

# Weaving Theology in Oceania

“This collection of exciting new perspectives from Oceania demonstrates the centrality and creativity of practical theology today. It is startlingly fresh, contextual in the very best sense, and relevant to people’s actual lives. Highly recommended.”

—Professor Wayne Hudson

Director, Centre for Public and Contextual Theology,  
Charles Sturt University, Australia

“This valuable collection of some sixteen essays proves the continuing health and vigour of practical theology in Oceania. The range and depth of the “weaving” involved in the writing and editing of these precious accounts provides not only a rich resource for theology today, but also testifies to the patient and genial editors who have brought all together for our benefit.”

—Professor Anthony Kelly, CSsR

Australian Catholic University

# Weaving Theology in Oceania:

*Culture, Context and Practice*

Edited by

Beatrice Green

and Keiti Ann Kanongata'a

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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This book is dedicated to Members and Friends of APTO, the Association  
of Practical Theology in Oceania—past, present and yet to come



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## FOREWORD

". . . in the beginning" (Gen 1:1), we came by *kalia*, *tafa'anga* and canoes seeking a land of our own. We settled on the untouched islands scattered across the vast ocean of the Pacific. Many years later the colonizers came searching for wealth and ownership. They came and saw and called us, the paradise of music and dancing. Then the missionaries came bringing the golden Cross to save the 'savage race' from 'going to hell.' They taught us Christianity through the Word, and by destroying our native beliefs.

Today, through education and communications, we rise to defend ourselves against the waves of change coming in small ripples and wild surf of modern issues such as globalization, clericalism, and climate change. The use of modern technology and social media challenge our Pacific wisdom to grapple with: how do we keep our Oceanic identity and at the same time be relevant to the rest of the greater world?

The CEPAC/APTO Conference of 2018, in Suva, sparked a chord of awakening sound to empower the People of the Seas to re-ignite the original spousal beauty of God manifested in the sounds of the seas, throbbing coconut palms, dancing stars in an unpolluted night, women daily weaving mats and painting tapa-cloths, men tilling the land, and, above all, the diversity of peoples, cultures, beliefs.

A distinguishing feature of 'weaving' in the Pacific Islands is that it is 'hand-made.' Even with the advancement of technology there is not yet any machine to do the weaving for us Islanders. We still weave 'all by hand.' The value and dignity of hand-made weaving challenge the Pacific Theologians to search for a theology that is 'incarnate' like Christ. Jesus' theology was 'incarnate—made flesh among us' in an *epiphanal* experience.

The Suva conference did just that. Each article in this book is a *la'i'akau* (type of pandanus leaf) that has been professionally prepared in length and width, and smoothed by local contributors hailing from different parts of Oceania, and beyond, and put together by the collaborative effort of two women editors—to produce this auspicious book, a first of its kind.

In a nutshell, the book offers an insight into the theological reflections, investigations and *epiphanies* of the people of Oceania, and related parties, shown in their culture, context and practice. So, if you want to be engaged in 'weaving' a theology, this book will be your starting point.

Keiti Ann Kanongata'a SOLN, May 30 2020

## PREFACE

The extraordinary character of our era has already been variously described by pundits from different avenues of life; the event of the COVID-19 Pandemic has simply drawn the central themes into sharper focus. Despite the fact that this virus was not an issue at the time of the CEPAC/APTO Conference in Suva—December 2018, it is therefore no surprise that the presentations at the conference centred on the stark crises characteristic of our times that challenge the Christian hope for justice and peace in the world. What *is* remarkable are the variety of approaches in response to these problems, and the creative suggestions anchored in practical solutions that give hope for the future.

It is for this reason that the theme of the Conference, "Weaving Theology in Oceania: Culture, Context and Practice" was maintained as the title for this book. A detailed description and understanding of the conference may be found in the collaborative centrepiece chapter, *Talanoa*, by the President of the Association of Practical Theology in Oceania, and Debra Snoddy, now an executive member of the association. Overall, our publication is, indeed, paradigmatic of the Oceanic tradition of weaving, a tradition evocatively on display in every aspect of the experience of this gathering at the Pacific Regional Seminary, in Suva. Weaving undergirds all aspects of traditional life on these islands, a vigorous practice which once involved men, women and children, that required harvesting and crafting different kinds of leaf, to make articles and mats for a host of purposes, such as baskets, ground mats and wall mats, roofs and sails.

