'ki latini samani ne, ba tini coni bipi ne*, in Varisis, you will hear it in this way, *Tara ge zaqe go tinisamani ne, ba tini miti maqa ne*, and in English it means, "I wish I could eat tin fish, or canned beef"...Instead of craving for fresh food from the sea, river or land, they opt for processed canned food. The changing of people's mindset and the attitudinal behavior of favoring Westernized processed canned foods more than our local food supply has also influenced Luru people's behaviors more into a monetary economy activities to make a living.

Zoleveke one of Luru's elders, strongly emphasizes the importance and sacredness of the Land. He points out that land was for the community to toil, cultivate, make gardens and get the most out of it for survival (Zoleveke1979:25-45). Further, he contends that Land sustains human life and therefore individuals ought to protect, preserve, care for it and sustainably harvest its resources.

Another major problem faced by the people of Luru is the high rate of land disputes. Mostly it is the people from the same tribal group who take each other to court. Conflicts over land have become common in contemporary Luru situation. To worsen the situation, only the provincial government executives have been legally recognized by the Solomon Islands constitution to make judgments over land disputes. In 2015 the Institute of Public Administration (IPAM) in Solomon Islands stated that the high court in Solomon Islands has high respect for the Solomon Islands constitution than the customary laws of the indigenous people.⁶ This usually serves to the advantage of multinational companies which are usually favored by the government institutions. Fraenkel (2014:39) rightly notes that the powerful who owns multinational companies, can easily bribe provincial executives. Here they would seek the country's executives' decisions in their favour. At the end, these companies are granted favor to enter disputed land and continue with logging activities. It can be stated therefore, that in conditions such as these, the powerful and those who have money always emerge victorious even in courts of law, simply due to the effects of bribery.

⁶ The Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) 'knowing your Public Service course Module', (2015) has clearly stated, that if there is any disagreements between what customary laws say and what the constitution or Act of Parliament says, the latter will prevail.

There are two more problematic areas that I would like to discuss under this heading, the first being the so-called ‘My Land’ expression, and the second is the practice of private advance of royalty money from the Company by the so-called chiefs, without the consent and knowledge of the tribal group. The First is the practice of land ownership claim that has been influenced by the concept of individualism, while the former is the attitude and common practice of modern day so-called chiefs in contemporary Luru context.

According to Zoleveke, (1979) in the traditional understanding of Land ownership in Luru, land was neither owned by an individual person, nor was it owned by the few minority of people such as nuclear or extended families. The land was always owned by tribal groups of people. Elsewhere, this position is affirmed by Lipsett-Moore, *et al.* (2010) who also asserts that land rights and ownership is always based on tribal land ownership.

However, due to the influence of human greed that was embedded in the foreign concept of individualism, selfish claims such as “*My Land*” emerged within the contemporary Luru context.⁷ It should be noted that chiefs nowadays have worked very hard to exclude members of their own tribe from the portion of land they are entrusted to under the notion ‘*My Land*’. Hence, “my land” expression leads to this attitude of silent advancing of tribal money from logging companies without prior consent of tribal members. Katovai *et al.* points out these greedy attitudes for one’s economic gain as he puts it this way:

Corruption among logging companies and various sectors of society has also contributed to excessive logging in Solomon Islands. This involves opportunists (*i.e.*, influential groups or individuals who cunningly pursue any foreseeable logging opportunities to make financial gains (Katovai *et al.* 2015:722).

Kabutaulaka (2001) contends that in the past, Solomon Islanders were anti-logging people who loved to keep and maintain their forests in a sustainable manner, but in our contemporary context, even traditional landowners contribute to the depletion of our forests by inviting many logging companies for massive extraction of our remaining rainforests.

As expressed earlier in this chapter, the occurrence of western invasion of the indigenous mindset by the foreign capitalist system has somewhat influenced the indigenous people’s

⁷ The notion of ‘My Land’ signified a claim of sole ownership of the said Land portion. This also meant that whoever claims to own such a Land under the “My Land” notion could do with it as pleases.

perception over land from sacredness and source of life to mere commodity for economic gain. According to Van Zeeland, this Capitalist system was always driven by greed for one's self economic interests. The scholar holds:

In the neoclassical economic analysis, the starting point is individual, the homo-economicus, whose human action is governed by self-interest and utility maximization. This ontological assumption has resulted in an economic system of corporate capitalism based on greed and driven by the laws of profit maximization and competition, as well as capitalist accumulation (Van Zeeland 2016:4).

1.3 Research problem statement

Lauru Island region of Solomon Island faces ecological injustices and land degradation due to the exploitative nature of human activities, among which is the unsustainable operations of the logging industry. The logging industry has attracted multinational companies that operate in harvesting trees in large numbers under the disguise of development, job creation and economic growth. This has negatively impacted the ecosystem, causing ecological injustices and placed the wellbeing of human beings at risk. But the current context of ecological injustice in this region could as well be associated with the diminishing tendencies of the community and its leaders to perceive land as sacred, source of life and a resource not only for the present generation but also the future. Given these experiences, this study proposed to revisit and explore the sacredness of land in Lauru Island through Theo-cultural lenses compatible with the Christian faith. This was proposed with the view of reawakening ecological responsibility among the Lauru people for the protection and preservation of Lauru Island as their home and the home to future generations.

1.4 Key Research Question and Sub-Questions

In view of the above problem statement, the study was setup to answer the following key research question:

To what extent are Theo-Cultural Lauru Perspectives impeding or advancing a responsible ecological stewardship?

In answering the key research question, the study was guided by three other sub-questions. These questions were stated as follows:

- I. What is the nature and extent of ecological degradation in contemporary Lauru?
- II. What are the traditional beliefs and cultural values about the sacredness of land in Lauru and why are they imperative for a positive response to evade the ecological degradation in Lauru?
- III. How could Lauru's Traditional beliefs and cultural values about the land be used to construct a Theo-Cultural response to contemporary ecological degradation in Lauru context?

A thorough articulation and reflection on the above mentioned key research question and the sub-questions guided the researcher to move further into setting out the objectives of the study. These objectives were directly related and linked to the research questions. This is elaborated below.

1.5 Objectives of the study

There were three main objectives of this study. First of all, the study sought to gain fair insights in order to understand the nature of ecological degradation in contemporary Lauru context. Secondly, the study sought to explore and interrogate the traditional beliefs and cultural values about the sacredness of land in Lauru context; and finally, the study sought to ascertain the extent to which Lauru's traditional beliefs about the sacredness of the land could be used to construct a Theo-Cultural response to contemporary ecological degradation in Lauru context. I anticipated that by thoroughly answering the key research question, sub-questions the objectives of the study would be achieved. Further, this would academically contribute towards an exploration of possible alternatives in addressing the current ecological injustices in the contemporary Lauru context. In the following part I present the theoretical framework through which the study was approached.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was adopted from Leslie Boseto's concept of *Grassroots Theology of the Land*.

The Grassroots Theology of the Land is a theory conceptualized by Leslie Boseto in the context of Luru Island, and has gained recognition in the wider Melanesian communities. The Theory demands practical actions by way of inviting tribal Chiefs, elders and ordinary local people of Luru to actively participate in formal meetings and conferences facilitated by the indigenous Nongovernmental organizations founded by Leslie Boseto known as the Luru Land Conference of Tribal Community.

Boseto (1995a:15-35), firmly grounded his theological concept of perceiving the Land as sacred on these three key theological viewpoints. First, Boseto argued that the land has its divine origin in God as the Creator. Acknowledging God as the supreme ruler and creator of the Universe including the earth is a biblical affirmation of declaring the sacredness of the land since it has its divine Origin in God.

Second, the land acts as our mother by breast feeding the past, present and will continue to do so for future generations. We live on the land, we till the land, we cultivate the land and get our daily food for survival from the land. Third, the scholar affirms that the land welcomes us back and embraces us into the earth's womb when we die. We were created from the earth, (*Adamah*) and to the earth we will return. These three fundamental key theological viewpoints led Boseto to affirm the Sacredness of the Land in Luru context (Boseto 1995b).

Boseto's understanding in conceptualizing the theory of Grassroots Theology of the Land, seems to be both traditionally and theologically awakening in the Luru context. It echoes a clear message of how Luru people should perceive and relate to their motherland. Warmback affirms Boseto's theological approach on land as having its divine origin in God. He holds that "a christian understanding of social struggles and development must begin with an affirmation that this is God's earth, and all that we seek to do in, with and to it, should be done out of this recognition" (Warmback 2017:75).

In the contemporary Luru context the study was motivated by a need to offer a theological framework that would to some extent help the people of Luru revisit their own traditional

values and theologically integrate these traditional values in the light of what the scriptures teach. It was anticipated that this would trigger among the Lauru people an attitude of respect to creation and perceive the sacredness of the land. Hence, Boseto's theoretical framework on Grassroots theology of the land was evaluated to provide a point of departure to further explore and provide a Theo-cultural response to the contemporary ecological degradation in Lauru context. In the next part, the methodology followed in this study is elaborated.

1.7 Research Methodology

This study followed a non-empirical qualitative research design. Qualitative research as Hancock explains, "is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are" (Hancock 1998:2). In qualitative research, "subjective experiences and meanings" of a social phenomenon plays a crucial role (Strydom and Bezuidenhout 2016:172). In this study however, subjective experiences were subjected to thorough critical analysis with existing literature so as to minimize trends of bias. One of the advantages of carrying out a qualitative research is that it exposes the researcher to "richness and depth of data, gathered from complex and multi-faceted phenomena in a specific context" (Strydom and Bezuidenhout 2016:172).

In my approach to this study I used a bibliographical research method. Bibliographical research is qualitative in nature and when used by scholars it employs a social interpretative paradigm of research. It involves social reconstructions of human life stories by using data sources such as biographical narratives, documents, video recordings, and photographs. Relevant data from these sources is then exposed to thorough critical interpretation according to a particular criterion in line with the key research question of a particular investigation.

Regarding this particular study, I used Richard Osmer's (2008) framework as a tool to facilitate my data interpretation and in answering the key research question. Osmer's framework assisted me to describe, interpret, and respond to the current ecological exploitation and land degradation in the contemporary Lauru context. In the following paragraphs I indicate briefly how Osmer's framework was engaged in the study.

Descriptive: Here I discussed the real problems, and what is currently going on in contemporary Lauru context. A description of real problems affecting people's lives and the natural

environment helped to guide me on how to engage the study's key research question and sub-questions; this was also in order to respond to the ecological issues and land degradation in contemporary Luru context.

Interpretive: I engaged the study in discussing the ecological implication of colonialism and capitalism as this has also become the visible reality in the contemporary Luru context. The foreign concept of wealth that has been introduced by the western monetary economy system along with the capitalistic ideology of wealth accumulation in the form of money, was also discussed as it contributes a lot to the changing of Luru people's mindset.

Normative: This part helped in forming the focus of my study, whereby I discussed and presented some cultural and religious tools or resources that could be used to address and resist the current ongoing trend of ecological exploitations and land degradation taking place in the island of Luru. Using sacredness of the land as my key concept, I then constructed a Theo-cultural response for the purpose of doing justice to creation and respecting our land in the island of Luru.

Praxis: Here, the study focused on practical ways of finding and suggesting alternatives to address the ecological problems identified in contemporary Luru context. It is more on the question of what can be done and how should the church and Christian people of Luru react and respond to the ongoing ecological problems as a way of finding a solution to, concerns of ecological injustice and land degradation affecting people's lives in Luru.

Further, I consulted literature that deal with the specific area on Land theology. This also included a review of reports and assessments done by the government and non-governmental organizations on the impacts of climate change and logging activities in the region of Luru.

Scholars who study the early Christian mission and colonial powers into the Melanesian region were also consulted. This was done to help the study present a fair understanding on how the early Christian mission, and colonialism contributed to the changing lifestyle and mindset of indigenous Luru people.

The study was divided into four phases.

Phase presented a brief discussion on the historical background of Lauru Island and the problems that contemporary Lauru people face today. Phase two of the study discussed the early encounters of Lauru people with both the Christian mission and the colonial powers. Phase three presented the negative impacts of global economic forces in the area of logging activities. Phase four dealt with the Mission of the church in responding to the current ecological degradation in Lauru.

1.8 Chapters outline

The study is divided into five chapters according to the following order of sequence.

Chapter one.

This is an introductory chapter to the study. It presents a general overview of problems arising in the contemporary Lauru context and raises key a research question, and sub-questions to area of study. The main objectives of the study, theoretical framework and the research methodology are also covered in this introductory chapter.

Chapter two

In Chapter two, the study moves further to explore the historical background of Lauru Island and its indigenous people, their cultural practices and ways of life that is changing a lot during the course of time. The people of Lauru encounter with early missionaries plus the impacts of global economic forces during the Post-colonial era will also be paid attention to, in this chapter.

Chapter three

In this chapter the study discusses in detail the nature and extent of ecological exploitation and land degradation that is affecting people's lives and the natural environment in contemporary Lauru context. Further, the chapter integrates Boseto's "Grassroots Theology of the Land" with Lauru's traditional beliefs about the sacredness of the Land, which then helps to frame a Theo-Cultural response to the contemporary ecological degradation in Lauru context.

Chapter four

Chapter four presents a way forward for the church and people of Lauru. It engages this through a theology of biblical stewardship and suggests possible alternatives for the church as an agent of

responsible ecological stewardship in contemporary Lauru context. The chapter ends with how the church should engage in its mission to respond and address the current and rampant ecological injustices in Lauru Island.

Chapter five

Chapter five is a concluding chapter for study. It presents a brief conclusion and a general summary of the study. It further presents a few recommendations that may be considered for future scholarship in the area of this study.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided the general overview of the context and the study's background of which the contemporary Lauru Island and its people are currently facing the challenges of ecological exploitation and land degradation. While tribal groups of the island were discovered to have resorted to logging activities by inviting multinational companies to harvest their resources, this behavior was nevertheless associated to the shifting mindset of the islander's perception from viewing land as sacred to land commoditization. It has been discovered in this chapter that in the contemporary Lauru, there is a clear evidence of the changing landscape of the island as many multinational companies are currently engaging in their economic activities through logging operations. Further, it was a finding of this chapter that many logging companies in the Island of Lauru, as well as tribal groups in this region have experienced high rate of land disputes amongst themselves. In the following chapter, the study explores the historical background of Lauru Island and its indigenous people.

Chapter Two

THE ISLAND OF LAURU

2.1 Introduction.

The previous chapter presented the general introduction to the entire study. This chapter explores the historical background of Lauru Island and its indigenous people. It pays attention to the people of Lauru cultural practices and their ways of life. The chapter then further explores the arrival of Western forces such as the colonial powers and the early Christian mission encounters, and their impact on the experiences of the indigenous people in Lauru region. This chapter further explores the modern capitalist system and critically examines its relationship with the State and how this plays in informing the current state of affairs in the region of Lauru with regard to the escalated ecological degradation.

2.2 Historical background of Lauru Island

The attitude of Lauru people in the past, their way of thinking, their way of life, how they conducted themselves according to their traditional values and cultural norms is fading away. Their traditional religious perceptions of the sacredness of land has been invaded and replaced by foreign concepts and Western ideologies that promote a capitalistic society in contemporary Lauru context. This fading away of traditional values, cultural norms and the indigenous belief systems could be understood to result from what I described in the previous chapter, as “*Foreign or western invasion of indigenous way of life*”. Hence, the islanders have experienced social disintegration within family structures, economic pressure and ecological exploitation on the natural environment, of which land degradation is a major issue. It is in this modern context of change that my key research question will be employed as a tool to explore and respond to the contextual reality in contemporary Lauru.

The Solomon Islands map geographically located the island of Lauru in the northernmost end. According to Jansen and Qusa (2010:3), Lauru Island is one of the six biggest Islands in the archipelago and extends between 6 degrees 35 minutes south and 156 degrees 23 minutes East

(Astrolabe Point) to 7 degrees 32 minutes south and 157 degrees 53 minutes east (Hamilton Island).

Jansen and Qusa (2010) further mention that Lauru Island is a long narrow Island, which is approximately 30-40 kilometers wide, and about 120-130 kilometers long, that has the total land area of 3296km². The Island's highest mountain is known as Mt. Maetabe, which is 1, 060 meters above sea level and is next to a high plateau of 480km²

Before the coming of explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries, the Island of Lauru was already inhabited by the natives, who named the Island' Lauru. It was when external visitors sighted the Island of Lauru, that they gave it a foreign name. Kwai (2017) mentions that indigenous people of the sea of islands were said to be settled in the Solomon archipelago prior to the western exploration. They settled for some thousands of years before they were discovered by western explorers.

Jansen and Qusa (2010) recorded that the first Portuguese Navigator by the name of Mendana was the first European explorer to have sighted the Island of Lauru in 1568. According to Jack-Hinton (1962) Alvaro de Mendana, an explorer first sighted the Island of Lauru in a 1567-68 expedition as he was on the journey exploring the pacific sea of Islands. He first named it *San Marcos* since he first saw the Island from a distance on Saint Mark's day. Macdonald(2009) also stated that two hundred years after, in 1768 Louise de Bougainville named the Island Choiseul, after the name of the then French Foreign Sena. According to Green, (1976) around 1800s the indigenous people of Solomon Islands began to experience the new encounter of foreigners to their shores. This is the period where a new western culture was said to be introduced to the islanders. The Island of Lauru was said to be first colonized when Germany established its protectorate over some parts of the western Solomon. Fraenkel holds,

The boundaries of the modern Solomon Islands nation-state were a creation entirely of imperial design. Germany established a protectorate over neighboring New Guinea in 1844 that was extended eastwards to include Bougainville, the Shortlands, Choiseul and Isabel (Fraenkel, 2004:20).

