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The **Melanesian Journal of Theology** is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and in duplicate.

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EDITORIAL

The papers contained in this issue were given at the 1987 Melanesian Association of Theological Schools Study Institute on "Theology by the People, a Resource for Justice, Development, and Peace". The Study Institute demonstrated the extent to which Melanesian theologians are assuming responsibility, both for MATS, and for particular Melanesian Theological Schools. This sense of Melanesian responsibility gave urgency to the discussions, and to some of the contributions. Another factor, which stimulated discussion, was the readiness of evangelical participants to both listen and respond when they raised the issue of the relation of biblical revelation to personal experience.

Several speakers stressed the need to ask questions related to real life in the present, rather than to accept answers already worked out in someone else's past. Rejection of answers imposed from outside was not seen as a way of remaining in one's own "indigenous" past, of being content with doubt, or of denying the possibility of progress. Rather, it was seen as a way of being open to rediscovering the answers afresh, in terms of the present context, and so providing a realistic vision of the future. The way of transcendence was seen to lie through immanence. Contributions by expatriates were not rejected but were assessed by how far they addressed genuine Melanesian concerns. The correlation between theology and engagement with the struggles of the people of Melanesia is expressed in a sentence from the paper by the new President of MATS, Revd Dick Avi: "Christ is resurrected in the hope of the people who are struggling to overcome the barriers or constraints in their lives." This statement need not reduce the belief in the resurrection to a gloss on secular politics. Rather, it may be seen as a way of saying that the effectiveness of a present experience of the risen Christ may be tested by how far it enables people to transcend their present context from within.

The Study Institute attempted to make a start in the task of relating theology to current Melanesian affairs. An example of this was the work of the group which studied the issue of "land" as a Melanesian value. How can "land" be seen as a priceless absolute possession? What contribution could a proper attitude to "land" make to the resolution of the conflicts in

Fiji, New Caledonia, and Irian Jaya, and to the impact of “modern” exploitive intervention in the whole region?

Revd Christopher J. Garland (Editor).

A paper from the Study Institute, by the Editor, has been held over for the next issue.

The Editor welcomes correspondence on questions raised in the Journal for inclusion in later issues.

CONTEXTUALISATION IN MELANESIA

(A Paper presented towards understanding the contextual bases for reviewing theological task in Melanesia.)

Revd Dick Avi

Introduction

The term "contextualisation" has become widely accepted as a way of doing theology, particularly in the so-called "Third World", and especially to signify a shift from the use of the familiar word "indigenisation". This shift was predominantly influenced by the belief that "indigenisation" posed some ambiguities and limitations in adequately conveying, or even understanding, the faith of Third-World Christians. The adoption (or alternative usage) of "contextualisation" is meant not to abandon but retain the ideas and feelings, as expressed in "indigenisation", and to relate them to their future meanings. As Shoki Coe[1] puts it, "indigenisation tends to be used in the sense of responding to the gospel in terms of traditional culture. Therefore, it is in danger of being past-oriented." Culture, admittedly, does not remain static, but changes in time and place, and, therefore, it is necessary and important to speak of a new context. Regarding the term "contextualisation", Coe further pointed out:

> "So, in using the word "contextualisation", we try to convey all that is implied in the familiar term "indigenisation", yet seek to press beyond for a more-dynamic concept, which is open to change, and which is also future-oriented."[2]

There is still a need for the use of "indigenisation" in theology, or rather, a particular identity of theology in indigenous culture, or the culture of indigenous people. Because the concept "indigenisation" has been applied exclusively in the Third World, the rise of political consciousness in

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[1] Shoki Coe, "Contextualising Theology", an article published in 1973 Summer issue of **Theological Education** by the Association of Theological Schools in USA and Canada. Part of this article has also been published in **Mission Trends No 3**, G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky, ed., New York NY: Paulist Press, 1976, pp. 19-24.

[2] Ibid., Mission Trend No 3, p. 21.

pre-independent, and post-independent, periods has led to identification of indigenisation (and localisation) of the church, or the Christian faith, as a form of paternalism and imperialism of the missionaries. This attitude elevated other problems inherent in, and created by, the process of indigenisation.

Firstly, the term implies importation and transplanting of the Christian gospel (from outside) into the culture of the local people. Since the missionaries dominated this activity, and they brought with them their own cultural practices, their efforts to indigenise the gospel (and the church) suggested, and impressed, into the minds of the local people, that their (missionaries') culture was better than that of the local people. Moreover, the gospel and Christian faith come from outside rather than from within human experience and consciousness. This image was (and still is) magnified by the presence of anthropologists in a kind of joint-enterprise with the missionaries. Alfred Krass[3] highlights an underlying goal of this enterprise "to create a church where non-acculturated African or Asian peoples feel at home". Thus, either the church becomes the tool for Western civilisation, or the act of indigenisation becomes a patronising mannerism. Both are counter-productive and oppressive.