So many participants had journeyed from afar, it was a small step of imagination to hit upon the idea of patterning the book after the great ocean-going canoe of Oceania, as a means of containing the rich variety of chapters by 16 different authors. Furthermore, the subject matter of this book is buoyed by passion, sometimes more compelling, at other times restrained, but always there; a depth of scholarly, pastoral, active engagement and personal commitment that evokes the human urge to go beyond constraining horizons, to live larger than the tests of time; because the ocean of the Mystery of the Great Beyond is the energy behind this whole endeavour.

Upolu Lumā Vaai, Professor of Theology and Ethics and Principal of the Pacific Theological College in Suva had already submitted his paper to another publication ahead of our invitation, but he graciously supplied the reflection describing the tradition surrounding the great canoe—the kind of wonderful craft that is on display at the Suva museum—that he had given at the plenary session:

### ***The Sail by Upolu Lumā Vaai***

The *laca* (the Fijian word for ‘sail’) of the great ocean-going canoe of Oceania represents a deep connectedness to peoples, values and cultures of the Oceanic communities. The *laca* is a powerful Oceanic metaphor because:

It is culturally and contextually rooted. It is born from the philosophies and values rooted in the cultural contexts and the creative imaginations of the Oceanic communities.

It is relational and transpatial. Traditionally, the materials that are used to produce mats (pandanus) and build houses (sinnet, made from coconut husk-fibres) for land-based activities are the same materials used to produce the *laca* for the ocean-based activities. It represents life and ecumenical values of relational interconnectedness as well as the interweaving of different spaces, peoples, cultures, stories and communities.

It is resilient. It invites people to experience how a journey is resilient in confronting and withstanding the challenges of the open sea. It must be durable to adjust to certain challenges and to recover from dangerous and life-threatening experiences. Hence the *laca* inspires individuals and communities to be resilient in the midst of their struggles and issues.

It is constantly opened. The raising of the *laca* signals its opening stage. The *laca* represents the beginning of its openness to new journeys, new seas, new discoveries, new heights and new challenges. It encourages an open, fluid, and dynamic culture and dialogue on issues that matter for the churches of the Pacific.

It is original. The *laca* is an original revolutionary creation of the Oceanic communities. Hence the *laca* attempts to capture the Oceanic communities’ originality in arts, cultural knowledge, and creativity.

.....

Upolu Vaai's erudite exposition of this amazing symbol reveals the interrelationship of land, sea and sky and our human journey, already characteristic of Oceanic tradition; an interconnection that should exist universally as a deep rapport—a vexing question central to the theology incorporated in this book.

Hospitality extends to 'weaving in' the two final chapters from earlier Oceanic conferences that are thematically *in sync*.

The dialogical gesture of honouring Oceanic traditional motifs of weaving and canoe has been generously received by those whose community way of life is threatened by the twin sins of greed and ignorance. These life-denying forces, and their blessed antitheses, emerge in the authors' works briefly described below according to the order they appear in the book:

**Keiti Ann Kanongata'a** in this first 'book-end' chapter, issues a challenge both to Tongan society and the wider world when, with prophetic authority, she demands an end to spousal violence. The cases the author cites from experience are her platform to argue for a return to the best characteristics of traditional culture whilst also acknowledging and engaging with the impacts and influences of modernity. The author grounds the argument in Christian Scripture and Tradition emphasising divine Beauty and the need for contemplative practice, and calling for a "theology of Beauty" and an "Oceanic mystical theology."