However, the Island of Lauru was then taken over by British rule in the later years. Belshaw (1950) asserts that British declared protectorate over the Islands nations of Solomon Islands in 1893, purposely to put an end to the illegal labor trade during those days, as people were forced

to leave their islands to work in Sugar plantations in Queensland, Fiji and Samoa. In the following part we focus on the indigenous people of Lauru and their culture.

2.3 Indigenous People of Lauru and their Culture

During the Pre-European contact era, the people of Lauru Island lived on the Island for several thousands of years. Spriggs, (1997) pointed out that in the general knowledge of Pacific history, there are two waves of migration. The first wave was that of the non-Austronesia people. These are the Papuan who came around some fifty thousand (50,000) years ago from South East Asia to Australia (Aborigines), Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The second wave of migration was said to have occurred in around some three thousand six hundreds (3,600) years ago from South China, Taiwan to Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. In Choiseul, there was no archaeological evidence on the first group, but since some concrete evidences like *lapita pot* were found in Guadalcanal, they might have gone through Choiseul after the second group arrived at Choiseul around two thousand five hundred (2,500) years ago and intermarried with the first group.

The theory of waves of migration into the Melanesian region was believed to be the early history of how Lauru people came to settle in the Island of Lauru. According to Wardlow (1986), back in the olden days Lauru people never lived in the coastal area due to fear of their enemies. During those days the practice of head-hunting was a normal way of life throughout the western part of the Solomon Islands. Hence, Lauru people lived in mountainous ridges and even below the valleys but inland. They lived in their tribal groupings and cultivated the soil by doing gardening mainly for food production.

Communal relationship and ways of life is the foundation of living for Lauru people. Mataki *et al.* contend, “Before the arrival of the missionaries during the heights of the headhunting days, the majority of people in Choiseul lived in small groups in temporary small villages built on tribal land, usually inland to protect them from the enemies” (Mataki *et al.* 2013:11). Living together in a communal lifestyle encouraged Lauru people to work in their portion of land, protect and preserve their tribal land boundaries.

Jansen and Qusa (2009) mention that the people of Lauru celebrated life together in their traditional crop harvesting and deeply respected their ancestral gods. Acknowledging the Supreme Being would be a clear indication that Lauru people were religious prior to the coming of missionaries to the Island. People had their traditional sacred space to worship and also make sacrifices to their gods. In the light of this cultural and traditional context that speaks about religious deities, there were many gods with their own sacred names belonging to each particular tribe.

Boseto (1995b:5) affirms the cultural and traditional understanding of Lauru people's indigenous belief system by stating that the God, whom the missionaries came to introduce to our forefathers, was not just in heaven or somewhere up above but very much with the people, as this God resides in creation. The scholar continues to argue that our ancestors long ago prior to the missionary era, paid homage to good spirits of their ancestors and the Supreme Being beyond them, who resides within the creation (Boseto 1995). Hence, Lauru people in the ancient times were very religious people and it was from this very context that contemporary Lauru people owe their religiosity. Lauru people's indigenous belief systems and their religious beliefs shaped their lifestyles and the way they lived in the olden days. Adopting the a patrilineal system of leadership, there ought to be a chief or big man who was the head of each tribal group.

The chief's role was to look after his tribal group and to make sure that portion of land was justly demarcated to tribal members for gardening. The chief highly respected his tribal members and the whole tribe also rendered their respect to their particular tribal chief. Kwai (2017) points out that there was a traditional practice of highly respecting the chiefs as traditional figures and authority in Solomon Islands and other Melanesian countries.

As indigenous people who lived under the directives and authority of their chiefs, Lauru people lived together as a group of people and their cultural lifestyle can be described as communal lifestyle. The new concept of individualism was never part of Lauru culture. This was a foreign concept that was newly introduced during the early encounters with foreigners. Moreover, prior to the pre-European contact era, it was common for Lauru people to visit their relatives or tribal members who lived happened to reside far in another village. This was a common practice during the past. Love and caring are part of traditional norms that existed within the life of tribal members that it became the foundation of their communal relationship. The death of a tribal

member also was a powerful means of bringing people together. According to Pitakoe (2017), in Luru culture, after the deceased was buried, the relatives then waited for several days, three to four days or even one week, then *Sara* would be made.⁸ In this *Sara* ceremony, at least two pigs were slaughtered to feed the people involved in getting the job done. In the case of the chief's death, an elder from that particular chief's tribe would publicly announce to the tribe and other tribes as well after the burial, that there is a *Zeru* in the portion of land where this late chief used to work while still alive.⁹ This was the traditional form and way of respecting the chief or a highly respected man's death. Moreover, this traditional way of respecting the tribal leader's death has a direct connection to the land. We can see that the sacredness of the life that was once moved and toiled had a direct link and connection to it.

The banning of this particular portion of land would go on up to one year. After this one year period, there would be another public announcement to clear the ban, and this was called pole zeru. This act of pole zeru (Ban lifting) was to be accompanied with a traditional feast where women prepared the food, while men banned portion of land to do some work as an indication to the lifting of the ban. The traditional concept of big man in the patrilineal societies in Solomon Islands, of which Luru Island is no exception, has been highly commended by the people. *A big man* is well recognized status throughout the entire community. His leadership role was highly commendable. This is the very reason for banning certain portion of tribal land having a connection to him. The banning also extended to the reefs as well, where the tribal members and general public were not allowed to harvest marine resources for a certain period of time. Lipsett-Moore, *et al.* (2010:8) well aware of these traditional practices in Luru state,

In the past, Choiseul communities had numerous traditions and customs relating to access and management of their natural resources, and today some of these practices persist. One of the most common forms of customary management is when communities ban harvest of beche-de-mer on a reef for a period of months or years. Closures are declared by the chiefs and church leaders. And once closed, reefs are considered tambu (sacred or off limits) until reopened by the leaders" (Lipsett-Moore *et al.* 2010:8).

⁸ *Sara* here is the traditional way of finally sealing the grave, home of the dead with stones.

⁹ *Zeru* is a traditional banning of that particular land area from tribal group members and even outsiders not to enter or move around that land area

This is a traditional practice that has been practiced in Lauru Island. The reason for banning is not in the death of chiefs alone but there are also some traditional reasons behind the traditional practice of banning resources for certain period of time. Tribal chiefs are very instrumental in carrying out their duty to inform their people and the community about the banning of certain portion of land or coastal reefs nearby. The big man's voice alone holds the power that summons his very own people to obey his command. Friesen (1986:37) rightly states,

The arrival of western Capitalist enterprises and missions in the Solomon Islands and into Choiseul has disrupted the traditional belief system of highly recognizing the role of big man. The alternative figures such as headmen post created by the colonial administrators and village Pastor Teachers created by the Church mission, have become the recognized leaders in place of the traditional big man system of leadership (Friesen, 1986:37).

Moreover, Lauru people's cultural way of living is founded on a strong social relationship that has been embedded in their communal way of living. This is obviously seen in the way people respect, love, share and care for each other in their daily interactions within their own circle of life. Missionaries did not teach the people of Lauru how to respect, love, share and care for each other. Prior to the coming of western missionaries, people of Lauru lived the life of respect, love, sharing and caring for each other as part of their traditional and social norms from the ancient time. It was by learning this that Boseto (1995) contends that the security of Lauru people is not based on any form of wealth or western economy, but was founded on human relationship. People relate well to each other in their own local setting to help each other. No one is isolated from the other. One family's problem or need will never go unnoticed but will definitely catch the attention of a wider community to actively participate by supporting the family in need.

In terms of respect, Lauru people show their respect to their traditional chiefs or tribal elders by humility and simple obedience to the instructions or call these leaders may make. When tribal leaders meet and decide on any particular issues of life that may require Labour force, tribal members show their deep respect to the traditional governing system by obeying and availing themselves to actively engage in actual workforce. This can be seen in the wedding ceremony where many pigs are slaughtered and baked for the wedding feast. Men will be awake the whole night slaughtering pigs and preparing them for baking, while women will be gathered in selected

areas to peel potato and taro skin for baking and cooking. Respect can also be seen when chiefs and tribal leaders from another villages are visiting chiefs and elders in another village. In this particular context, children will be advised to stay away from the meeting place as elders need quietness during time of meeting.

Love, which is another virtue of firm relationship can also be manifested and seen in many ways. One way is in the visiting of patients. When a relative or family member is sick but lives in a far distant village, those who are directly related to this sick person will send messages of appointment that they will visit the sick person on a certain day or time. After the sick person receives the message of appointment being sent, then the family and relatives of the sick would then prepare themselves. They would harvest local food from their garden, get sea food. Once all is done and ready, they would leave their village to visit their sick relative. This act of love is then reciprocated as the family relatives in that particular village where this sick person is being married to, then receive the visitors with joy and hospitality.

The acts of traditional norms in showing compassion through visiting the sick person who lives in another village by the immediate family members and relatives, is a common practice throughout the island of Lauru. Another way, in which compassion is shown, is in death, where the majority of the tribal group and the villagers will be present for mourning over the deceased. This mourning will go on for some days, and it could even reach two to three days as the dead person's body will be kept in the house waiting for the day of burial. In such death situation, the very family of the dead person will never go out to collect food from their gardens, and it was the responsibility of the visiting relatives who came to mourn for dead person, who brought food for the family.

Moving away from our discussion on compassion, there is sharing as another powerful virtue that binds social relationship that exists in the lives of Lauru people. The people of Laura practice sharing of resources including garden harvests as a way of life. Sharing of both tangible and intangible resources is part of Lauru people's traditional lifestyle. In the case of the intangible resources, Lauru tribal chiefs and elders are willing to teach and share with the younger generation the indigenous belief systems of the people of Lauru. (Custom and traditional Knowledge). Sharing of tangible resources is very evident in the lives of Lauru women as they return from their garden. It was always a common practice for them to wash crops, such as

potatos in the streams near the road before taking them home. Pitakoe, (2017) further elaborates that this practice of sharing while doing community responsibilities is not only identified in feminine groups but also among men. For instance, this was also found to be common among fishermen's fishing trips.¹⁰

In the context of Lauru Island, when men went out fishing and caught many fish, they only returned home with fishing tools but not the fish, to tell their wives. It was a wife's responsibility to go to the canoe, get the fish and share them to other neighboring families, especially the older people. This act of sharing had no strings attached to it. It was a way of life lived by the Lauru people. Lauru people see themselves as a caring community. They have great concern and care for one another within their local context. Boseto (1995b) holds that the virtues of respect, love, sharing and caring are the foundations security in Lauru communities.

In the context of tribal conflicts, there existed a traditional way of facilitating reconciliation. This traditional way of facilitating peace talks was usually carried out by the two traditional chiefs between the warring parties. The two chiefs representing the two parties have to negotiate for open dialogue between the two conflicting parties; and if they agreed to this call for open dialogue, a date of meeting would be set; and if the meeting was successful in sorting out differences and hurtful feelings, a date for reconciliation was chosen. This was one of the ways of delivering justice and reconciliation.

In Lauru culture, reconciliation must be facilitated in the following manner; there has to be what is called *Naki* in Babatana and *Kelo* in Varisi. This is a traditional feast that must take place to mark the reconciliation of both parties. Pitakoe (2017) further explains that the events which required the erection of *Naki/Kelo* as a public traditional feast for everyone in the open space to witness are: the handing over of tribal land to another tribe, the reclaiming of tribal land from another tribe (that had taken care of the land for several years due to some traditional reasons), and the reconciliation between conflicting parties.

In this traditional feast called *Naki or Kelo* the local foods are placed in a triangular shaped-like basket made of special types of woods woven together. This was called *Suqu*. This *Suqu* would

¹⁰ LLCTC have been very active in gathering all the traditional beliefs and practices of Lauru people and compiled them into a booklet called Custom Book of Lauru, in their head office, Supizae. Lauru Province. 2017. And this information of Lauru's traditional practice of loving and sharing was derived from this small booklet.

be raised and in it would be placed varieties of local foods, such as Taoga, which was made from ngali nuts, fruits and Taro fruits, and pig. In any traditional form of reconciliation in Luru culture, the Taoga and pig is very important. It gives a clear message that both parties were satisfied with the reconciliation ceremony. In any reconciliation that has no *Taoga* and pig placed in the *Suqu* for the traditional feast called *Naki* or *Kelo*, the people would question the validity and authenticity of this reconciliation ceremony. That is the reason why in Luru culture, when any reconciliation is bound to take place, the most important traditional requirements are, the Taoga and pig, as well as the custom money called *kesa vudu* (Custom money). Luru people use traditional form of monetary economy as a symbol of true reconciliation alongside the local food that is available for them to bring during the reconciliation ceremony.

As far as Luru cultural belief is concerned, our Land is sacred and it is the very place where tribal chiefs and elders conserve or hide the tribe's custom money. Tribal custom money was never kept in the house, this is because the custom money was not a private property but was traditionally owned by the whole tribe. Traditionally it was also believed that those who kept the tribal custom money in their house often got ill and lived a disturbed life. Hence, custom money owned by the tribe would be always kept safely in the tribal land.

I had a chance to visit some sick people in my Pastoral Ministry they mysterious sickness associated with tribal custom money in Luru. According to them, before their sickness, they led a health life. But after keeping the tribal custom money in their houses, they began to experience unusual sickness tormenting them time and again. After realizing their mistakes and they resolved to return the custom money in its rightful place, a resolution once affected, led them to recover from sickness and so, regained their normal healthy lifestyle. Luru traditional belief on custom money was that custom money had a direct link with the gods. Hence, carelessly placing this custom money in wrong places aggrieved the gods.

Furthermore, Luru people are very religious and very much conscious of the presence of their gods within creation and especially in the very environment they live in. They also have the indigenous belief system that informed them the facts of blessings and cursing. For the Luru people, a good relationship with their gods would cause direct positive impacts upon their lives. On the other hand, a wrong relationship with their gods would cause direct negative impacts upon their lives which is a curse. This is a clear evidence that Luru as part of the wider

Melanesian communities shared the same religious worldview that has strong connection to their land. Threlfall points out that Melanesian cultural beliefs affirmed land as the people's integral part of life, connected to their religious beliefs (Threlfall 1975:19).

Due to this traditional understanding of how blessings, curses, or bad luck occur in one's life, people in Lauru in the past were very conscious on how they lived and related to their immediate environment. Each season of the year, where the nut fruit tree was ready for harvest, men would go out into the bush and climb the tree to harvest the fruits. This season was called season of *Babali* in Babatana and *Masirani* in Varisi dialects. According to Jansen and Qusa, (2010) the first harvested fruits would be offered to the gods as an act of worship. This would bring good luck and blessings to the people and also for the fruit tree to yield more in the next harvest season. It was a strong belief that when the gods received the fruits of the nut trees in the form of sacrifices offered to them by the tribal elders, then in return they bestowed blessings upon both the people and the land.

The attitude of caring for creation and respecting the environments was obviously seen in other various practices. Among these was when people cleared the bushes and virgin forests for gardening, and when they cut sago-palm leaves and extract bush material to build their traditional houses. Branches from the cut trees and waste leaves of the sago-palm tree were carefully gathered and put in a particular area. Even when the work was done just beside the river, they were very careful not to throw any waste materials or leaves into the river. They were very conscious in respecting and caring for their natural surroundings. The primary reason for respecting creation was according to their traditional beliefs and worldview, ancestral spirits and their gods reside in creation. Whiteman reiterates that "Melanesian People are very religious people, in which according to their worldview, both the spirit and physical world are inseparable" (Whiteman 1983:64). The scholar contends that these people search beyond their physical world to find root causes of their catastrophic situations for religious explanations and interpretations in life's tragedy. We can therefore state that the aspect of caring for creation and respecting the natural environments was known to be a daily experience for Lauru people in the past.

However, in the modern context of Lauru, the deep religious indigenous belief systems that have been advocated, upheld and practiced by our ancestors and forefathers in the past have vanished

and slowly diminished by new concepts and foreign theological ideas contrary to Lauru's traditional belief systems and cultural way of life as discussed above.

In this regard, the Christian mission is one of the most influential forces that disregarded and brushed aside the indigenous belief systems, cultural values and traditional practices of Lauru people including the wider Melanesian region. According to Whiteman, (1983) the Christian mission introduced new teachings in the islands of Melanesia to replace the traditional beliefs and practices of Melanesian people. This leads me to further discuss in the next sub-heading, Lauru people and their early encounters with missionaries who first brought the Christian mission to the shores of Lauru. 2.3 Lauru People and their early encounters with Missionaries

Lauru people's encounter with early missionaries is worth discussing and given attention under this chapter as I am of the view that this early encounter contributed to influencing and shaping the perceptions of Lauru people regarding their relationship to the land and their natural environments. Moreover, missionary early encounters with the indigenous people of Lauru somewhat brushed aside the cultural values and traditional practices once regarded by the ancestors of Lauru people as the pillars of social relationship, tribal relationship and communal solidarity in Lauru context

Several scholars and researchers who have studied Christian mission in the Pacific, point out that these missionaries who were agents of Christian mission to the shores of Oceania, have established mission Headquarters as institutions and contributed to the changing of cultural and communal practices of the islanders (Latukeyu 1969, Garrett 1982 and Whiteman 1983). Gaqurae holds, "early missionaries who brought Christianity in Solomon Islands did not only come with the gospel of Jesus Christ, they also came in with western civilization" (Gaqurae 1977:146). Thus Christianity for Gaqurae to some extent was seen as what he called "The Colonizing race's religion" (1977:147). Longgar, (2006) who did research in mission and land theology in Papua New Guinea, mentioned that Melanesian critics voiced their dissatisfactions on the early missionary encounters with their Eurocentric attitudes in mission. The Melanesian according to Longgar accused the early missionaries of showing no respect and did not even accept the Melanesians traditional values and cultural belief systems.