**Andrew Menzies** begins by exposing the gravity of injustice against the Indigenous people of what is now Kalgoorlie from the discovery of gold, and applies the reality of injustice and unresolved tension between the dynamic life of local community and distant, callous, or indifferent controlling centres of wealth and power to Christian institutional and community life. Pointing to the common good as an inspired and holistic enterprise, he focuses on relevant insights, especially of Jeremiah, Leonardo Boff, and even Australian author Tim Winton. Menzies' careful reflection on the history and significance of Boff's Base Ecclesial Communities conveys his belief in their importance for our times of crisis, revealing the ways and means by which the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God bring ordinary people, otherwise marginalised, into creative collaboration towards the realization of God's reign of justice and peace.

**Gerard Hall** connects the prophetic and mystical dimensions of Practical Theology as a means of facing the crisis of eco-degradation and global warming. With reference to classical and modern sources, he elucidates an

understanding of “genuine mysticism” noting its relative neglect and utmost importance for our caring and healing of the planet. The author shows how the mystical thread in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*, Raimon Panikkar's trinitarian spirituality with its focus on the "wisdom of the earth," and the "natural mysticism" of Indigenous peoples all strongly support his insight and argument.

**Debra Snoddy** takes us on a scriptural tour of the significance of the woman in the Gospels, Mary Magdalene. Among other exploratory paths, this demands an exegesis of the appellation, Magdalene, early Church assignments and designations, and anomalies in respect to the Gospel of Luke compared with the other three Gospels. She reveals how the different treatments of this Mary in the Gospels of Luke and John are quite marked. Ferreting out the truth of the matter brings the author to the point of demonstrating how Mary Magdalene is emblematic for us searching for the best Christian response today.

**Christopher Longhurst** presents "a contextual theology by looking at how indigenous cultural motifs are embedded in Christian themes through pictorial art" in order to augment the dialogue between faith and culture. Through sampling many different examples of interculturality in painting through the decades of modernity, he argues that the exercise of this principle in religious art has the potential, through respect of difference and acknowledgement of commonality within diverse cultures, to teach us how to better listen, look, and learn; the result will be a deeper sense of belonging, albeit a "double membership."

**Beatrice Green** argues for the recognition of a movement to the next stage of consciousness to which humanity is being drawn by the Holy Spirit. The thought of Bede Griffiths, Ken Wilber and Steve McIntosh support the argument which also includes the vision of Raimon Panikkar, and of David Bohm. Distinguishing qualities of this new level are shown both as challenge and acquisition. The value of spiritual experience that is essential to integral consciousness obtains renewed emphasis, while the mysterious source of consciousness' unfolding is presented via a final illustrative story.

**Donato Kivi** begins Section Two, with his offer of a Marian-ecological spirituality, as a response to the fragmented and broken reality of the *vanua*—understood in its widest sense as the context from which all draw life. Kivi uses familiar, ecologically-based typologies of soil, garden, and earth to represent Mary's Virginity, Motherhood and Queenship, in order

to present her at the heart of creation bearing help for our wounded world. The author uses familiar garden experiences of fertilising, nurturing and seeing, together with Scripture and Church tradition to articulate how we can receive the seed of the Word, nurture it in the garden of our heart, and share it to all the world. The goal is no less than a re-evangelisation of the faithful to mission, and re-conversion to love of all creation.

**Stephen Beaumont** explores the tension that exists between the therapeutic relationship and pastoral mission, and the gap where debate and discussion on this subject should exist in Australia. His response to this omission centres on his experience leading outdoor adventure-based programmes. He includes an insightful case-study of his experience with "bush therapy" working with disadvantaged and vulnerable youth, in particular with an Indigenous adolescent young man. From this, there emerged for him a fresh understanding of Incarnational theology as ground for this ministry.

**John Collins and Debra Snoddy** in the book's centrepiece, collaboratively recreate the formative experience of the CEPAC/APTO Conference in Suva, 17-21 November 2018. The chapter's symbolic image, *Talanoa*, evokes a profound interrelatedness generating life. Their rendition includes contributions from the conference plenary session presented in poetic form followed by theological commentary that invite further interpretation and development. The chapter is illustrated with photographs taken during the conference.

**Denise Goodwin** presents, via a case-study based on the drawings, written explanatory texts, and oral accounts of a focus group of Dinka children affected by the war in South Sudan, analyses and conclusions that bear directly on Western cultural presuppositions; tension exists with the different mind-sets of 'others' entering from outside. Based on the hermeneutic circle of interpretation, the carefully structured study offers keys for spiritual and theological analysis of the children's deep fears and altruistic motives which, in turn, direct her discernment of the sources of cultural relationship tension. This study carries the hope for the seeds of future harmonious understanding and integration, for the sake of spiritual integrity.

**Aoife McGrath** presents a persuasive argument for examining and gearing programs in ministry formation to counter and correct the tendency among students in these institutions to avoid depth of engagement in course practice designed to facilitate personal integration and authenticity.



Student reactions are identified as reflecting the complexities of contemporary culture and Catholic context. However, the importance of personal development and self-transcendence is demonstrated to be not only necessary for pastoral leadership, but also for Christian mission generally.

**Clement Papa** introduces Section Three; he draws upon intellectual influences in his own theological journey to argue the importance of applying Lonergan's praxis theology to contemporary Melanesian culture, in order to create a vital Melanesian theology. The author reflects on his own experiences of how political corruption in PNG has had devastating effects on social health and stability. He finds an answer in Lonergan's dialectics of history which had led him to propose a particular 'Catholic Action' to provoke reform. The author believes that an understanding of Lonergan's theology of redemptive history will help direct and clarify ways to work together to find solutions to address Melanesia's dire needs.

**Joel Atwood**, in response to the theological task in Island Melanesia with its huge diversity of living languages proposes better recognition and elevation of status of the 'contact language,' Bislama. Based on his experience of Vanuatu in particular, he describes how Bislama, while "significant" and "prevalent" is regarded as inadequate for the theological task, except for textual translation. He seeks to demonstrate, with examples and analysis, how a better understanding of, and literacy in Bislama can enable its use, along with relevant terms from the local vernacular, to communicate theology.

**Brendan Long** intends political persuasion as to the efficacy of religious adherence for the common good, aided by his own tool, the 'yeast test.' He interrogates the survey methods that seek to establish the financial contribution that citizens belonging to a religious tradition make to the national economy. He establishes the link between the Gospel motif of the 'yeast' and the persons of religious persuasion who are volunteers and donors, not merely for preservation of the institution, but altruistically towards the common good. This is original research in the area of theology and economics.

**Philip Gibbs** traces the development of the FCBCO, *The Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania*, from its beginnings in the new millennium to the present. He shows how practical issues, that were voiced by the relatively few Pacific representatives at Vat II, provided the ground for ongoing engagement with the needs of the people of the region,

and how change and development is reflected in ongoing, widening interaction with FCBCO and other Church leadership groups. The author examines the significance of the Synod for Oceania in 1998; and the importance of *Laudato Si'* and "communion in diversity" for the region. A regional description and map are included.

**Robert Dixon**, in this final 'book-end' chapter, presents an historical survey, augmented with his own precise illustrative graphs, of the Australian Catholic population from colonial settlement to the present. The author shows how globalisation was the condition of the Australian church from its inception. In this comprehensive study of how globalisation has impacted Catholicism in Australia over two centuries, elaborating the changing contexts, and interpreting motives, the author provides a measured path through sociological complexity which leads to a recognition of the same 'global' character in parishes today as being a sign of hope for the future.

.....

It has been my great privilege and honour, together with a stellar practical theologian, Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, to take on the task of editing this book. Keiti's Foreword is richly textured according to her cultural background, while her incisive first chapter cuts to the bone of a global disorder, setting our 'canoe' on a straight path.

Beatrice Green, June 6 2020

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I, Beatrice Green, write this alongside Dr Keiti Ann Kanongata'a SOLN. Despite a heavy weight of pastoral commitments, Keiti generously agreed to co-edit *Weaving Theology in Oceania: Culture, Context and Practice*, for which I am abundantly grateful. When I met Keiti in Suva, I was impressed by her strong personality and sense of humour. She is deeply contemplative, and I am sure hers and the prayers of her Sisters of the religious congregation of Our Lady of Nazareth have been the invisible strand throughout the process of this "weaving."