Despite the above views on early missionaries' approaches to Melanesian people and culture, some of the positive work output of the missionary works should be acknowledged, such as the end of headhunting period as a result of the influence of Christian mission.¹¹

Lauru Island, is said to have been first introduced to the works of mission and Christianity by three different groups of missionaries. These were the Methodist Mission, the Roman Catholic Mission and the Seventh Day Adventists Mission. The Methodist mission was said to have come earlier than the other two, and made first formal missionary contact with the indigenous people of Lauru. According to McDonald, (2009) the first Missionary encounter with the indigenous people of Lauru was led by John Francis Goldie with several Fijian Methodists missionaries in 1905. This first encounter with the islanders was not an easy one for the missionaries as they were seen by the indigenous people of Lauru as a foreign threat to their lives. Luxton, (1955) mentions in one occasion where Goldie intended to enter with his worker by the name of Muna, a Samoan missionary teacher. The islanders of Kumboro, a village in Lauru, were unwelcoming and hostile to Goldie's team. They are said to have put bush vines to close the only passage where the missionaries' boat pass. However, Goldie was so brave that he made the breakthrough and had his Samoan missionary teacher settled in. Luxton (1995) further reported that Muna did not stay long in Kumboro due to the hostile people of Kumboro, who finally tied him to a raft and let him drift out into the sea. The Lauru people's hostility indicated the fear of foreign powers.

Despite this hostility towards the newly introduced Christian missions, the missionaries were bold and courageous to pave their way in and finally established mission headquarters and centers to carry out their mission work in Lauru. McDonald, (2009) stated that the people of Lauru were termed or labeled by missionaries as savage, dirty with superstitious beliefs, lived in darkness and that they were in need of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to come out into the light. McDonald (2009), Rooney one of the missionaries who served in Lauru prayed very hard so that the people of Tepazaka area in Lauru he saw as wild, savage, and sin-stricken would be converted to the newly introduced Christian religion.

¹¹ Headhunting is a form of traditional tribal fighting where only men are involved in it, where they travel across from island to island to kill and capture people from other island and take them back to their island as slaves and for traditional sacrifices as well.

Christianity as a newly introduced religion became very active during its early years of inception. Missionaries built mission schools and hospitals to help the islanders. Young men and women were taken to attend these new mission schools. They were taught how to read and write, how to promote cleanliness for a good healthy living. Despite the positive mission output rendered by the missionary work, there also arose some negative aspects of mission that paved its way to change the mindset and way of living for indigenous Lauruans.

One of the negative aspects of the Christian missions was the influence it caused to dismantle the islander's traditional forms of leadership structures. Missionaries were looked highly upon as superior leaders in Lauru communities. Their leadership roles as missionaries hijacked the traditional leadership system, in which villagers shifted their attention from what their traditional leaders said to what the missionary told them. Witherell (1977), also notes that these Missionaries brought an end to the traditional forms of leadership because their position as superiors had been recognized by the islanders. Another major negative impact introduced by the early missionaries through Christian religion is what could be described as the "Culture of Superiority versus inferiority".

Western missionaries somewhat perceived the islanders as weak, dirty, savage and of an inferior race, who were from darkness and very much in need of the saving grace of God through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is very clear through the writings of McDonald (2009:23) as she cited some of the articles and letters written by early missionaries who served in the Island of Lauru that Lauruans were filthy little creatures who had been brought into the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Daniel Bula who was one of the earliest Methodist converts from Vella la Vella Island was labeled by the missionaries as a child of savages from one of the heathen tribes in Vella la Vella. In addition, Hiebert contends that the "West regard themselves as having a better and superior culture, which clearly draws a boundary line that affirmed Christianity to be a superior religion by nature above all other pagan religions throughout the world" (Hiebert 1994:55).

Due to this western perception of Christianity as a superior religion, as Hiebert (1994) argues, most Christian missionaries brought along a mindset that the local people's cultural values and traditional practices were associated with evil and demonic forces; and due to this, they must be rejected. The powerful influence of this western concept of Christianity as the superior religion

has disrupted indigenous people from their traditional beliefs and disconnected them from their land, natural environments and sea.

Traditional practices and forms of fishing, traditional rules for gardening and harvesting of fruit trees, traditional ways of harvesting garden fruits, and traditional ways of respecting, protecting and preserving the land as sacred were all labeled by the early missionaries as nothing but forms of animistic practices. Hence, they must be rejected and put an end to in order to qualify them to be genuine Christians.

The work of Allan Tippet was very clear on regarding all forms of cultural ways of life and traditional practices as nothing but pure animism. Tippet is a key figure in Methodist Mission based in Fiji from (1911-1988). He wrote a book called *“Solomon Islands Christianity: A study in Growth and Obstruction*, which draws a clear line between the Power of God against the forces of evil. Tippet’s view in presenting the gospel goes in line with Richard Niebuhr’s position (1952) which puts emphasis on “Christ against Culture.” According to Tippet, (1967) Christianity and animism pledge allegiance to two different powers, the Power of God and the power of evil. Thus his dualistic approach to mission led him to label all traditional beliefs, worthy customs and cultural practices animism and therefore God’s power needs to encounter, overcome and destroy these practices in order for genuine Christianity to grow. I disagree with Tippet as he seems to ignore the very indigenous context in which the gospel can be transmitted through and be contextualized in order for the Christian message to be meaningful to the indigenous islanders. The emphasis to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ become meaningful in any contextual realities has been strongly contended by Newbigin as he puts it this way:

In order for the gospel to be more meaningful and be relevant to people, it must be shared and presented in the very language the people speak. It must be communicated in a language understood by the people. The gospel must be communicated in symbols and values that are meaningful to the people in a particular context that it is shared (Newbigin, 1989:145).

It was through these early Christian missionaries approach to mission and the way they influenced and shaped the mindset of Luru people and the wider Melanesian communities with this newly introduced gospel that is so abstract from contextual realities, that leads me to argue that early Christian mission encounter with Luru people had its share on shaping the mindset of

Lauruans in relation to their perception and relationship to the land and their surrounding environments. Having explored the historical and mostly pre-colonial cultural experiences of the Lauru people and the coming of the early Christian missionaries, we then focus on the post-colonial period in this region and its people.

2.4 Lauru Island and its people in Post-Colonial era

The island of Lauru was inhabited by two groups with different traditional and cultural backgrounds. The first were of Melanesian origin who settled in much earlier while the minority group who settled in later around the 1960s were from Kiribati (Micronesia) through the colonial Government (Mataki *et al.* 2013).

According to Mataki *et al.* (2013), the island of Lauru's population in the last census record taken in 2009, was 26,372. With this rapid population growth in this small island of Lauru, people still accept logging as one of the major commercial operation. This has been the result of economic factors in the rural which determines the needs of the islanders.

In this section, I want to further explore the changing mindset and attitudes of Lauru people in this Post-Colonial era. The ways of life, attitudes and how one relates to others and the environment is not the same for the people of Lauru in these two periods of timeframe, the pre-colonial and post-colonial era. The past generations who lived during the pre-colonial time, lived differently from the people who live in this contemporary post-colonial era.

During the pre-colonial era, people did not need monetary economy for their basic needs for survival. Garden activities for major food production were for nothing more than human consumption and traditional feast celebrations, whereas in this contemporary post-colonial era, people's labor force to achieve high production of garden food is for marketing. Boseto, (1995) asserts, monetary economy becomes the power that drives away many from the rural settings to the urban centers.

The false notion of money as the true symbol of wealth has changed the mindset of Lauru people in this post-colonial era. Money becomes the measuring standard by which one is identified as to whether he or she is rich or poor. Moreover, the foreign concept of individualism has crept in unnoticed and caused the fragmentation of our people's cultural values of communalism. The life of sharing and caring that has been part of the traditional norms is hardly seen nowadays. This

was very obvious in our contemporary communities as one hardly gets things for free like before. According to Matakai *et al.* (2013) in the past, people didn't sell their bush materials to their fellow relatives to build local houses, they were freely given to those who needed and asked. Now in our contemporary post-colonial era, people have to buy these bush materials if they need them to build local houses. This is a lifestyle of depending on western form of monetary economy for people's survival. According to Pitakoe, (2017) Chief Cornelius Joe lamented as he recalled the communal way of living that was embedded in the very life of love, care and sharing which he used to see and experience in his early days as a child, but now no longer sees this kind of communal life of sharing in its greater measure.

Furthermore, in this contemporary post-colonial era, we also notice how the foreign concept of individualism has shaped the mindset of the Lauru people and therefore led to changes in the kind of language they speak. In Lauru context, during the pre-colonial era, land was always perceived and regarded as 'our land'. Tribal leaders always mention the phrase 'our land' when they made any direct claim relating to land. In Babatana, it was used to say *Mami lua* or *lua ta sinaqi*, while in Varisi, they say *pua remu*, or *pua ia sinaqi*, of which when translated into English simply means, our land, or the tribal land declaring that the land was owned by a particular tribal group. However, in this post-colonial era, the inclusive affirmation of land ownership as 'our land', has shifted to the exclusive affirmation of 'my land'. Tribal leaders and so-called chiefs easily make such bold claim of land ownership as 'my land'. Boseto, (1995) argues that such exclusive affirmation of land ownership is a foreign idea and has no part to share in the culture of Lauru people.

The lifestyle of eating from one pot which culturally symbolized family bond of oneness and solidarity has been replaced by each individual family members having their own plate and spoon to eat with. In the small village where my grandmother came from, the name was called *Kaqa Luga*. This small village is where my dad's mother was raised. My grandmother has five other sisters and only one brother, and their parents taught them to draw food from the same pot. This was a sign of unity, a practice of living together as family. The traditional way of eating from one pot as they sat together on the floor without table, chair and spoon continued to depict the act of sharing, community, love, reconciliation and embrace of one another. The name *Kaqa Luga* is a combination of two separate words in my dialect in Vaghua which means, *Kaqa* as One

and *Luga* as Pot, so *Kaqa Luga* simply means one pot. Boseto (1995:6) puts more emphasis on good relationship in family basis as he puts it in this way, “Good relationship between family members like brothers, sisters, cousins and so forth and as well as other tribal leaders, are the core foundation for justice and peace in Lauru community”.

The practice of handed down oral traditions of true genealogies that connected families and tribal ties with their demarcated land boundaries, has been replaced by new versions of false genealogies produced by modern technological devices. These new ways look much attractive and presentable but yet full of human errors motivated by human greed. In the past, people did not have many versions of tribal genealogies; there was only one genuine one. In the contemporary Lauru, there was a growing awareness of losing local and traditional knowledge. As Lauru people began to shift from their traditional activities and diets towards foreign monetary economy systems, much of the customary foods, traditional knowledge on how to prepare these foods, and information on cultural values and practices started to get lost. Jansen and Qusa (2010) are well aware of these changes as they both confirmed that much of the current harvesting of food activities has been occurring throughout the island of Lauru, somewhat reflected modern form of diets, of which imported foods are supported directly through money earning jobs such as selling of copra and timber products and other small scale generating income projects like commercial agriculture and fisheries projects.

Another great change that is worth discussing under this heading is the rebellious attitudes of young people in the contemporary Lauru. Young people are easily influenced and hooked by a newly introduced lifestyle of taking weeds or what is called marijuana, life of gambling as a quick way of earning money and the continuous making of local homemade brewed alcohol called Kwaso. Kwaso was the name of a locally brewed alcohol that was introduced and illegally sold throughout Solomon Islands. It was one of the major cause of social problems throughout the country and the police are working very hard to combat and address its illegal brewing and selling. According to the Law of Solomon Islands, those found guilty of brewing and selling of Kwaso are liable to fine for \$30,000 SBD or five years imprisonment.¹² Most of the Lauru young people today do not perceive *land* as sacred space where one can toil to make a

¹² The awareness talks on the effects of Kwaso, the major social problems it causes and its consequences according to the Law of Solomon Islands are clearly stated in a document called Facts about Kwaso circulated by the National Community Policing office. Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, P.O Box G3, Rove Police Headquarter, Honiara.

living. Instead they opt for quick money by venturing into illegal selling of home brewed alcohol and these weeds called marijuana. Those involved in gambling are causing family problems of practicing what is commonly known as Black market in our local context. Black market was a name given to describe such act of selling of family valuable properties, like pots, knives, axes and other items without the knowledge of parents for quick money by those young people who heavily involved in gambling. All these practices mentioned here are a foreign way of life that has never been practiced or lived out by the young people of Luru in the past. According to my general observation in contemporary Luru context, those young people who are heavily involved in marijuana, homemade locally brewed alcohol and gambling, miserably fail to see the importance of the land as a sacred space that gives life and yields good fruits to those who are willing to cultivate and toil it. Instead of engaging in sustainable livelihood activities that can help to empower them in their own land, many young people of Luru are involving themselves in such life denying activities as mentioned above. These life denying activities that I have just mentioned above are the newly introduced lifestyles invading the Luru culture of respect, love, caring and sharing that has long prevailed in the lives of Luru people in the past generation.¹³

2.5 Negative impacts of global economic forces on the Island of Luru and its people

In this section we further discuss and explore some of the negative impacts of the global economic forces on the global level, regional and locally on the Island of Luru and its people.

The economic activities executed by the global economic powers driven by powerful capitalist system that has been severely motivated by human greed, is one of the major causes of negative impacts that has been affecting and destroying human lives and communities of most less developed countries throughout the globe. This negative impact caused by global economic powers is a global phenomenon in which we cannot deny, but rather witness its negative effects in societies across the globe. Boff (1995) one of the key figures in Liberation theology, argues that the modern global capitalism contributes a lot to the increased poverty situations throughout the globe as it engages in economic activities that only destroy the world's ecosystem and the

¹³ These social problems are facts that I have observed in the island of Luru during my pastoral ministry.

natural environment. Gebara (1999) also echoed the same sentiment as Boff as she said that those life denying forces, factors and systems that oppressed and suppressed people are the same forces that keep destroying the land and the natural environment.

It is argued that global economic forces paved their ways into the land that was said to be owned by the less powerful people in two forms: in the name of development or in form of land grabbing by some unjust means. According to Davies and Seon-Won Park Land-grabbing is a widespread global practice that has been collectively led by groups of local, national and transnational elites, investors and governments with the aim, motive and intention of controlling the world's resources (Davies and Seon-Won Park 2016:40). Warmback too, points out the major problems within the current economic systems that permeate all levels of societies across the globe (Warmback 2017:19). The scholar further argues that this has to do with the way we understand and put into practice economic principles, whereby those powerful elites with resources designed policies and regulations on how goods and services are produced and how they are shared or publicly distributed. As a result of this common practice, it is obvious that those with less power have very little influence or control over the way this economic system functions. Hence, what we have seen and experienced in our contemporary societies throughout the globe, is that the dominant market system becomes the power that determines our economics. We have been caught in a web of globalization by the push of modern technology in which almost every country being drawn closer through such international policies paves way for the lowering of trade barriers. Warmback (2017:19) lamented that the current trend of globalization has been fully backed up and supported by the neo-liberal ideologies that only worsens the impact of the capitalist system.

What this system does is nothing more than promoting human greed and selfishness that results in uncontrollable exploitations and the ecological destructions, which then creates the two extremes of wealth and poverty. The few powerful wealthy elites always become rich and powerful while the masses always becomes the majority poor. With regard to Land grabbing, some of the classical examples noted by Davis and Parker (2016:42) occurred in countries like “Brazil, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and Uganda”. The attitude of land grabbing has been a common

rude practice employed by the powerful to conquer the less powerful. Most colonial powers are using this method and approach to conquer land, and gain new territories. The indigenous people battling with these colonial powers continue to experience unhealthy pressure and subordination. These experiences cannot be argued to facilitate good living conditions but make life painful, resulting in decrease in life expectancies of many. Davies and Park (2016:34) have cited the bold declaration from the Kairos Palestine by the Palestinian Christians as they said,

We Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples (Davies and Park, 2016:34).

In addition one of the widely used saying in postcolonial African politics to protest against the unjust deprivation of the land resource at by the Foreigners is that related with the coming of White missionaries. This saying protests by saying that ‘when White people first came to their Africa, they came with their bible while they as black people had their land. As the whites instructed them to bow and pray, they fully obeyed. However, at the end of the prayer session, the whites had the land and the blacks who were indigenous owner of their land were given the bible (West 2016). It should be noted through the African postcolonial lenses that this is the kind of African expression to depict the imperial powers and global economic forces that have used the bible as the tool for oppression in the disguise of ‘the good news’.