Somehow we managed to overcome the four hours' time difference for our emails conversations between Brisbane and Tonga, occasionally helped along with a virtual wine. It was a challenging time for Keiti. I heard that her brother-in-law who works with the Wesleyan mission in the US was in the ICU, very sick with the coronavirus. Soon after, she told me how she was busy clearing away debris in the gardens in the wake of Cyclone Harold. We are both very grateful to Sr Tisiola and Mrs Rita Olivina Tuiono for their office assistance, and to Mrs Mele Lefai, the weaver whose industry is visible on our book cover.

To borrow a Benedictine slogan, the book is the result of many heads, hearts and hands. We welcome this opportunity to recognise the diligence, insight and expertise of those who have helped facilitate this project.

There are our esteemed authors. From residences stretching from Papua New Guinea, Australia, Fiji, Tonga and New Zealand to Ireland, their continual courtesy and co-operation over the months is an indication of their faith in the direction we were taking, and also of their integrity and humanity, clearly evident in their presentations. Rev Dr Andrew Menzies' encouragement and assurance was helpful from the start and inspired me to take the task one step at a time.

As the book derives from a unique event in Suva, 2018, it is the planners and leaders of the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific / APTO conference to whom we owe particular gratitude. In this respect, we thank His Grace, Peter Loy Chong, Archbishop of Suva, representing CEPAC, and Dr John Collins, President of the Association of Practical Theology in Oceania

Inc., along with the association's Secretary, Dr Cecilia Tan, Treasurer, Dr Robert Dixon, and Web-master, Dr Zachariah Duke. However, we appreciate the assurance and encouragement of the whole APTO Executive, including Vice President, Dr Douglas Hynd, Rev Dr Peter Carblis, and Dr Debra Snoddy.

We are especially grateful to Robert Dixon for the centrefold photos (a bare few are mine), and assistance with some final manuscript 'polishing.'

After the recent spate of activity it's easy to forget that this project began warming slowly on the burner round about May 2019! Initially, two people on the executive, Dr Patrick McArdle and I formed a working party to collate the papers and get the book out; however, Patrick's swelling commitments in canon law research forced him to withdraw. Nevertheless, we warmly thank him for his work drafting the requests and his early proof-reading.

We would like to thank the independent academic publisher, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, situated in the historic Lady Stephenson Library, in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, for agreeing to publish our book. Their Proposal Submission Form was something of a *tour de force*, and I am most appreciative to John Collins for giving our efforts the once over via his mobile phone in the midst of his business travels. Thanks too to Associate Professor Gerard Hall SM for suggestions in the marketing section (and further final 'polishing').

Adam Rummens, Commissioning Editor for Cambridge Scholars Publishing, has always been courteous, and prompt to respond, despite the nine hours time-lag—in the opposite direction from Keiti's and mine. Cecilia Tan alerted us to this contact, which we so much appreciate.

Personally, I must thank my family for their encouragement, especially my husband, Gregory, for *his* generous contribution of head, heart and hands, lots of listening, and assistance with scanning, and our son, Dr Thomas Green for preparation of the book's images for printing.

It really is quite amazing how in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, APTO's mission to produce a book from the Suva conference has nevertheless continued, bringing together, under the radar, academics and artisans, quietly and firmly gliding forward—which brings us to the final recognition, over and above all, for our book, *Weaving Theology in Oceania: Culture, Context and Practice*—Thanks be to God.

**PART ONE:**

**WEAVING THE MAT:  
SECURING THE GROUND**

# CHAPTER 1

## EMPOWERING WOMEN: RESPONDING TO THE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF SPOUSAL LOVE/RELATIONSHIP

KEITI ANN KANONGATA'A SOLN

I believe the issue of abuse and violent behavior in close relationships, especially the spousal relationship, is a pandemic that sorely needs to be addressed. Abuse and violence are destroying the delicately woven fabric of our society just as a beautifully woven mat is exposed to bugs that eat and gnaw at it till the mat is ruined, discarded and becomes useless.

As a Tongan, raised in a specific Polynesian culture, my focus is naturally on my own people. The stories I used in this presentation are taken from real life modern Tongan persons.

First, let me present some of the cases in point:

### **Case #1-**

One evening, recently, three friends came to visit me. Two of the women were recently widowed and the third woman 'lost' hers to 'another woman.' We had supper together then settled in the living area to chat. The 'chat' became a sort of therapy session in which I had the role of informal moderator. Each woman told her story of how she survived the violence of her husband. The therapy session continued most of the rest of the night with detailed recitation of the sexual abuse and other violence each had to endure as their 'wifely duty.' Oddly, the next morning I received an email from Dr John Collins, APTO President, asking me to make a presentation on such violence and abuse in Oceania. I hate violence and, as I have no husband to abuse me, my initial choice was to refuse; but I knew, the people of

Oceania need to face the fact that this does happen in this part of our world. So, reluctantly, I agreed.

**Case #2-** The story of one client, call her ‘Mele,’ was utterly appalling! She had come to me for help and counseling. She was a very beautiful young woman and I could not stop myself from blurting out when she finished talking: “Mele! I find it hard to believe that anyone would be so cruel to such a beautiful person as you! You are a very beautiful woman!” My remark brought tears to her eyes and she sobbed her heart out.

**Case #3-** A Form 3 student, call her ‘Pua,’ came one day to tell me she was determined to take her own life! Why? Because the sexual abuse she was subjected to at home was beyond what she could continue to bear! She was 15 years old! After calming her, I mentioned what a beautiful girl she was, and what a pity to throw away her life. As we talked out the problems during her two weeks stay with me I suggested she could perhaps find a way, a career that would allow her to use her good looks to gain a better life for herself. ‘Pua’ is still alive and living happily in a loving relationship.

Mele’s, Pua’s, and the three women’s stories are but a few examples of the many cases of abuse and violence I have encountered in my pastoral ministry. Violence and abuse against women, younger girls and children in Tonga and the rest of Oceania may not be as big a problem as in the large industrialized countries—yet. But women have come to me with battered faces, scratch-marks, bruises, and broken hearts as well as having been sexually, physically, mentally and emotionally abused and even spiritually confused. They come seeking a haven in the ‘safe house,’ and/or assistance in seeking police protection or other protective measures. A friend recently cried to me that when the honeymoon was over and she was moved into her new home, her husband treated her with less affection that he gave to the chair he sat on.

## **Responding 1**

Beauty—God’s Beauty—the Beauty of Spousal Love:

Spousal love expressed in beauty is a theme song in the Bible especially in Chapter 4 of the Book, *Song of Songs*, otherwise known as the *Song of Solomon*, or *Canticles*. The bride and the bridegroom are fascinated by the blinding beauty they see in one another:

Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved,  
ah, you are beautiful! (*Song of Songs 4:1*)

You are all-beautiful, my beloved,  
And there is no blemish in you. (4:7)

My lover is radiant and ruddy;  
he stands out among thousands. (5:10)

O my dove . . .  
let me see your face,  
let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet,  
and your face is lovely. (2:13-14)

Church tradition has built this profoundly human love into its theological deposit. Pope John Paul II points out in his *Theology of the Body* that the dialogue between the bride and the groom is a, “language about love and at the same time a language about the femininity of the bride . . . and the masculinity of the bridegroom . . . which express amazement and admiration” (John Paul II 2006, n109: 1,2. p.560).

According to Thomas Aquinas, “It (beauty) has the power to fascinate and convince us because the delight it arouses in us is based on the fact that, in it, something of the ultimate truth and goodness of reality becomes visible and communicates itself to us” (John R. Sachs S.J. 1987).