In the Indian context, Davies and Park (2016: 37) reported the cry of an eleven (11) year old female by the name of Subhatra Mondel as she said, “I will not let the Government of Orissa take away our land from any of us!” Subhatra is just one amongst other several hundreds of Indian Children struggling together with their parents to challenge the State and voiced out their strong concern for their homeland, identity and livelihood. Davies and Park, (2016:37-45) further elaborates their report by pointing out the kind of economic activity that has been discussed by both the Government and this giant economic power, Korean based Phoon Steel company as detrimental to human lives and their livelihood. The Government of Orissa just because of the offer of 58,000 Crores of Rupees which is equivalent to (\$58 billion USD), is engaging in land acquisition process. This is undoubtedly paving way for this global economic power for their operation of unearthing and steel production activity. While this serves government’s interests, it

does not necessarily take precaution for the ordinary people's lives and the future. It is not surprising that the ordinary people have resorted to staging protests and mass mobilization against their government in an effort to challenge the Government's rush process of forceful land acquisitions.

According to Davies and Park, (2016) these people have initiated a new non-violent methodological approach to challenge the transnational cooperation and the state by the very act of lying on the ground to hug Mother Earth. This powerful action of hugging mother earth was performed in the very front of Police and the Government authorities who are trying in many ways to illegally acquire the land from the locals. To these people, their land is their hope, security and life not only in this present time but in the years to come. Again, Davies and park cited Subhatra as she boldly declared "Land is our future, we think of the future only and not of the present. Our present is our 'struggle for the future'!" (Davies and park 2016:38).

Within our own Pacific region, there are places like New Caledonia, West Papua and the Island of Bougainville that have experienced serious conflicts between the State and global economic powers being one party opposed by the mass of indigenous people claiming direct ownership to their land. According to Spriggs, (1997:268) "there were some 330 Nickel mines companies that have been operating in New Caledonia since 1880, and the effects of these large scale mining operations has not only created environmental problems in the land, but pollutes the waterways and the surrounding coastal reef ecosystems." Spriggs also states that "within the mining areas in New Caledonia, more than 40 streams and rivers have been polluted and contaminated by chemicals, by waters from the mines and the bays into which they flowed have been greatly affected and altered by sediment deposits." (Spriggs 1997:268).

Just beside us, our neighboring country of West Papua has been struggling for Sovereignty and justice for several decades now but to no avail. According to Davies and park, (2016:31) the West Papuans claimed the forest as their mother, it was more than the source of life to them since the land and their forests house their ancestors. The West Papuans communications with and relationship to their ancestors are perceived to be of the present and of future and not a past thing. Hence, according to the indigenous people of West Papua, taking their land from them by way of exploiting their forests implies total destruction to the very core of their human lives.

Since the Indonesian independence way back in 1945, as Davies and Park (2016:32) assert, the West Papuan people have been interrogating, challenging and repudiating their political integration into Indonesia as one Government, of which under the New York Agreement of Act of Self Determination which was ratified in 1962, fully backed and supported by the USA and the UNTEA (United Nations Temporary Executive Authority in 1963. This political process of amalgamating West Papua to Indonesia to form one Sovereign State was a move that was only supported by 1,009 indigenous Papuans out of 800,000 during that period of time. The indigenous West Papuan people since that time till now have been trying all means of acquiring political independence but have not yet achieved the desires of their heart. Instead of gaining political independence that will allow them to rule freely in their own land, West Papuan people under the evil and unjust Indonesian Political regime have no sense of security and are continuously harassed, tortured and brutally humiliated within their own motherland.

Spriggs (1997) in his research within the Melanesian region states that the large scale copper and gold mining at Panguna in the Island of Bougainville, which has operated there since 1968, was one of the world's largest open cut mines. This open cut mine, which is the major cause of environmental degradation especially in the surrounding areas, has been seen as one of the major reasons that ignited the angry people of Bougainville to start the fight against the Government of Papua New Guinea, in which many innocent lives were killed during the Bougainville struggle or land crisis. The mine remained closed since 1989 due to the Bougainville Revolutionary Armies (BRA) movement to fight for their land rights. In April 1996 the BRA were said to be in total control of the closed down Panguna Copper mine.

In the very context of Lauru Island where this study focuses, the first impact caused by global economic forces from the outside world was not so much about environmental degradation, but the imposition of a foreign name to the Island. Many Lauru people over-looked this foreign name called Choiseul and have accepted it as the name of the Province.¹⁴ The name Choiseul is a foreign name and by accepting it for registration to be the official name of the Province implies that we are already legalizing illegal imposition of this very name. The Sagas of Lauru during

¹⁴ I have discussed earlier on in this chapter, under the section historical background of Lauru Island that there were two foreigners in different years of exploring the Pacific sea who gave two different names to the Island. Alvaro de Mendana in 1568 called it San Marcos and Louise de Bougainville called it Choiseul in 1768 as he sailed through the Solomon Seas.

that period of time when this name was imposed on their native land were never aware of it either. It should be noted that the act of giving a new or foreign name to someone or even to a particular group of people is to deny their original identity. Budden (2014) Points out that the so-called doctrine of discovery was designed and circulated throughout the globe as a way of explaining the legal rights of a particular nation. They may have discovered certain geographical location and features that they called new land as if it had never been owned by people. Budden further expressed that, “Discovery gave a right of Sovereignty with the assumption that local people were not civilized enough to exercise Sovereignty.” (Budden 2014:21). In the light of Budden’s (2014) explanation of the political implication of Sovereignty, the colonial powers take it a priority to first name their colonies with new names as a sign of dominance and control before actually claiming political and legal rights over that particular territory. With new name comes new identity and foreign concepts that often affect the lives of local people. The impacts of the global economic powers in the island of Lauru and how foreign concepts are shaping peoples behaviors and attitudes of the people can best be described as life threatening.

As a man originally from Lauru Island, and a Clergy who has served the Christian church in Lauru Island for several years, I present my own narrative and perspective on the current situation of Lauru people below:

The foreign concept of wealth and riches has been directly linked to the western form of monetary economy. Hence, for someone to be regarded as wealthy or rich, he or she must have a lot of money. Paunga (2009) notes that most of the Pacific Islanders are being drifted to urban centers from their rural communities expecting that urban centers would offer a good commoditized life. This myth and false notion of wealth has brainwashed the mindset of the contemporary Lauruans. This is also one of the major reasons as to why people allowed the transnational cooperation or logging companies to enter their land for logging operations. Moreover, the best interest of these logging companies and their workers was merely focused on their economic gain. They did not worry about the welfare of the land owning tribal groups. The workers in high position of these companies have been luring local parents with money and goods so that they can be allowed to marry young ladies within their family circles. This is a form of dehumanization where our young girls have been allowed by their parents to marry these loggers in exchange for money, goods and material things. Mataki *et al.* (2013) mentions that in

some cases, where parents are not involved some of the loggers themselves were very instrumental in commercial sex activities that often lead to the abuse of young ladies.

Another major negative impact of these global economic forces in Lauru Island is the division it creates amongst the same tribal group. Prior to the coming of these transnational companies, the people in the island lived in good relationship where grudges and conflicts could easily be solved at the tribal leader's level. The coming of these foreign companies in Lauru Island has caused more land disputes, which always ended up in court cases. These do not seem to benefit any of the parties in the case of true reconciliation. Further to this, the Lauru traditional ways and method of solving conflicts and disputes over land is totally ignored. People now look to the court system which is foreign to us, to solve their problems when it comes to land matters. Moreover, when such conflicts reach the legal system of the country in terms of decisions and making sound judgments, politicians who have the power to influence certain levels in court cases are involved to protect the interest of these foreign companies, which worsens the conflicts. According to Kabutaulaka (2000), Solomon Islands Government has a history of being manipulated by a kind of political culture motivated by money from logging companies, and such practices turn a blind eye on state policies and forestry regulations that are intended to protect the environment. Dinnen and Firth (2008) states that Politicians and some government key players benefitting from such illegal and corrupt deals are merely serving the interests of logging companies.

The same problem that is happening in the context of Lauru was similar in nature in other neighboring Islands in Solomon Islands and throughout the wider Melanesian countries. In Papua New Guinea context, Longgar (2006) contends that the secular capitalistic notion of development has degraded and destroyed the religious spiritual values of the sacredness of the land. Longgar further argues that this is one of the major contributing factors as to why the Melanesian mindset has shifted to the perception of regarding the land as commodity for profit making, which leads to competitive ideologies that have separated tribal groups, clans and even families. What is clear and obvious in the context of Lauru Island after the companies ceased operation, was that people in the rural remained the same, and some are even worse than before the companies operated in their land. This notable experience happened in almost every island that invited the logging companies to do operation in their land. Spriggs (1997:272) holds that

logging activities have also contributed to the declining of drinking water quality, which is another environmental and human survival challenge.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on the historical background of Luru Island and the indigenous people's cultural way of life, and their traditional religious practices that connected them to the land and their natural environment. It has demonstrated that the current state of affairs in the Luru Island with regard to the sacredness of land has drifted to the worse. It is a finding of this chapter that foreign groups in the island that include missionaries, political administrators and multinational economic companies have gradually led to this negative drift. It is important to note as the chapter has discovered, that there is a great gap between how presently the Luru people relate to one another, their land, and the surrounding environment as compared to how it was prior the infiltration of the above mentioned groups of foreigners on the land of Luru; further that this mostly negative shift has resulted in ecological exploitation and environmental degradation in Luru island, a condition that demands critical attention. In the next chapter the study will discuss in detail the nature and extent of ecological exploitation and land degradation that is affecting people's lives and the natural environment in contemporary Luru context.

Chapter 3

LAURU ISLAND OUR MOTHER

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on discussing the historical background of Lauru Island and the indigenous people's cultural way of life and how this, in relation to the reverence and sacredness of the land, has undergone dynamics of change especially as foreigners started arriving and settling in the island of Lauru. In this chapter, the study explores in detail the nature and extent of ecological exploitation and land degradation that is affecting people's lives and the natural environment in contemporary Lauru context. It engages with the Leslie Boseto's Grassroots theology of the land, and the theories of land sacredness among the Lauru people as its analytical tools. The chapter concludes by proposing a theological response to contemporary ecological degradation in Lauru as part of answering the key research question of this study.

3.2 The nature and extent of ecological degradation in contemporary Lauru

Ecological exploitations and land degradation are direct impacts of large scale logging activities that are currently taking place in the island of Lauru. These multinational companies that currently operate in Lauru Island are foreign owned, mainly from Asia. According to Butler (2012), most of these logging companies in the 1990s moved towards the green forests of Northeastern South America, the Brazilian Amazon, and Congo Basin of central Africa and to the south pacific region in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The movements of these multinational companies from Asia to other the parts of the world as mentioned, happened as a result of the realized depletion on timber stocks in Asia. Butler (2012) further points out those logging practices as one form of economic activities mostly known for forests and land degradation as well as for the destruction of natural environment.

In view of Butler's explanation above, it is imperative to engage on how best we can address and respond to the situation and challenges faced in Lauru Island. This leads me to a view that ecological degradation, environmental exploitation and climate change are global issues and must be seen as everyone's duty and responsibility to participate in addressing these issues affecting mother earth. Conradie strongly holds that "climate change is a task that has to be

addressed through a global effort. Politicians, business leaders, scientists, analysts, educators, community leaders and religious leaders alike will all have to contribute. Churches can only play a minor supporting role here” (Conradie, 2008:25).

In the context of contemporary Lauru, it is obviously undeniable that ecological degradation seen in environmental exploitation such as soil erosion, polluted or contaminated rivers are real issues that Lauru people are struggling with in their currently. In a report by Scoop World (2013) independent news titled *Threats to Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands*, there was a meeting of Lauru representatives in Taro Island the Headquarter of Lauru on Wednesday 13th February 2013, to raise their concerns on the impact of climate change and logging activities in Lauru. In this meeting, Gendley Galo, a representative of Nuatabu village in the Northern part of Lauru Island, raised serious concerns regarding logging operation that destroyed two hectares of mangroves in his area. It was further expressed that during the logging operation, livelihood in their land was extremely affected and the t environment destroyed.

The pollution of river, water catchment areas and the destruction of cultural sites are direct impacts caused by the logging company that was operating in his land area.¹⁵ In some villages in Lauru people do not have proper supply of drinking water. Hence their source for drinking water is their bush streams where they collect fresh water both for cooking and drinking. These bush streams of water source for drinking in some areas are being contaminated by logging activities. The felling down of many trees which really affected the forest in Lauru Island, also contributed to the changing of weather patterns in the local context in Lauru.

Manebona reported in the 2017 *Island Sun News* that people of Northwest Choiseul (Lauru) from Voruvoru community are suffering with contaminated water related problems as water was determined unsafe for drinking and cooking. This was a direct result of logging operation in their particular land area. Ulemeiki in his complaint to the *Island Sun News*, claimed that their streams and rivers keep changing to red color during rainy seasons due to soil erosion that occurs near the streams and river banks.

¹⁵ For more detailed information on this report, see www.scoop.co.nz/stories/wo1302/s00148/threats-to-choiseul-province

In 2013, Choiseul province climate change, vulnerability and adaptation assessment team made a survey regarding the impacts of climate change. The assessment shows that since July 2012, there were a total of eleven logging companies operating in the small island of Lauru, and they confirmed through their survey that there was still more customary land in process for timber right hearing to acquire license- Mataki *et al.* (2013). The scholars further note that a total of 692, 600 m³ from 1995 to 2005 was harvested in Lauru Island and almost the same amount, 610,402m³ was extracted in the next five years from 2006 to 2010.

The environmental degradation caused by heavy machineries of logging operations is affecting both human beings at home and wildlife that lives in the forests as their natural habitat. Prior to the invitation of multinational companies, resources of Lauru Island were fully intact. The local people found it very easy to get foods from land, river and sea. Bush materials that were needed to build traditional houses could be easily collected nearby. The sound of nature as the birds and insects giggled could be heard in the nearby bushes. In fact, people could feel the presence and sacredness of Mother Nature.

The Island of Lauru was always perceived by our elders from the past as the beloved mother, who breastfeeds; sustains human life and continue to give life to the future generation. However, what is happening now throughout the Island due to logging operation is life denying. Spillover of dirty oil from machineries into the river, which then flows into the sea causing double destructions where fresh water fish and shells in the river are poisoned, salt water fish and coral life within the surrounding reefs area affected and others killed. In almost every logging camp and site, there are holes that accommodate mud and water where mosquitoes are attracted as their breeding places. This also created an unhealthy atmosphere for both workers and villagers who used roads through those camp sites for their work and gardening. Jansen and Qusa claimed that in the island of Lauru, “recently high impact activities such as loggings with heavy equipment have caused extensive long-term destruction of forests through soil compaction, erosion, siltation and unsustainable exploitation of resources” (Jansen and Qusa, 2010:4).

Due to the changing landscape of the island and the continuous logging activities and operation throughout most parts of Lauru Island, I agree with Jansen and Qusa as I have also witnessed the fact that every road that the logging companies made throughout the island of Lauru was never a

tar sealed road. These are mere ordinary roads that allow their machines to move freely through the forests mainly for the purpose of harvesting and transporting of round logs from the forest to the log-pond (log yard). Since the roads are without tar and proper drainage, when heavy rain falls, the areas near streams and rivers are always affected.

Mixed mud and dirty oil that spilled over from the machineries during logging operations will always be found contaminating nearby streams and water sources and into the rivers nearby the logging operation area. As a local and indigenous Lauruan lived in Lauru for some time, I have witnessed the extreme negative impacts of these logging activities on some parts of the island itself. The current ecological degradation on the island and its natural environment has been a major problem to the wellbeing of Lauru people.

Spillover oil from the machines beside the river banks has greatly polluted the rivers, affecting and disturbing the ecosystems in the particular areas of logging operations. Freshwater fish have been poisoned by dirty oil, river shells have died and as the river flows right into the sea, the coral reefs have also been affected. Kabutaulaka (2000) questions the poorly implemented State policies. Fueled by corrupt practices and the desire to illegally harvest the island's resources, these policies facilitate untamed severe environmental degradation which is harmful to human life. Spriggs, (1997:271) points out the historical facts about logging in Solomon;

Since the independence of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, in the period 1975-80 pressures have been growing from Malaysian and Taiwanese-based multinational logging companies to be allowed in to cut what are now some of the last major unlogged tropical-forest areas in the world. They have been described in official government reports in PNG as 'robber barons' and aid agencies have voiced alarm at the logging quotas Melanesian governments seem willing to hand out to such companies. They probably represents the most corrupting force at large in the region (Spriggs, 1997:271).

From the time Spriggs made the remarks to the present, foreign logging companies keep coming in alarming numbers to rip off the remaining resources in the Solomon Islands.