### **Beauty matters – beauty is God!**

As reflected in the Song of Songs above, a woman’s beauty and a woman’s genius are prime attractions for a man, and the same holds true for her. According to natural instinct, a man’s healthy, strong body, and social development, giving him the ability to provide for himself, the woman and her offspring stimulate attraction of a man for a woman. Likewise, a woman is attracted to the other who can help protect and provide for her, and for children who come of the union. When these attractions meet they can provide the physical basis for spousal relationships. Yet without recognition of the beauty of spousal love that



God provides, the relationship may, and probably will, fail to rise to the higher levels of mutual respect, affection, valued friendship and interpersonal dignity.

What drives a man or a woman to abuse and violence in a spousal relationship? What drives a man or a woman to reject and/or destroy the beautiful gift of God's special spousal love given to a couple?

The answers are as many as there are people involved: possessiveness, domination, jealousy, guilt, obsession, lust, and tradition-warped interpretation of cultural values, bigotry, financial problems, and so many other causes, pretexts, or excuses.

St Augustine of Hippo confessed the sin of lust against beauty when he admitted that lust hindered him from transcending human desire to rise to love of God: ". . . in my unloveliness I plunged into lovely things You created, You were with me but I was not with you; created things kept me from you; yet if they would not have been at all!" (St Augustine, F.J. Sheed, trans. 1943, 84)

Lust first wants the beauty all to itself. Lust wants to possess, own and obsess; so much so that selfishly it destroys the beauty it desires. If we are to rise from the level of fleshy lust to the beauty of God, then we need, as St Augustine experienced, to uplift our hearts—to transcend the created beauty to the Beauty of God. Does this call for a Theology of Beauty?

To be transcendent people, we would need to be people of contemplation. It is quite common to hear that contemplative prayer is not for us, Islanders. But, have we honestly tried to experience silence, solitude and reflective pondering? I believe that my contemplative experience of God's beauty naturally flows to my environment and more so to my relationship in communion with other beings.

When it comes to contemplation, women take the lead. Women have in-born potential and capacity to ponder, to feel the emotions of life, to have womb of compassion and feminine intuition, and of course a maternal heart.

Europe and Asia have for centuries developed their way of transcending beauty by their mystical spirituality and theology. How about an Oceanic Mystical Theology?

Practical Theology calls us to weave the kind of theology that touches the heart of the people of the Seas so that there is a richer appreciation of beauty, lasting value of beauty, and above all spiritual capacity to transcend created beauty to Beauty Itself—God.

## **Responding 2: Education and engaging culture with Evangelizing Presence**

Historically, the empowerment of women of the Pacific Islands goes back to the pre-Christian era. Christian education and hygienic life style introduced and implemented by missionaries resulted in the “liberation of womenfolk from the slavery of ignorance, of the manipulation and exploitation by men under the guise of culture and customs” (Keiti Ann Kanongata'a 1986, 42).

In our own time, education and career training are empowering and inspiring women to action. Earning power (money or status) moves a woman up from the level of dependence to being a person in her own right. Educated, ambitious and/ or inspired women are taking on responsibilities and leadership roles in business, politics, church and education. Through social work, both as professionals and volunteers, women are striving to better their communities.

In spite of progress towards just and equal co-existence, progress is slow in both secular and church mission to find solutions to social problems. Violence and abuse remain an ugly, festering sore in family and social life of the island peoples.

In his revolutionary *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II, offers a theological and anthropological solution to spousal abuse and violence. He refers to Jesus' comments on the origin of marriage:

Have you not read that from the beginning the creator made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? (Mt 19:4-6)

John Paul describes spousal love in agreement with St John of the Cross as a gift of self that is radical and thus total and irrevocable. The human body, with its sex—its masculinity and femininity—seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains “from the beginning” the

“spousal” attribute, that is, the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his/her being and existence (n.15:1).

God created man (human beings) in the image of Himself (God-self), in the image of Himself He (God-self God) created man (human beings) male and female He (God) created them. (Genesis 1:27)

In spite of many biblical accounts of the beauty of spousal love, this gift from our Creator is being trampled in the mud of abuse and violence by the many facets of selfishness, fear, lust and greed. All over the world, people are being battered by the media inundation of cheap sexual gratification. Oceania is not exempt from this amoral onslaught. In island nations such as Tonga, culture and tradition are used to excuse leering lust and violent behaviours.