3.3 Leslie Boseto's Grassroots Theology of the Land

In the context where most of the contemporary Luru people have perceived the land as a commodity for economic gain and many tribal groups have given their land through the timber right hearing process, both the people and the natural environment in Luru are heavily affected. Mataka *et al.* (2013:13) affirm that, “the major commercial operation in Choiseul is logging”. This sometimes leads to land disputes and tribal conflicts. Moreover, the island of Luru has been entertaining commercial logging activities for the last two decades. Against this background, Boseto's grassroots theology of the land articulates the sacredness of the land by connecting the land to the creator of the Land. During the early formation of the LLCTC,¹⁶ way back in the 1982 conference in Nukiki, one of the villages in Luru Island, the participating elders of the meeting composed a song which begins by theologically inquiring where God resides. According to Boseto, this song is a theological affirmation of Luru people's belief concerning the sacredness of Land, which continuously offers the needs of our people and sustains their very lives from the past generations till now (Boseto 1995:2). Boseto, (1995:2) puts the song in Babatana dialect as this:

Karaputae Bangara sa kou, ta lua, loka no rani
Sa taka mata paki kisini
Potae Bangara ta taba nguni.

When literally translated into English, we have the words in the following manner,

The power of God is here,
In Land, sea and sky
We can never escape it
The Spirit of God in all Places¹⁷.

In his theological understanding about the land, Boseto engages in connecting the Creator with Luru Island and its people in the five theological affirmations:

¹⁶ Luru Land Conference of Tribal Community

¹⁷ Boseto's Translation

- Lauru Island is part and parcel of the whole entire created order. Boseto believes that the whole island of Lauru has a beginning. The island was not just there, appeared from some external forces as some atheists may have us believe, but has its foundation in the very God (Creator) who created it from the beginning of time
- The ancestors of Lauru people knew God as the creator, source and sustainer of their lives from the very beginning. And that this very God has been present with them in Creation. To them, God resides in sacred stone, Sacred Mountain, certain large trees, rivers, or even in creaturely forms such as birds, shark snakes and other forms of animals and reptiles
- The ancestors of Lauru People respect their God's Spirits. To Lauru people, their God's spirits were always respected and given first priority when it comes to the first harvest of certain fruit trees in the land. This notion of respecting and giving first priority to the Spirits is a powerful indigenous belief system practiced throughout the whole island of Lauru long ago, but which declined during the final establishment of Christianity in our shores. Jansen and Qusa (2010:110) also affirmed that the ancestors of Lauru people during the first harvest of ngali nuts fruits always first of all gave to their gods. Only after their gods were offered the first fruits could people then have their share of the fruits
- The ancestors of Lauru people have their sacred ground. This sacred ground was set aside for worshipping and offering sacrifices to their god. In this sacred ground they erected an alter where sacrifices were made during their time of worship
- Right relationship with God. The ancestors of Lauru people believed that right relationship between them and their god would bring blessings on their land, the fruit of their land, communities and families while on the other hand, any ill actions that may bring disgrace and anger to their god would bring curses to their land and communities. This implies that the

God who resides in creation, who they worship, is the God of life and death.

Boseto further elaborates that the wisdom and worthy custom upheld by the ancestors of Lauru people were God-given to them as also enshrined in the preamble of the Solomon Islands National Constitution that:

We people of Solomon Islands, proud of the wisdom and the worthy customs of our ancestors, mindful of our common diverse heritage and conscious of our common destiny, do now, under the guiding hand of God, establish the Sovereign Democratic State of Solomon Islands (Boseto 1995:3).

Boseto puts more emphasis on the wisdom and worthy customs of the ancestors of Lauru people as to how they perceive and relate to land as the foundation of his grassroots theology of the land. He further argues and establishes the following theological claims; that our land as our mother must be seen as the life-blood of Lauru communities; that land for the people of Lauru is both their security and life-insurance for the tribe's generations; that the Land in Lauru context is owned by each tribal groupings and cannot be owned by a particular individual and finally that the right phrase to use when pronouncing claim of ownership over land is our land and not my land.

In the Island of Lauru, the main tribal land in Babatana was called *Kutea Lua*, and in Varisi language it was called *Unu pua*, and it was traditionally owned by the tribal group and was not allowed to be sold out to foreigners. During the colonial era, land was also labeled by the colonial rulers as alienated land, of which according to Boseto “the term alienated land is a foreign concept that does not have roots and foundation in Lauru context” (Boseto 1995:4). Our land must not be regarded as a marketable commodity, but the very fountain of life for Lauru people. Individual tribal members along with their families have their traditional birthright to make gardens in their own portion of land, or to erect their houses in a particular spot that is permissible for erecting a family house.

In many LLCTC meetings, Lauru people have been invited and encouraged to perceive land as home for the wholeness of life. Boseto asserts, “seeing land as the very foundation and home for

the whole life is our theological and philosophical concept of understanding our land as our mother and source of life” (Boseto 1995:4).

The very fabric of life in individuals and communities is embedded or intertwined within the inter-relatedness of human life, life in trees, plants, insects, animal species, reptiles and both the land and sea. This clearly implies that our lives cannot be separated from our land, the sea, river air and the entire environment within our circle of existence.

Boseto (1995b) argues that one of the major problems of contemporary Luru people nowadays was that they perceive the land as mere resource for economic development without seeing its sacredness. The more people perceive land as an object for economic development, the less they recognize its sacredness. This means they may hardly respect the spiritual nature of its existence. The ancestors of Luru people were said to have been very religious people in the past and that they worshiped God’s spirits residing in the creation around them. They are fully aware that there is a Supreme Being who is much more powerful and is above their small gods present in river, stones, trees, and reefs.

The environment is not just a form of material world in which one can make use of for economic activities, in fact there is life in the environment and the Spirit of God has filled the entire creation. There is also a strong affirmation in the LLCTC meetings that it is through recognizing the Spirit of God breathing life and sustaining the whole of creation in the island of Luru, that Luru people have a deeper and greater respect for their land in Luru.

Boseto’s grassroots theology of the land in Luru context and even to the wider context outside Luru has encountered and battled with other forms of theologies that presented the Gospel in prosperity and eschatological lenses. This foreign theological concept has been a trap used by the managing directors of the multinational companies to lure local people in order to grant them the right to concession for harvesting of their trees.

Bird points out that,

In Solomon Islands context, senior company officials usually would come and say to the local people that it is God’s plan and will that resource custodians should attain good quality and high standard of living from their land and sea resources with the cooperate help of those powerful multinational companies who have the capital and technology in terms of machineries (Bird, 2008:98).

Here we can see that under the cloth of capitalism and neo-liberal economic order, these multinational companies disguised in a form of Christian love and caring for the poor are luring resource custodians so that they easily get timber concession right to do logging operations.

Boseto's grassroots theology of the land further argues that our forefathers in the past, respected the land and their natural environment as sacred. They had a very strong sense of religious affirmation concerning the very presence of God within their environment (creation) than us the contemporary Lauruans who put much emphasis of the God of heaven (Boseto, (1995b).

In their day to day interaction in the past, our ancestors were filled with awe and the sensitivity of the God who resides within creation and who watches over their everyday movements, actions and listens to what they said. This has been the firm belief and understanding of creation that our ancestors taught us through the handed-down oral traditions, that land, trees, sea and reef were not merely source of resource to sustain human life but were also very source of power and life that proceeds from the God who lives within His creation.

In line with Boseto's grassroots theology of the Land, I have selected two poems that were written by two young men of Lauru Island worth of mentioning as they perceive the importance of Lauru Island as our mother that continues to provide and sustains life for Lauru people and those who came to live in Lauru in the past, present and future.

The first poem was written by Zalevaka (2017) in Babatana dialect and it reads,

*Tinaqu Lauru, ko kamisi maka, ko vakaji maka. Kiku sa piqata sarapokam re,
vuru sa tototolo la ta tikava. Sosopoe lokae matamu re (Miq) sa kia tu. No
bebetoe ko peke maka takui tanam.*

Literal translation of this poem into English would read like this;

My mother Lauru, you have nursed and raised me up. The Sun shines above you, rivers flow from you to the sea. The Tear of your eyes is the rain that gives life. In the end when death comes, you hide me within yourself.

The second piece of writing in a poetic form was written by Uki in English. The poem reads,

Mother Lauru, oh thou fertile lands and has sustained thy children for ages. Tales of great triumphs and periods of tribulations have been echoed for ages about thy children. Oh, since when did thou children despise thy orderly customs, and venerate the white men. A taste of the forbidden fruit and thy children betray thou. Thou forests, lands and Oceans are at the brink of total exploitation. Motherland Lauru, are you still there? Come cradle your children.

The two poems above clearly indicate that there are some young people in contemporary Lauru who really have great concern for the island of Lauru and who see that land offers and sustains life for the past, present and future generations. However, there are also many in this current generation who perceive land and the natural resources as a mere commodity to plunder for economic gain.

It was in the midst of this current growing population, economic pressure from the indigenous people and the shifting of peoples' mindset regarding the nature and understanding of wealth that Boseto's grassroots theology of the land continues to echo a fresh invitation to the people of Lauru to revisit the land and the entire environment with traditional and ancestral lenses, where the sacredness of the land is of great importance as far as these lenses are concerned. In the following section the study explores briefly traditional beliefs and practices of Lauru people in regard to the sacredness of the land.

3.4 Traditional beliefs of land sacredness in Lauru

Traditional beliefs are indigenous belief systems that have connection to the traditional religious practices of people in their particular cultural settings. Lauru people as Melanesians by origin shared the Melanesian world view of the land. Jupiter (2017) says that when one mentions Melanesia as a region, this refers to the neighboring island nations of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia and the Torres Strait Islands between Papua New Guinea and Australia and including the Indonesian Province of West Papua.

These island nations' people shared the same world view of land as sacred by perceiving the land as their source of life and respecting the land and all that is in it. The Melanesian worldview of the land in which Lauru people shared was not the same as the western classical understanding

and worldview of the land. Jupiter (2017) also affirms this as she points out that the Melanesian worldview on nature and the inseparability of human beings and the natural environment is a totally different view from the western perspective that sees nature detached from human. According to Cajete, people who have been classified as Natives were all over throughout the globe in their own local settings and locations of which the Europeans termed as the “New World” (Cajete 1999:4-5). Within their contextual realities, these native people have established a very strong bond of relationship between creation and the natural environment. The understanding of this deep existing relationship between the native people and nature was clearly manifested in every aspect of their traditional norms and culture.

Traditional beliefs on land as sacred in Lauru can be seen and found in the deeper spiritual connection the people have with their motherland. They have demarcated sacred sites purposely for traditional worship and sacrifices. Their close interaction with nature and their environment speaks well of their perception on land sacredness. The traditional spiritual value of the sacredness of land is part of the lifestyle of Lauru people in respecting their land. Kabutaulaka points out in the Solomon Islands context that,

Land and the environment is not just a commodity to exploit for the economic gain and interests of the few powerful elites. Our land has physical, cultural and spiritual values that we can embrace in order to support and sustain life. Hence, we are part of the land and our natural environment (Kabutaulaka, 2003:45).

Friesen (1986) also discovered the strong Melanesian worldview of land that can be regarded as a source of cultural identity of certain tribal groups who lived in a particular area or portion of land. He argues that Melanesian people have a strong belief system that ties them to their land as source and foundation for their lives.

Boseto (1995b) affirms that traditionally Lauru people believed in the great spirits that inhabited their land, trees, and rivers and which reside in sacred mountains. It was because of this traditional belief in the past that the land was well cared for, and was seen as our source of life. The unnecessary cutting and burning down of trees was not allowed during the past pre-missionary and pre-colonial era. It can be argued that it is this traditional understanding and perception of regarding the land as sacred space that provides for life both in past and present

that becomes the strong foundation for caring and respecting the land and including all that was derived from it as sacred. The people's deep traditional beliefs and values of the land and the entire environment as sacred becomes the very fabric of Lauru culture and tradition in the past. Hallman, (2000:7) mentions that there are two fundamental ways and approaches in which we as Christians and those of other faith religions can employ to articulate, understand and relate well to the earth community through life enhancing practices. These are what he terms as "Spiritual values and religious beliefs". Hallman argues that "our spiritual values are far beyond our rational minds, since it involves our hearts, emotions, intuitions and behaviors. And it is by engaging in and discerning of these spiritual values from our Christian perspectives along with other faith religions that paves way for us to perceive the sacredness of the earth as place to accommodate and sustain human life for the human species" (Hallman 2000:7-8). Hallman's idea of spiritual values that involves our hearts, emotions, intuitions and behaviors is very much in line with Lauru people's traditional beliefs as they relate to the land with their traditional spiritual values involving their entire life. This is evident in clearing new sites for gardening or even making new villages, where there will be rituals performed by killing a pig and making a traditional feast to acknowledge the sacredness of the land through these works. In one of his articles, Boseto (1995a) expresses that our lives and the land are connected, therefore, do not separate us from our land.

Moreover, Lauru Island and its people have their own traditional belief systems regarding the sacredness of the land. The LLCTC for the last 37 years since its formation as the only Indigenous NGO in Lauru Island, has been working on gathering information on oral traditions and worthy customs from the elders and tribal chiefs of Lauru Island and compiled them in a document called the Lauru custom Book. According to these traditional beliefs and worthy customs, the people of Lauru believed that the land is sacred as it is the only source of life for them and it has become the symbol of life and one's identity. According to Pitakoe, (2017), the five fundamental principles according to Lauru's traditional beliefs and worthy customs give validity to the sacredness of the land.

(1)*Komala Bana*, old sites of village where ancestors of particular tribal groups lived long ago

(2)*Kukubo*, graveyard where ordinary members of the tribe were buried

(3)*Sope*, was a carved stone where the skulls and bones of tribal chiefs and very important tribal members were kept after death

(4)*Nguni Vavarerena*, or *de vava rere*, is a sacred spot where believed to be where their tribal god resided, and people especially men went to offer sacrifice for traditional worship

(5)*Kesa Vudu*, traditional money and tribal wealth are well kept in the land, hidden caves or even in stones and rocks that were carved into bowl shaped objects.

These above mentioned key points give validity to the sacredness of the land. They confirm that the land and the natural environment are sacred and has direct link and connection to people's life. Lauru people believed that their culture and traditional belief system does not allow them to sell land to foreigners or anyone outside of their tribal group, as the ancestors of Luru people always perceived land as their source and foundation for livelihood.

Moreover, according to Boseto (1995a) God's spirit is the very Spirit that created the Universe and the Island of Luru which is part of the whole created order. Hence, the traditional belief systems and understanding of our ancestors who claimed that the Spirits of their God resides in their land, trees, rivers and mountains guarantees the sacredness of the land. For it is revisiting the traditional beliefs and claims of our ancestors regarding the sacredness of the land, that would help us respect the land and perceive it as sacred like they did before us. It is important to note that the way we perceive the land and our surrounding environments would most certainly influence us in the way we treat and relate to the land and the entire natural environment. When we find it difficult to perceive the sacredness of the land, it will be very easy to disrespect our motherland and to extremely exploit it in the name of the so-called development activities of which only the powerful and the few rich elites are the real beneficiaries of such economic activities. Therefore, in the following section, we attempt to propose a theological response to the contemporary ecological degradation in Luru already discussed above.

3.5 Theological Response to contemporary ecological degradation in Luru

The contemporary experience of ecological degradation in Luru brings to human consciousness one of the examples of an ecological crisis being experienced in the 21st century. Theological response cannot be left behind in charting the way forward. This is because as theologians we have become as McFague would hold, “aware of that anthropocentrism that characterizes much of the Judeo-Christian traditions” a theology which has “often fed a sensibility insensitive to our proper place in the universe” (McFague 1990:201). It is imperative to promote a theological response given the special place occupied by theology in conceiving various images, language, and symbols in an attempt to express how human persons relate to God the Creator of the Universe.

But what could be the foundation of the human persons’ theological response? This can be traced back to various biblical verses which in themselves must be exposed to anti-anthropocentric biblical interpretations. It can be positively marked that the book of Genesis has a lot to speak about human relationship alongside creation: In Genesis 1:28-31, it is stated thus; Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground”.¹⁸ Also, God said unto human persons in command: “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground-everything that has life.” And that is what happened. Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day (NLTB).

In this biblical text, God has entrusted to man the great responsibility of caring and looking after the creation. It was clearly stated that at the end of the sixth day, God saw what He created was very good. It is important to note that the creation, for which we are part of, must not be taken for granted as it defines whom we are and without which, we are unknown. The evolutionary,

¹⁸ New Living Bible Translation (NLTB).

ecologist would state that “we are, in most profound way, ‘not our own’: we belong to the finest creations of our minds, to the intricate, ever –changing cosmos. We both depend on that web of life for our own continued existence and in a special way we are responsible for it. It is an awesome—and unsettling—thought” (McFague 1990:201).

It cannot be commoditized for economic gain; it was a great blessing from God the creator himself. The question that we must continue to ask ourselves today as members of the Christian Church of UCSI in Luru is: Do we see creation as a real gift and blessing from God? In the book of Psalms 24:1-2, the Psalmist also declared that, the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he (the Lord) laid the earth’s foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths (NLTB).

With this clear biblical understanding and affirmation that God was responsible for creating the entire created order, the vast universe and solar system which includes planet earth, Luru people’s traditional belief that acknowledges our land as source and foundation for our life points to the awesome majestic presence of God the creator who is the very source, giver and sustainer of all life.

In John’s Gospel Chapter 10:1-15, Jesus here introduced himself as the source and sustainer of life. He speaks of certain images like gate and good shepherd metaphorically to convey a message to his listeners how much he cared for life. He simply stated that he came to give life and life in abundance, life in all its fullness. In the midst of these destructive machines that cause ecological degradation in the island of Luru, Jesus said that he came to give life.

According to Steve de Gruchy “Jesus uses the very image of life to bring across the core message of his mission to the people” (2015:182). In our modern context, there are also life and creation denying forms of Theologies that give birth to ecological disasters.¹⁹ These tend to place

¹⁹ These kinds of theologies are also classified in this study as harmful. They are harmful in the sense that they promote aggressive dominion over nonhuman part of creation. Such theologies tend to promote a dichotomy in creation where the “Us”-human beings, verses the “Other”- nonhuman creatures. Such theologies use biblical verses such as those in the Priestly account of creation in the Bible to construct non-eco-friendly knowledge that only seek the welfare of a human community at the disadvantage of the entire creation that includes lands, seas, vegetation, air, animals, birds, and insects. Therefore, a theology that seeks to promote dominion and exploitation of the nonhuman part of creation is such classified as harmful because it fails to promote the creation role of environmental stewardship and the ethics of care for the environment. The consequences of this, leads to experiences of environmental degradation and ecological crises.

human beings as the overall rulers of mother earth. In response to these harmful theologies, Bauckham (2010) argues that there is a greater need to revisit our theological interpretations of the Scriptures that will enable us as human beings to seriously view and perceive creation as part of us. Bauckham further claims that the modern theological implications of the concept of dominion and stewardship, has been misinterpreted to lead to the enhancements of structural globalization.

We have to bear in mind that creation, the land, trees, rivers and sea are continuously performing their duty of praising God—all creations unceasingly praising God as their maker.

In the light of the constant and vibrant acts of praises rendered by creation itself to its maker, we are being called and summoned by the scriptures to understand the biblical fact that not only humans do praise God, the entire creation of God from the very beginning of their existence have been praising God without ceasing till now. The waves, the thunderstorm, the wind, the earthquake, the rain, birds with all sorts of sound, land and sea creatures give endless acts of praise and worship to the almighty God of creation. Hence, the destructive forces in the form of heavy machineries which the multinational companies have used in their operation to do massive harvesting of trees must be seen as interrupting and disturbing the praises creation renders to its maker, the Creator (God).

In his ten themes for sermons on environmental justice, de Gruchy (2015:182) affirms this biblical understanding of all creation praising the creator by declaring that, “Given the way that God has created all living things, and that God has entered into a covenant with them (see Genesis 9:8-17), it is not surprising that creation responds by praising its creator. Psalms 148 is one of a number of such examples” (De Gruchy, 2015:182).

Moreover, in the gospel stories Jesus the source and giver of abundant life involve himself with creation. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 verses 25-34 Jesus talks about creation such as birds, lilies of the field and wildflowers in order to teach people the truth about God’s Kingdom and way of life. Jesus never detached from creation when he taught people and addressed the crowds. He uses creation and makes parables out from it to teach people. Jesus also sees the divinity of creation and acknowledges the sacredness of the land as of divine origin. He acknowledges that there is life in the land, by the very act of spitting on the ground and made

mud with his saliva, spreading the mud over the blind man's eyes. After he ordered the blind man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, the man came back regaining his sight. (See John 9:6).

Jesus in his earthly ministry used powerful metaphorical language of creation to give simple messages to the people so that they could easily understand the message he came to teach and preach. As water is an important element that gives life to humans and other forms of life, Jesus made an analogy that he gives water that will make people never be thirsty again. (See John 4:13-14). Again in John 7:38-39, Jesus invites those who believe in him to come to him and drink! For the scripture declares, Rivers of living water will flow from his/her heart. Jesus here speaks of the Holy Spirit of life as living water. Moreover, we can see that Jesus in his teaching in parables, recognizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature. We have learned a great lesson of theological importance here that will re-direct our mindset and re-shape our worldview again like that of our forefathers, to perceive God's creation entrusted to us as a sacred gift from God; that this gift supports and sustains life for both humans and the natural world.

Warmback contends that we need a theology of senses (2017:49).²⁰ As human beings we respond to the world around us with all our senses. We must listen and pay attention to the groaning of creation. Warmback's emphasis on the theology of senses is a strong calling to a higher responsibility by the church, community and tribal leaders, to mobilize the people whom they lead in caring for creation. As human as we are, we should be conscious of the pains and groaning of creation. Soil erosion caused by logging machineries, river pollutions that flows to the sea caused by spilt over of oil from the machineries, deep holes with muddy water that breeds mosquitoes which are harmful to human life, and the destruction of natural habitats for wild life are clear signs of creation's groaning. The groaning of creation does not only affect the natural world but also extends to affect human life. Since human beings depend on the land, river and sea for their survival, the negative impacts of such massive logging activities will directly affect and disturb human beings and the whole of ecosystem within that particular polluted or affected area.

²⁰ Warmback further explains that a theology of senses should enable us to hear the thunder, see the strike of lightning, and feel the rain as it falls. We are to embrace and accommodate those who have been regarded as environmental refugees, who fled from such situations as environmental disasters, pollutions and destructions.

Furthermore, a theological response demands us to be confident to challenge the current existing powers with life-enhancing theologies. Such is the theology that sees our land, rivers and seas, as the mother who breastfeeds us. There is a need to discover a theology that recognizes our land as not mere commodity for economic gain but as the very breath of God residing within his creation. Boseto points out the importance of land in Laurus context as he mentions that our land is our mother who gives us life, and foreign concepts or ideas that may have influenced our mindset to perceive land as mere commodity should never be entertained (1995:69-72). In his writings, Boseto highlights the Melanesian traditional worldview of land in which he presented the indigenous belief system of seeing the whole of life's existence and its continuous survival as depending very much on the interrelatedness, interdependence, and the interrelationship of the whole of life within the entire created order.

It is how we perceive creation that will determine how we relate to it. When land is perceived as commodity for economic activity, it can be extremely exploited. Tofaeono's *Eco-Theology: AIGA* (2000) is one of the first major research works on Eco-Theology in the Pacific region that recognizes the sacredness of the land by seeing that the household community has direct link and connection to the gods and ancestors including the land, sea and sky. Halapua concurs with Ama'lele Tofaeono (2000) by theologically articulating the vast ocean we lived in, and suggests that the entire oceans of the world are interconnected. Hence, what he called the "*Moana* (Ocean) acts as a symbol of life in relationship and the land we live in encompassing interconnecting the nature of the God of life" (2010: 65-70). The traditional affirmation of Lauru Island as our mother, source and sustainer of our lives in times past, here and now and in the years to come, cannot be denied. In the midst of all the logging operation carried out by these global economic powers in the island of Lauru, in the midst of soil erosion and river pollutions affecting our very land and environment; this affirmation of Lauru as our mother and source of life remains one of a theological issues that we have to grapple with.

According to Brueggemann, the sacredness of land was found in the God who gave the land to his people to dwell and toil (1977:47). This implies that the very God who created the land and the entire creation, resides in his creation. Pannenberg further explains that the western theological understanding of God's Spirit is the Spirit of redemption for the salvation of humankind, this understanding confines the Spirit of God within the ecclesial domain and by so

doing detaching the very Spirit of life from nature and creation (Pannenberg 1975:134). However, to detach the Spirit of God from his creation can also lead to denying the sacredness of the land.

The Eurocentric interpretation of the gospel employed by Tippet (1967) as discussed in chapter two of this thesis in which he labeled the indigenous people's close interaction with creation in their geographical location as "*Animism*", theologically fails to see the significance of the indigenous people's traditional way of worshipping the God of creation. Bevans (2002) in his book "*Models of Contextual Theology*" argues that, as people in their different contextual location have closer interaction with nature and creation, this is nothing more than the natural revelation of God himself through his creation. The revelatory acts of God do not begin in the manifestation of Jesus Christ in human flesh, but rather begin with the process of God's creative power by creating the universe. In the light of this theological understanding, the indigenous people's close interaction with nature and creation should not be mistakenly labeled as evil nor forms of animism, for they did not worship creation but acknowledge a higher deity, Supreme Being through creation.

Alufurai (1986) a Solomon Islander whose major research work is based in Sacrifice in Melanesia, points out that indigenous people of Solomon Islands are well aware of the interconnectedness of the physical and the spiritual world, so their physical interaction with creation through sacrifices was rendered to a higher being unseen but yet present with them. What Alufurai mentions, is true in the context of Luru and Solomon Islands where the acts of sacrifices were not rendered to creation itself, but to a higher supreme being who is believed to be simultaneously beyond and within creation.

It is also important to be aware of the fact that while some biblical scholars may give their theological viewpoints and arguments in support of the sacredness of life and the land, there are others who also have theological viewpoints and arguments that may seem to place our mother earth in an awkward position as mere commodity for economic gain and human consumption. Gerten and Bergman (2011) points out that the idea of Christian faith and theology can be a means to promote and enhance good relationship between humans and mother earth and should never be taken for granted, as there are also some religious ideas, theologies, traditions and

practices that can somewhat influence people to disassociate themselves from environmental issues.

A clear example of this would be Mike Hulme's argument (2009: 144) where he boldly made this statement: "One of the reasons we disagree about climate change is because we believe different things about our duty to others, to Nature and to our deities." Hulme's argument for raising the reason why he doesn't believe in climate change is a clear indication of such belief system that contradicts a sound theological position that we are created by God to keep, protect and preserve creation as our lives depend on the very life of mother earth. Climate change does not appear out of the blue, but a direct result of massive exploitation of earth's resources. In the light of this contextual reality where our mother earth has been massively exploited under the western notion of development by depleting the natural resources, it is very important for us to perceive the importance of firm relationship between ourselves and creation that was founded in God the creator of all forms of life. This involves a holistic relationship that is centered on God as the creator and extends to both humans and the entire creation, where we as humans cannot be passive about our stewardship duties towards God's creation.

Mcfague contends that: "a theology that does not work within the context of the holistic view of reality cannot address the needs of our time (Mcfague 1987:14)." The ecological exploitations, land degradations, land disputes, and the perception of land as commodity for economic gains through the lenses of modernity and contemporary capitalist systems, are the holistic views of reality that the indigenous people of Luru grapple with, and it is in this contextual reality that our theological engagement and participation be made alive and active to educate people, addressing these challenges and bring about change that will result in transformative developments in societies and communities. From a theological perspective we can assert that human beings' survival which depends entirely on the creation, speaks to us that the God who creates, sustains and preserves all forms of life intends that the a life giving cycle of creation ought to strive and continue from one generation to another. Thus creationist theology must be understood in the very context of God's ultimate relationship to human beings and the rest of Creation. Grenz and Olson affirmed this by saying that: "Theology seeks to understand God's nature and God's relationship to the world" (Grenz and Olson 1996:38).

Moltman (1992) points out that God's Spirit is a Spirit of life that continues to give and sustains life to the whole entire created order, and therefore cannot be detached from nature. Moltman's articulation on the nature of God's Spirit seems to be a powerful theological invitation. It summons us to the point of realizing and embracing the long existing life affirming connection and interrelationship to our mother earth as our very source and sustainer of all forms of life. Bird (2008) concurs with Moltman; He expresses that the Spirit of God and the land are interconnected, and from the spirit of life the land receives life. In his Marovo context, land is like a woman's womb where life begins. Our life's activities are centered on the land. We were created from the dust of the ground as the Book of Genesis informs us, (See Genesis 2:7) we toil, make gardens, harvest our food from land and we will also return to the ground at the end of our earthly journey.

3.6 Conclusion:

In the conclusion of this chapter we reiterate that a positive theological response to the ecological exploitation ought to first acknowledge the reality of this experience within Lauru Island. This experience exposes the fact that Lauru Island is one of the Islands in Solomon Islands that have heavily experienced ecological exploitations and land degradation over the last two decades; that with the high rate of environmental pollution in the region, the livelihood of the people in Lauru and the entire ecosystem have been very much disturbed and affected. The chapter has thus shade light to the possible response to this challenge. It has discussed the viability of the grassroots theology of the land as proposed by Boseto; it has proposed recourse to traditional knowledge regarding the sacredness of land among the Lauru people and a necessary choice to make use of life-giving interpretation and implementation of theological and biblical knowledge. It has been the argument of the chapter that by integrating Boseto's grassroots theology of the Land with Lauru's traditional beliefs, and practices on land sacredness, as well as with a pro-environmental non-anthropocentric theology, a Theo-cultural response is thus constructed as a tool to respond to the current ecological exploitation and land degradation in contemporary Lauru. In the next chapter, the study pays attention to how the church and the people of Lauru may be responsible agents of ecological stewardship in contemporary Lauru.

Chapter 4:

LAURU CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND ITS ROLE TOWARDS ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP.

4.1 Introduction.

The previous chapter shaded light on the nature and extent of the existing ecological exploitation and land degradation affecting the people of Lauru and the natural environment. The following chapter will attempt to explore possible alternatives that could help Lauru Christians in conceiving better ways of sustaining, protecting and preserving the island of Lauru, which is currently at the grip of an ecological destruction. The chapter builds its discussion by viewing land as: a gift of God, our mother, source of life, the foundation for life, as well as the home of the past and future generations.

4.2 The Church responds to environmental issues²¹

The church in Lauru context has been silenced for decades when it comes to land and environmental issues. While there have been local non-government organizations (NGOs) and the Choiseul provincial governments' involvement in environmental protection programs in Lauru Island, the church has hardly been part. Instead, the Church has been preaching the message of salvation, putting much emphasis on the heavenly kingdom of God, and eschatological messages with less or no concern for the environmental degradation that is currently affecting the lives of the very people it cares for.

Currently in the Island of Lauru, there are NGOs such as Ecological Solutions Solomon Islands (ESSI), Secretariat of the Pacific Region Environmental Program (SPREP) and Lauru Land Conference of Tribal Communities (LLCTC), which have been collaborating together with the Choiseul Provincial Government (CPG) to venture into documenting baseline inventory of flora and fauna in one of the untouched areas of the island of Lauru. According to David Boseto the

²¹ When I mention the Church in this discussion, I am specifically referring to both the Church as a denominational institution within the United Church in Solomon Islands and its congregational members in the context of Lauru Island.

local young scientist in Lauru who founded the ESSI²², his team in the month of October 2014, together with other stakeholders such as SPREP, LLCTC and other international Universities, collaborated in the research that carried out biological surveys in areas between the lower reaches of what is known as Kolombangara river to the very top of Choiseul Island's central mountain called Mt. Maetambe. These secular organizations have played major roles in addressing environmental issues within Lauru Island while the church remains passive on issues that deal with environment.

Although the church has not been as active as other organizations, we cannot underestimate the role of the church as an institution if it chooses to be an active advocate for transformation. In fact, should there be any powerful institution that will better educate the people and equip them to take the lead in respecting, protecting and preserving our land and sea resources, our natural environment and rain forests, the church takes a prominent position and it is better placed. In such a context where the Church has been focusing on spiritual aspect of mission and confined its mission within the ecclesial arena, I would like to suggest some alternatives which the Christian church in Lauru Island should venture into in order to be pro-active as an agent of ecological stewardship. The question therefore which we can ask ourselves is *“How can the church respond and use its position in society as an advocate of transformation for the protection, preservation and sustenance of the natural environment in Lauru?”*

It could be proposed that the church should select scriptural readings and formulate liturgies with environmental lenses that can invite the adherents to a call for environmental responsibility. In its daily sharing of the word of God, the church should take an alternative where preaching and caring for the entire creation is accommodated within her own liturgy. Moreover, the church as an Institution of her own right can still call or invite these leading environmentalists to be part of church educational awareness programs in rallying our people on issues of global warming, climate change, sea level rise and the negative impacts of logging that resulted in the current ecological degradation in the Island. Moreover, the Christian church in Lauru context should never see the responsibility of caring for creation as a secular role, but a responsibility that both

²² Ecological Solution Solomon Islands is a Solomon Islands Local based Organization founded by David Boseto a local Scientist that specializes in environmental programs. The Organization was comprised of qualified leading ecologists and botanists and environmental project managers with considerable experiences in conducting environmental projects throughout the country.

the secular NGOs and church have to share and participate in addressing for the good of our land, environments and the people who live in it.

Peter De Vos (1991) contends that the highest responsibility of all God's people in the created order is never to interrogate and find out how this mysterious God created the universe; instead, they ought to love, keep and care for creation, since within God's creation we find life and have our needs for survival met.

Warmback discusses how the Church at a global level can participate in contributing to the mission of eco-justice (Warmback 2017:30-31). He argues that the global position of the church's responsibility can be measured by articulating the World Council of Church's (WCC) idea of *justice, peace and the integrity of creation* (JPIC). According to the WCC, the program of JPIC is crucial since maintaining of ecological integrity of the earth has a strong connection to the integrity of human beings.

Warmback also points out that in Luru and in South African contexts, "the church was silent on environmental issues in the past. Under the apartheid regime, the church was very instrumental in protesting against certain issues, but when it came to environmental issues, the church became so passive and quiet" (Warmback 2017:31). The church as an institution that claims to preach the good news of protecting people's lives must be prophetic in her role and be the voice of the voiceless and the marginalized in societies.

The ongoing operation of these global economic powers in island of Luru, causes more than ecological degradation. As discussed earlier, it also contributes to the poverty in people's lives as very little amount of money has been paid to the land owners in a form of what is called royalty payment, and higher percentage of money goes to the company owners and the government. According to Katovai (2015), local land owners only received smaller dividends of royalty payments from their logs in comparison to the amount the government received. De Gruchy makes a powerful statement as he says:

The problem confronting the globe, our continent and our country today is that alongside the incredible wealth that this neo-liberal capitalist economy has generated for some people, there is incredible poverty. What the globalized neo-liberal economy seems to do is to suck money up through the system, and leave in its wake closed factories and mines, unemployment, the casualization of labour, and the survival economics of the informal sector" (De Gruchy, 2015:218).