Sefo’s story illustrates the particular tension between the influence of Western modernity and Tongan traditional life. Both have deep goodness but also limitations and dark pathologies:

Sefo, a husband and father of a Tongan family relocated from Tonga to Washington State, USA, was arrested for “hitting” his wife and children. At his trial, the presiding Judge asked Sefo why he hit his wife and children. “Because I’m Tongan,” he replied. The Judge asked him how being Tongan excused hitting his wife and children. “As a Tongan, when I was growing up, my parents hit me, when I went to school, the teachers hit me, and when I went to church, the ushers hit me. So, now I am an adult and married. It’s my turn to hit my wife and children.”

Sefo’s story represents many similar stories of how culture and tradition, which have so much of value, can yet conceal and excuse abuses and violence. Culture, tradition, peer pressure, constant media bombardment of sexual amorality, and financial problems are the major triggers engendering violent behavior and sexual abuse. While, the Western system of law has value and an important role in modern society, safe houses, arrests, court trials, prison, only possibly protect the victim after the crime. More family laws are merely ink on paper and do not address the root causes of amoral behavior nor effectively prevent criminal acts from happening.

The peoples of Oceania need to look at the wealth of love and family respect that was the way of life in the past century. Norms of good

behavior, loyalty to family and clan, friendly welcome to those in need, submission to a trust-worthy authority—these virtues need to be brought to the fore and given prime value again.

I think we have no choice but be engaged with the new culture of our modern society. We need to be present where people are, to be in touch with the reality of life, discover the culture that our people are engaging in, and then we bring God’s goodness in the context of people’s lives. We must be clear-eyed and honestly evaluate what is going on in our schools, social organizations, churches, businesses, sports and entertainment venues and our homes. To be ignorant of what is going on in our society is a sign of our irrelevance. The mission to change our world for better demands that we need to understand the culture and the gospel because change can only happen with the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

To resist the dark forces of sexual evil sweeping across our Islands we need to take a stand—a collective stand. As Christians we are being challenged by the Vatican II Council to resonate with the poor, afflicted and in need where in opening sentence of *Gaudium et Spes* we find:

The joy and hope, the grief and the anguish of the men (and women) of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ. (1965,1998, 903n1)

Taking upon us the joys and grief of our people in need we become also a part of the solution. Today, furthermore, we need to ask ourselves the question: Is our response to the needs of humanity credible?

## Conclusion

I believe the APTO conference in Suva calls for a *new weaving* of Practical Theology—a weaving that will produce a *new mat*—that enhances an Oceanic church and society—where spousal love and relationship are founded in the Beauty of God and in the “Theology of the Body.”

The 'new mat' will challenge us to weave together: women, men, ecumenically and with other advocates; to invest in collaborations among existing organizations, movements and programs that currently seek to address the root causes of spousal abuse. It is a call for all women and men to rebuild or 're-birth' a society befitting the Kingdom of God—a church and society where men and women in their spousal masculinity and

femininity live in the redeeming original meaning of their body—gift from God and gift for each other in the image of Trinitarian Love and Unity (John Paul II n9:3).

Women and men of Oceania need to work together to determine how to effectively counteract the malign influences of the materialistic cultures while finding ways to accommodate or assimilate that which is beneficial to our Oceania way of life.

Weaving such a 'mat,' we women need to bring in our men to weave with us. If our men become co-weavers, they will, no doubt, have no heart to abuse, violate or destroy what they are a part of making. There is no limit to our engaging our Oceanic World, as every issue of life is an issue for both men and women—women and men.

As theologians, and pastors, our mission is to weave a theology that is meaningful and touches the hearts of the people of the Seas so that there is a richer appreciation of beauty, lasting value of beauty and above all spiritual capacity to transcend created beauty to be one with Beauty Itself—God.

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