The Accra statement of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, also prophetically declares:

We reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defies God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire, which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule (Accra Covenant clause 19).²³

Some of the churches in the global context and active theologians are not afraid of the state and these so called economic powers; rather, they challenge them by demanding that better policies be implemented within the economic structures for the good of the nations. Hence, it can be suggested that the church in Lauru Island should be bold and confident in matters that affect people's lives with regard to the current logging activities, which have resulted in major ecological exploitation of our land and the natural environment. There are always alternatives for the church to engage more through such educational awareness programs. This can be through the mobilization of church members to actively participate in reforestation activities. Church members ought to learn saying no to these incoming global economic powers and opt for sustainable harvesting of land resources that will benefit the people and help protect the environment.

Moreover, in the Island of Lauru, we have more than one Christian denomination. For instance, some of these denominations include, the United Church in Solomon Islands, The Seventh Day Adventist Church, The Roman Catholic Church, The Anglican Church of Melanesia, The South Seas Evangelical Church and other New Pentecostal religious groups. By understanding how the ecological exploitation in Lauru Island has affected the people of Lauru, these different Christian denominations despite their doctrinal differences, would come together and work towards a common goal of respecting, protecting and preserving both land and sea resources. It appears prominent that saving the island of Lauru in terms of its natural resources is of great importance

²³ See A study Resource on the Accra Confession: Covenanting For Justice in the Economy and Earth, World Alliance of Reformed Churches 2009.

today. However, this demands the cooperation of both the church and Christian land custodians in Lauru. Both church leaders and tribal leaders of Lauru Island must seriously consider and take into account that the land and resources of Lauru Island are not only for the people here and now, but for the yet to appear generation.

4.3 Re-Interpreting Biblical Stewardship.

In this section of the chapter, a focus is given on some of the misguided interpretation of biblical stewardship that leads to massive exploitation of creation by human beings. Palmer contends that “all forms of life whether human or non-human live to support each other in order to survive on this earth” (Palmer 1992:81); but this is not always the case in Lauru and there is a need to deconstruct the status quo (which is in most cases anthropocentric) for the sake of creation survival. Palmer argues that the biblical understanding of the very term stewardship must be re-visited and re-interpreted since it continues to lead to anthropocentric view, where humans have been given biblical mandate of being authorized by God to rule and dominate the earth according to how they may wish

There are some of the biblical texts that have been misinterpreted to justify man’s exploitative actions on the earth: Genesis 1:28, Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.” Genesis 2: 15, The Lord God placed man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it; and Psalms 8:4-6, “What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority” (NLBT). It can be held that scriptures when misinterpreted can become a powerful tool in the hands of the powerful to justify their exploitative actions on land and sea resources. McDonagh concurs with Palmer by pointing out that: “The Western cultural worldview in both the religious and scientific world is entirely anthropocentric in nature since it places humans in a very special position that is of greater importance and superior to other creation, and therefore can easily manipulate the earth and its resources” (McDonagh 1994:125).

Berry (2006) in his biblical perspective on creation argues and poses the question: *Why should people continue to destroy the very creation that brings pleasure to its maker?* He further claims that human beings have been given divine responsibility and have been mandated by the Creator (God) to be good and responsible stewards of creation. He exposes the biblical interpretations of the book of Psalms 104 and concludes that the bible was never meant to be a manual text book that can be used for ecological exploitations but rather our guide for the very care and good stewardship over God's Creation.

It can be noted that for a long time human beings have used the power of misinterpreting the biblical texts for the justification of their massive exploitative actions over creation. According to Wellman, (2015) Genesis 2:15 which in another translation reads, "The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it," must be clearly understood in its original meaning. He argues that when God commands us to keep and care for the earth, his instructions has nothing to do with man's dominion over the earth and exploiting it. Rather it is an instruction of caring and keeping the earth as our place to live in.

Wellman further explains that the Hebrew word for keep is "Shamar" implies more than just mere keeping, but "to guard" or to watch and protect. Another Hebrew word that needs to be further explained in this verse is the word that was used as work or other translation called it cultivate. The Hebrew word for this word is "a bad," meaning to serve. So Genesis 2:15 would be literally read as this: The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and to guard and have it protected. It can be stated therefore that God's command to human persons for the protection of creation cannot be considered synonymous to abuse and exploitation of creation.

Kearns (1996) connects Christian stewardship with eco-justice, creation and spirituality. He calls for a new way of reflecting on Christian stewardship, that it should be founded on a theological discourse that enhances eco-justice and the realized spirituality of creation. This implies that any theological discourse that is detached from creation is void and irrelevant to our contextual realities, where we have witnessed the groaning of creation. According to Bauckham, (2010) biblical stewardship is a divine call that we must respond to God as our maker by committing our lives to be good custodians of God's creation entrusted to us. Wolter (2005) draws a theological

affirmation from Christ's redemptive work by pointing out that redemption was never meant to be exclusive for the Salvation of human beings alone but rather it is the all-inclusive act of God by redeeming both human beings and the entire created order. Thus for Wolter (2005) the biblical implication of Jesus Christ's redemptive work is the restoration of the once perfect Creation before sin entered this world.

In his article called *The Native American and the Land*, George Tinker (1986) observes that almost every natives and indigenous people throughout the globe have similar beliefs about creation which were found in the Judeo-Christian Tradition. In the Genesis account chapter 2, while, the bible claims that human beings were created out of the earth, many times the church in Lauru context has been brainwashed with wrong kind of theology. This theology advocates for man as a supreme being as compared to other creatures and the earth. It can be noted that this theology has no place for creation. It focuses on the futuristic heavenly Kingdom that will culminate in the soon destruction of this earth. This narrow theological concept of the futuristic Kingdom of God has been highly preached, promoted and advocated by Pentecostal preachers such as Lindsay (1997) in his book called "*The Late Great Planet Earth*."²⁴ Since the publication of Lindsay's book, till now (21 years later), a theology of human beings superiority over creation especially those who claim to be believers, continues to thrive with great influence in the lives of Lauru Christians.

According to Agyarko and Cilliers (2016) this kind of narrow theological understanding and lack of true biblical insights, has influenced the mindset of people, which then resulted in destructive forms of environmental impacts as far as our relationship with creation is concerned. This kind of theology however, contradicts with how other scholars view Jesus' ministry while on earth. Loader (1998) argues that Jesus during his earthly ministry put more emphasis on living better life here and now. For Loader, the goodness of God must be experienced in this material world. Loader (1998:42) boldly claims that: "It is not about a pathway to heaven, as hope lies in abandoning earth. This kind of theology diminishes Creation." There is a great need of understanding that the very spirit of God that gives life to human beings is the same spirit that is hovering over the entire created order.

²⁴ In this book, Lindsay assures that true believers will be caught away in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and the mass evil people together with this planet to be destroyed.

Pacific church leaders are aware of so many misinterpretations of the scriptures that advocate for the western understanding of anthropocentric view of creation. They therefore made attempt by calling church leaders within the region to come together to revisit their traditional values incorporated with the scriptures. This is evidenced in the Otin Tai declaration (2004), a call and open invitation initiated by various Pacific church leaders for the re-interpretation of biblical teachings in connection to the Traditional Pacific teachings in order to encourage pacific people to become good stewards of the land, sea and natural environment.

The Earth Bible Team (2000) mentions that a principle of mutual custodianship existed between human beings and the earth. This mutual custodianship recognizes the earth to function and perform a duty as a unique but yet diverse domain, of which humans as responsible custodians play the role of earth's partners to take care of it rather than rulers to destroy it. The Earth Bible Team (2000) further argued by stating that, "there is a widespread recognition today that the language of human dominion over Earth is not acceptable. It is, in fact one of the factors that have led to our contemporary ecological crisis."

Moreover, The Earth Bible Team (2000) further explains how the philosophers and scientists during the seventeenth and eighteenth century bring home the dualism of medieval Christianity to its logical conclusion. These philosophers make analogy to the earth and machine and the creator (God) as the great designer, and humans as being the agents to handle this machine that leads to benefiting fellow human beings. This analogy of how to understand the role of human beings is still anthropocentric in nature. It is where human beings always became the ruler and supreme Lord over the creation. When the human being sees the earth as a Machine to handle and to run it for the benefit of other fellow human beings, then they can easily exploit the earth without any concern of having respect for the earth to protect, sustainably harvest and preserve the resources in it.

Seeing the earth in a mutual custodian relationship perspective is very helpful to us as Christians so that we know our position regarding our relationship to the earth and the natural environment surrounding us. A closer scrutiny of the earth as our partner will enable us to see the beauty and wonder of God's creation, where we receive gifts of food both in land and sea, rivers including the surrounding environment. The richness of food provided by the mother earth for us must not be taken for granted as if it was our right as human beings who live on the earth. It is the Earth's

contribution to us as her fellow partner. And for us as human beings, the Earth becomes our mother, who provides for our daily needs in terms of food, local herbal medicines and bush materials for building traditional houses for our shelters. As Human beings partner together with the Earth, we live in harmony with nature and supplement each other's needs. As Christians, our commitment to respect, protect and preserve the earth is a duty that will save life now and the lives of the unborn generations. Keeping, tending and watching over God's creation is a Christian duty that no one is exempted from.

We have a duty to attend to, and a vital role to play which is none other than looking after and caring for the earth, and to make sure that the people we are caring for are not suffering to the extreme where food will be difficult for them to get. We must make sure that our land continues to provide for our people, and will continue to provide for those who are yet to appear. As God's steward over his creation, we are to provide and suggest alternatives for our people on how best they can sustainably harvest their resources, and yet never cause extreme ecological exploitation and environmental degradation.

4.3 Responsible Ecological Stewardship

In this particular section, I will discuss some of the ways and steps which the church may consider as it ventures into approaches of being an agent that can actively participate in a responsible ecological stewardship strategy. As the logging operation throughout the Island of Lauru becomes a major issue that affects both people's lives and the environment, what is the role of the Church in this particular context? Will the Church continue to confine itself within its own boundary of ecclesial domain and focus more on the spiritual growth of its adherents while ignoring the contemporary social problems and ecological exploitation that is going on before its very eyes? It can be suggested that in this contemporary ecological exploitation and land degradation in Lauru Island, the Church should publicly take a strong stand to be an agent for ecological stewardship.

Van Dyke *et al.* (1996) offer clear biblical reasons as to why the church should place itself in a position as an agent of ecological stewardship. Jeremiah 10:12 declared that “God made the earth by his power, and he preserves it by his wisdom” (NLTB). If God uses his wisdom to preserve the earth, then we as the Church members, who continue to proclaim the whole council of God for the common good of all people, should also rely on God’s wisdom to care for Creation. Van Dyke (1996) *et al.* further express that God who is the Creator and cause of the universe including the Earth’s existence, has given to us the responsibility of caring for Creation. This implies that the church that fails to participate as an agent for ecological stewardship over God’s creation has ignored its God-given responsibility.

Clint Le Bruyns (2009) in one of his articles entitled “*Re-placing Stewardship? Towards an Ethics of Responsible Care*” argues for a new theological approach that seeks to redefine the implications and theological praxis of stewardship that will equip the church to become responsibly caring in the midst of crisis and challenges in the public sphere. Redefining the implications and theological praxis of stewardship calls for the prophetic voice of the Church by engaging in public theology to analyze, challenge, address and call for the rectification of such unjust economic policies, unjust political structures that continue to protect the economic interests of the powerful, which have resulted in the massive ecological exploitations and environmental degradation that disturbs both the people and the natural environment.

In one of his books entitled “Essential Care: An ethics of Human Nature, the famous Brazilian theologian Boff (2008) formulates themes of caring as ethically commendable for Churches in public arena. Boff came up with this theme of caring against the contemporary background of careless lifestyle in our modern era, which manifests itself in various forms. In the light of what Boff expresses, that the Church ought to seriously reflect on its stewardship models. Does it offer a caring mission to protect the interests and needs of its people? A caring church should be a prophetic church that must speak against social injustices, economic injustices and ecological crisis that is oppressing and destroying human lives and creation.

The church needs to be constantly reminded that our land is our traditional birthright and identity. It is in this very context of continuously giving away timber right concessions to multinational companies that the church needs to rise and take a stand as a responsible ecological

stewardship agent. According to Fraenkel (2004), politicians in the provincial government play major roles as they collaborate with managing directors of these logging companies when it comes to timber rights act hearing. Here, provincial government executive members according to the law of our country have the sole responsibility to determine the decisions of granting timber right concession to the multinational companies for logging operations. This legal procedure has been hijacked by corrupt practices, where loggers pay huge amount of money to these politicians in the provincial government to grant them timber right concession for quick operation on the land. Moreover, this legal procedure of granting timber right to the foreign logging companies has been hijacked by lack of traditional knowledge on Luru customs. This is in the case of provincial government executives, who are not well versed with Luru customs, yet the Solomon Island's Law (Constitution) has mandated them to hear cases and determine decisions on timber rights. This legal framework becomes life denying as it does not recognize the traditional customs and laws of Luru Island at provincial level.

In the midst of human greed, unjust economic powers, and puppet politicians who have been bribed by these multinational companies, how does the church take a firm and bold stand to act as a responsible ecological stewardship agent? The alternative in which the church can venture into in order to participate and become part of the global network and movement of addressing the issue of ecological degradation, is to embark on the sound theology that sees the involvement of God in his creation. The great spirit of life from God is never detached from creation but remains very much part of it. Hence the church which preaches the gospel of life to the people should always concern and take side on our mother earth when it comes to such issues as ecological exploitations, and even climate change that is very much affecting the earth itself and human beings who live in it. Warmback (2017:18) raises a concern of which he himself believe as a fundamental issue in the fight and struggle for ecological justice; he states,

The problem is that among those with political and economic power, some are claiming the world for themselves. They are trying to control it for their own benefit. More than that, they are trying to own the earth, and to exploit its resources to profit themselves only, and not make them available for the common good. As a consequence we have seen the increasing privatization of the "commons", those life-giving ecological resources and services that should be for the benefit of all water, rivers, wetlands, biological diversity and the air itself. One could say that nature is being commoditized and a "market value" is being attached to natural resources (Warmback, 2017:18).

Another alternative that the church can pursue is to accommodate within its agendas discussions on ecological degradation and environmental exploitations in the country. By discussing these very issues that affect the lives of human beings in all levels, it can position the church in a better place to act and challenge the current existing policies that only serve the interests of the powerful elites. The unjust economic policies and political structures in the provincial and national level need to be challenged, amended and rectified. Who can challenge these life denying policies? The church can do by mobilizing people and rallying support from the civil society. When people realize their sufferings and began to plan, mobilize and act for change, they will certainly achieve their dreams and plans. People's movement to challenge the status quo is a powerful move and action that can bring about change in societies. Korten (1990:124) also agreed to this line of thinking when he said:

Social movements have special quality. They are driven not by budgets or organizational structures, but rather by ideas, by a vision for a better world. They move on social energy more than on money. The vision mobilizes independent action by countless individuals and organizations across national boundaries, all supporting a shared ideal. Participants in successful movements collaborate in continuously shifting networks and coalitions. They may quarrel over ideological issues and tactics. But when they have been successful, their efforts have generated a reinforcing synergy (Korten, 1990:124).

As Korten plainly states, there is power in social movement; so the church in order to be a powerful agent of responsible ecological stewardship, should never isolate itself but be part of social network and collaborate with social movements to struggle together for a change that we can be able to live in a better world. I am convinced that the church is one of the most powerful institutions that can mobilize people together into massive social movement with the non-violent approach to bring about change in societies.

Moreover, one of the major hindrances faced by the church in Luru context, which directly detached them from involving in environmental issues are the kind of biblical and theological insights propagated by the extreme fundamentalist Christians from the new religious groups

spreading very fast in the Pacific region. According to these new religious groups' teachings and messages, the physical world we are living in here and now is full of evil and a wicked world. Hence we are to disassociate ourselves from this world and focus our Christian faith in the new world that is yet to come, in which Jesus himself has prepared for us. Dermawan (2003) points out that the eschatological presentation of the gospel has been the core teaching of Pentecostal Christians, in which they have interpreted the ecological exploitations and environmental disasters as a sure sign of the second advent of Jesus Christ. This kind of belief has been influencing many Christians throughout the Pacific region and has permeated and taken its roots in Luru Christian context as well. According to Ernst,

Most of the newer religious groups in the Pacific Islands are eschatological dispensational groups. Characteristic for them is a belief system based on a totalitarian dualism. In their view, the existing world is wicked and evil and in total contrast to the world they expect to come. This wicked and evil world is seen as lost, and there is an expectation that Christ will return in glory and bring an end to all misery, injustice, disease and death. Certain passages of the bible related to the "End- Times" are interpreted in a way that "rationalize" in a superficial way the experiences of people who are suffering the negative impact of globalization" (Manfred, 2012:38).

In light of this very influential teaching which has shaped the mindset of Christians in Luru, there is a strong need of decolonizing this foreign theological knowledge. Luru Christian church needs to be free from such eschatological and dispensational biblical messages that do not see the importance of caring for God's creation but rather only put more emphasis on the futuristic aspect of the gospel. As an agent of responsible ecological stewardship, the church needs to embrace the biblical hermeneutics and theological knowledge that sees the power of God and his presence through the Spirit of life in and within the whole creation. God's spirit that gives life cannot be separated from his creation. Against this background of distorted eschatological messages, Boseto (1995) lamented that such foreign ideologies should not separate us the indigenous people from the land, the very place we reside and belong to.

The church needs to focus its mission here and now and not keep pointing to the abstract futuristic kingdom of God. We need to get into the clear understanding of seeing the kingdom of

God that grapples with the suffering of God's very own children and his (God's) creation. The kind of Kingdom Jesus is referring to in the prayer he taught his disciples usually known as "The Lord's Prayer" is never a futuristic kingdom. It is the kingdom here and now. "May your Kingdom come soon, and may your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." (See Matthew 6:10) NLTB.

God's will for humanity is nothing more than people having right relationship with God and creation and to enjoy peace, justice and harmony in our daily living, which most of the time human beings missed and never enjoyed because of human greed and selfish desires, which are rampant across the globe through this current system of neo-liberal economic globalization.²⁵

Warmback states that as a result of the kind of economic system, the world has been devising, the ecosystems of planet earth that continue to provide and sustain life for living creatures on earth both human and non-humans were being destroyed (Warmback 2017:19).

4.5 The Church in God's mission

In this final section of this chapter, I would like to discuss and elaborate on the mission of the Christian church in Lauru and further present how the church in contemporary Lauru viewed this mission. The church in Lauru has been doing mission work since the early missionaries introduced the gospel to our shores up to this very day. The church understands mission as the act of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching, teaching and conducting crusades and open air services by focusing on the salvation of the lost souls.

This understanding of mission does not accommodate the agendas for discussing and finding better solutions to the earth's problems in our given localities and contextual realities. This understanding of mission which focuses much on human beings but fails to accommodate and address the environmental impacts caused by man's destructive methods of unsustainable resource harvesting is a Eurocentric Christianity's residue that the locals are blind to see and therefore called it the mission of the church.

²⁵ What we have seen and experienced today is a direct opposite of God's will for humanity. As the rich continues to accumulate wealth, the poor are getting poorer.

The environmental exploitations and ecological degradations currently experienced by the locals in Luru Island was for so long regarded by the church as a secular issue, and therefore had been left as an as government and secular NGO's responsibility. Given this approach to mission, the church has been always silent and never had chance to prophetically address these environmental issues affecting people's lives. Kumalo who writes within the South African context speaks of the kind of gospel brought by the early missionaries in South African:

South Africa like many countries was a recipient of the gospel through missionaries who came from Europe and North America with the aim of spreading the gospel, through evangelism and education. In most cases the gospel they brought came with imperial agenda, which was meant to make the beneficiaries of the missionary enterprise subjects of the countries of origin of the missionaries (Kumalo, 2015:175).

Kumalo's observation can be said true of the Pacific region. The understanding of mission and the proclamation of the gospel in the Pacific region, is very much shaped by the western missionaries' influence. In the light of this foreign understanding of mission, there is a need for a paradigm shift of our theological understanding of the God of this mission.

Le Bruyns (2012:1) one of the leading theologians and activists in South Africa articulates the contextual realities of struggles in post-apartheid era. It should be noted that despite the fall apartheid, the country still struggles with violence, poverty, economic exploitation, and questions as to whether the country experiences freedom and true liberation from Political and economic injustices are very popular in the country. Le Bruyns raises a critical question as; "To what extent is public theological discourses contributing to the quest for social transformation in South Africa today?" Le Bruyns (2012) answers this question by strongly emphasizing the role of public theology. He argues that theologians, pastors and church leaders, have a greater responsibility to practically engage in the public arena to influence the existing powers in order to bring about change and transformation in our societies. According to Le Bruyns, the church should not confine itself in what he termed as "*Ecclesial Domain*", but rather to be engaged in the mission out into the public arena by engaging in public theological discourse as an instrument for change that leads to transformative development.

Since Christianity teaches of a God who gives life, who liberates and is always present in and within his people, it is far better for Christians to theologically articulate the characters and nature of this God. The church therefore, needs to imitate God's nature of goodness by appreciating the value of God's creation. This leads to commitments in searching the scriptures and studying them carefully in order to grasp a fair understanding on how this God acts and relates to his people and the creation he has created. Only then can we be able to map out a new strategy for mission that will be seen and understood in its broader perspectives as we further delve into the characters, nature and being of the God of creation who involves in the sustaining of lives for both humans and the entire creation.

Moreover, the mission of the church should be a holistic mission. It should find its destiny in community development that should improve people's lives, and help people to see their potentiality as human beings capable of building their communities as a better place to live in as people of God. As Christians we have a strong belief that God who is responsible for creating this world does not abandon it. He created it and chose the world as the arena and the very place where he can manifest his work to sustain and save his creation from destructive powers of evils in our societies. The "*Oikos Journey*" points out that earth is the home for humanity and God's economy as the *Oikos-nomos* speaks of the rules of this home called the earth, and that God's economy is nothing more than his very own principles and rules of life that will make sure this earth as our home, continues to sustain human life; and in return, we as human beings have respects for our home the earth.²⁶ De Gruchy shares the same thought in-line as the "*Oikos Journey*". He mentions, "From God's perspective, economy and ecology are really the same thing, for there is no future in an economy if its rules are designed to destroy the environment" (De Gruchy 2015:220).

As Christians, we believe that God's intention for creating this world and placing us here is to for human beings to enjoy life within his creation and flourish. God never intends us to suffer poverty or hunger. In fact, there is just too much and enough within the entire creation to feed the hungry, and to develop or improve standard of living. However, due to the unjust neo-liberal economic systems the powerful have designed, it has resulted in creating a very big gap between the rich and the poor.

²⁶ See www.diakonia.org.za/attachments/39_The%20Oikos%20Journey.pdf

In Laurus Context, the church in God's mission has never been carried out in a holistic manner. It has been one facilitating a one sided mission where much focus and emphasis was on religious spirituality and the eschatological message of the gospel. The holistic mission of preaching the gospel should engage the church in active participation of addressing environmental issues and to care for creation. Moreover, the church in God's mission will always have the stewardship concern for creation and be accommodative to the future generation as well. Christians should never see this earth as if it belongs to us, but rather see ourselves as belonging to this earth, and that there is a need for sharing the earth's resources amongst ourselves.

De Gruchy points out:

God loves this world and has placed us here that we might live and flourish. We belong to the earth rather than the earth belonging to us, and so it provided for the shared benefit of all, rather than for a private ownership of a few (De Gruchy, 2015:220).

The Christian virtues that speak well of our Christian beliefs and economic benefits in terms of wealth and prosperity should not only be confined to our generation. We are to consider the future or unborn generation as beneficiaries of earth's resources. De Gruchy, points out this as he stated that:

Economic prosperity is not just for this generation, but must serve future generations, our children and their children. The way we live now cannot imperil the world for those who have yet to come. We have to think beyond just immediate concerns, and have a time-scale that is relevant to the oikos as a whole. We have to respect the carrying capacity of the earth. We have to hold oikos-nomos and oikos-logos, economy and ecology together (De Gruchy, 2015:222).

What De Gruchy seems to have meant is that this earth as *oikos*, which is a home to us was never meant to be for us who live and move upon it at this present time, it was also for the unborn generation. Hence, the way we benefit from earth's resources must be done in a sustainable manner so that those who will arrive after us can also share the benefits of the earth as their oikos as well. Sustainable harvesting of earth's resources in such a way in which we consider the

future generations should reflect the alternative actions taken by Luru people as they enjoy their very limited resources in the island.

Furthermore, the church whose responsibility is to carry out God's mission by now should see herself in a wider perspective of holistic mission. The mission of the church now should extend beyond the boundaries of just preaching, teaching and praying for the sick. As Christians we need to see God's character and nature who always stands at the side of the oppressed. In the light of this understanding, the church should also regard herself as the vessel of liberation to the oppressed people and a vessel of ecological stewardship for God's creation, oikos our only home the earth that sustains life. Bosch observes that "we have degraded the earth and have done great injustice to it by treating the earth as a mere object that it is continuously dying under our very hands"(1991:355).

By acting as an agent or vessel of ecological stewardship, the church in her mission could contribute to protect and preserve the earth as a better place and home for us and the unborn generations. We as the church who claim to worship God as the supreme ruler and creator of the universe ought to bear in mind that God directly involved in relationship to us and the natural environments.

Some of the biblical narratives found in the Old Testament clearly convey to us the close link and connection between injustice and the environment during the time of Moses as he confronts the Egyptian Pharaoh.²⁷ The Plagues that came upon the Egyptians is a clear indication that something was not right amongst human beings in the sight of God. Hence, this also means that something also went wrong in the natural world, the environment. According to De Gruchy, Moses boldly declared to Pharaoh that if he (Pharaoh) puts an end to oppression, then the land would be healed (De Gruchy 2015:184). These biblical texts, such as Exodus 8:2 about frogs, Exodus 8:21 about flies, Exodus 9:18 about hailstorm speak well to Pharaoh that injustices executed under his Political regime and the ecological degradation and environmental exploitation are interconnected. De Gruchy holds, "In confronting Pharaoh, Moses uses the words of Psalms 24:1, 'The earth is the Lords' (Exodus 9:29)" (De Gruchy, 2015 184). This implies that wrongdoing towards both humans and creation are interconnected and may have

²⁷ See Exodus 9:22-33.

direct consequences that will affect the wider community. In light of this understanding, the church as a living organism that continues to proclaim the gospel of life must never bow down to the powerful and the empires of the day, but rather challenge the life denying systems of governance, unjust economic structures and the current neo-liberal economic order that is much more concerned about profit making through their economic activities by way of depleting our natural resources.

According to Vigulu, (2017) the status of Island forests in Solomon Islands is 5-6 times unsustainable, of which forest cover declined from 90% in the 1990 to 78% in 2015. This has been the result of uncontrollable harvesting of our rainforest over the past years due to these multinational companies using large sums of money to hijack the normal procedures to acquire timber concession rights for fast harvesting of trees in our Islands.

In the current ecological degradation and environmental exploitations in the context of Lauru, the church cannot continue to stand aside, watch and be silent. The preaching of eschatological message that takes away the people's attentions from the living realities of life, and the struggles they face daily in terms of water and river pollution, the dying coral reefs and soil erosion, does not do justice to what the scripture teaches us. While many evangelical preachers preached about the future Kingdom that all Christians are expecting and longing to enter someday, Jesus the Lord of the Church, the master of creation cries for a Kingdom to be established here and now in his famous teaching on prayer known as the Lord's prayer, "May your kingdom come soon; May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."²⁸

4.6 Conclusion

It could be underlined that the aspect of ecological degradation and environmental exploitation calls for the church's positive and active involvement. This is because the church is one of the authoritative institutions in Lauru Island with potentiality to cause reforms in caring for the

²⁸ (See Matthew 6: 10) Jesus' concern as he taught his followers how to pray, is the concern for here and now, never a futuristic concern.

The kingdom of God and his will be done here in our present context where we want to see ecological justice and the caring for the earth we live in.

environment. However, mere involvement would not be a solution without a being accompanied by a new understanding of biblical stewardship. This can be achieved through biblical hermeneutics that challenge anthropocentric understanding of the bible, as this has for long led to more ecological disasters. This chapter has argued that eschatological theology and a race to win souls for the heavenly kingdom, is not enough to manifest the Church's mission on earth as it fails to respond promptly to the challenges such as environment degradation, facing the human community and the natural environment today. The church therefore ought to revisit its prophetic voice with regard to environmental stewardship, and so, to reawaken among its followers a desire to nurture, protect and preserve the environment, as a Christian responsibility. The next section of the study is the concluding chapter of the entire study.

Chapter 5

CONCLUDING THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction.

The last four chapters have been directed to addressing the objectives of the study. This has been achieved by conclusively answering the key research question and its subsequent sub questions. This chapter brings the entire study to its general conclusion. It provides the summary of the study by highlighting briefly how the study has been carried out, and its key research findings. It concludes by suggesting a few recommendations for future research explorations.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The overall aim of this study was to use the Theo-Cultural knowledge or what I may call theological insights integrated with traditional/indigenous belief systems in Lauru context, as a tool to help rediscover the sacredness of the land in contemporary Lauru. Through its problem statement, the study highlighted that Lauru Island was facing significant land degradation and environmental exploitation brought about by unsustainable logging activities with little regard to the indigenous environmental knowledge systems of the people of Lauru. In the view of its problem statement the study sought to answer a key research question below:

To what extent are Theo-Cultural Lauru Perspectives impeding or advancing a responsible ecological stewardship?

This study answered the above key research question in the following ways: First of all the study sought insights to understand the nature of ecological degradation in contemporary Lauru context. Second, the study explored and interrogated the traditional beliefs and cultural values about the sacredness of land in Lauru context and found out that although there existed indigenous knowledge that preserved the sacredness of the land, this knowledge had been deconstructed and disregarded by the present system of capitalism and western religions such as Christianity all of which were linked to foreign influence especially the West. In chapter three and four, the study sought to ascertain the extent to which Lauru's traditional beliefs about the sacredness of the land could be used to construct a Theo-Cultural response to contemporary

ecological degradation in Lauru context. It was discovered that a theo-cultural positive response to the ecological degradation in Lauru Island was possible if the sense of sacredness of the land was reawakened and observed in the contemporary Lauru people's ways of life. The study argued that by integrating Boseto's theological concept on land sacredness and Lauru traditional belief systems that perceived the sacredness of the land, a Theo-cultural response could be constructed to address the current ecological exploitations and land degradation in contemporary Lauru. It was also found that a theo-cultural response to the ecological degradation would be possible if a new biblical hermeneutics of ecological stewardship was critically incorporated within the church's mission of today.

5.3 Structure of the study.

In chapter one, the study first presented the problems arising within the background of study context in Lauru Island. Second, the study introduced the research methodology and further elaborated on the study outline. In chapter two, the study focused on the island of Lauru and made an attempt to recap the brief historical background of the Island, the indigenous people's culture and their traditional way of life. The study then moved on and further explored how the early missionary encounters and the impacts of the western influence have affected and changed the mindset of the indigenous people of Lauru Island.

Third, in chapter three, the study discussed some of the negative impacts of the global economic powers in Lauru affecting human life and the natural environments. By exposing the current ecological degradation and environmental exploitations in Lauru, the study further articulated Boseto's concept on land sacredness and the traditional belief systems in Lauru that perceives the land as sacred.

In chapter four, the study finally presented alternatives for the church in Lauru to be pro-active in engaging to address the environmental issues in Lauru. The study also redefined the meaning of mission in Lauru context, where the church should not only see mission within its ecclesial boundary limit but to move forth into the open public space and be agents of change that would lead people to transformative developments in their communities. Below are some of the research findings that have been mentioned in each of the chapters:

- i. In the contemporary Lauru, there is a clear evidence of the changing landscape of the Island, as many multinational companies are currently doing logging operation throughout the island
- ii. Due to many logging companies settled in the island for logging operations, tribal groups in Lauru Island have experienced land disputes that lead to many court cases
- iii. There is a great gap between these two time frames: pre-colonial era and post-colonial era regarding people's way of life, and how they relate to land and their surrounding environments in Lauru context. In pre-colonial era for instance, the land and natural resources are the very foundation of security and source of peoples livelihood, while in this era of modernity, people are buying western concepts and monetary economy becomes one's security in life.
- iv. The negative impact of large scale logging activities has resulted in ecological exploitation and environmental degradation, an undeniable fact in Lauru. This has been as a result of economic pressure, and the changing mindset of the people as they encountered the early missionaries and colonial powers, thereby perceiving land as a commodity to exploit for economic gain
- v. Lauru Island is one of the many islands in Solomon Islands that have heavily experienced ecological exploitation and land degradation over the last two decades up to this present time due to logging operations carried out by foreign multinational companies. Hence, people's livelihoods are affected
- vi. Traditional belief systems that guided people's minds and shaped their behaviors by way of perceiving and relating to land as sacred and source of life, have been corroded and poisoned by the foreign concept of land commoditization and the capitalist system of profit making and wealth accumulation
- vii. The Christian Church in Lauru Island has been silent for so long regarding environmental issues. The Church's focus has been a narrowed down mission within its own ecclesial circle. The Church's understanding of mission has been that of preaching the gospel from

the pulpit, and engaging in evangelistic programs of what is commonly known as soul winning

- viii. The distorted theological understanding of the scriptures which puts much emphasis on the eschatological futuristic message of the gospel with no space and room for creation in at its core is still upheld and advocated for by many Christians in Lauru Island. This needs to be challenged with better biblical interpretation of the scriptures and sound theological discourse.

5.4 Recommendations for further study

This important study has been constrained by certain factors such as time limit, financial limitation and lack of up to date information that deals with the topic specifically in Lauru context. Hence, I believe and recommend that the inclusion of empirical research field work would have improved and broadened the spectrum of this particular study area.

It would be very helpful to find out more from the Islanders their view on the impact of the current practice of logging activities through empirical research work. Such a study would even be very helpful if pursued at a PhD level.

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