Secondly, preserving and promoting cultural values of sharing, community, caring, extended-familyhood, respect for the elderly and disabled, together with certain customary laws or taboos, could not be easily retained without reviving the old traditional myths and worship of evil and ancestor spirits, which were almost completely wiped out by the church. Indigenising the faith received a negative response from many church members, especially among the leaders and elderly parishioners, who contended that new faith requires new spirituality, and new morality, even if the cost involves the whole culture. The gospel appears to be above and against the culture, as proclaimed by the missionaries and early converts. Indigenisation would draw life back to ways of the primitive society.

Thirdly, indigenisation implies localisation, particularly of the leadership and structure of the church, where localisation was meant to bring about gradual and smooth transition to independence and maturity, the role of the remaining missionaries, and the new, foreign, church workers,

[3] Alfred C. Krass, "Contextualisation for Today", an article published in **Gospel in Context**, vol 2 no 3, July 1979, pp. 27-30. See especially page 27.

became increasingly critical in the face of rapid localisation. The programme of localisation, as a "child" of indigenisation, in some sectors of the Third-World communities, was being regarded as a premature exercise. It all seemed natural that the process of indigenisation, and the programme of localisation, were linked together in the struggle for political freedom and home rule. Indigenisation appeared to be costly because it meant the loss of missionary aid, on one hand, and the struggle for self-help, on the other.

The so-called "theology of indigenisation" has become unduly preoccupied with the pattern of reaction against the theology of the West. This creates undesirable repercussions in Third-World theology, which constantly seeks to inspire and permeate the realities of particular human situations, without necessarily denying or competing with theologies of other situations.

(1) Contextualisation in the Third World

"Contextualisation" is not an innovation of Third-World theology, as one might say "indigenisation" is of Third-World Christendom. In view of the points outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the concept of indigenisation portrayed the spirit of cultural self-containment, prejudice, and to some extent, opposition, against the theologies of other peoples. Indeed, "contextualisation" must not be regarded as separate from theology, as such, as if it were a method, or an ideal, for expressing theology in a particular context. Rather, the term, itself, profoundly proclaims the contextuality of the gospel. It implies immanent revelation of God, and His concern in the realities of a particular context, as if that context were speaking for itself – striving to gain liberty, and triumph over the world. Humankind's encounter and struggle to rid itself from the bondage of the realities of its situation is entwined with the immanence of God in human life. Incarnation demonstrates this quite clearly. Struggle to overcome bondage in the presence of God is, itself, a realisation of incarnation taking place in a particular context. As such, the term "contextualisation" differs in orientation, as well as substance, from what is implied in "indigenisation". It is important to point out some very significant factors, which inspired theology in the Third World to take particular contexts seriously:

(a) Theology cannot be done in a vacuum. The word of God cannot be proclaimed, or heard, in isolation from human realities. Theology is not purely a matter of personal salvation, which is usually preoccupied by ways of withdrawing from or surrendering to the powers of the world. The problems of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, war, exploitation, crime, etc., prevailing and increasing in Third World situations, as well as in other parts of the world, have much to do with the conditions set by certain kinds of powers in those particular situations. Theology in the Third World naturally responds to these situations, and confronts the conditioning powers of the world, manifested in dehumanising structures, institutions, and policies. Christian theology proclaims and reflects on the life lived in Christ to overcome and defeat the evils of the world. Revolutionary struggles, common in Third World countries, are a manifestation of that painful groaning of humanity, and, indeed, of the whole creation, towards ultimate redemption, which St Paul spoke about in Romans 8.

(b) The way every society has come to encounter God has been very much linked with the experiences of their time and place. Christian theology, as well as theologies of peoples of other faiths, have grown out of the contextual encounters. The early church, for instance, found it appropriate to develop doctrines and church orders, based on thought patterns and social or political influences of those times. The subsequent growth of the church, and the proclamation of that faith in later times and other places, also took up the conditions of later societies. Liberation theology, black theology, water-buffalo theology, death-of-God theology, secular theology, ecological theology, mystical theology – all have been shaped in and by particular cultures or needs. Robert McAfee Brown clarifies this further in his analysis of the conditioning elements in theology, in an article, "The Rootedness of All Theology", published in July 1977, following his visit to Latin America and the Caribbean:

> "(1) All theologies are contextually conditioned. Theologies emerge out of a certain set of experiences, or out of a particularised historical context.
>
> "(2) There is nothing wrong with theology being contextually conditioned. There is no way in which a historical faith (one that has received embodiment in specific times and places) could be expressed other than through the cultural norms and patterns in which it is

located. If it did not do so, it would fail to communicate . . . it would not be historical."[4]

(c) Contextualisation involves a critical awareness, which, in the language of liberation theology, is conscientisation. The people become aware of the reasons why certain changes have taken place, and why the conditions in which they are living are so in their particular context. They ask questions why news ways happen fast, especially among urban people. They ask questions why more and more people become poor, unemployed, involved in crime, separated from families, unhealthy, etc., despite claims of growth in national production and revenue by governments and business enterprises. In the Third World, it is quite common and easy for people to raise such questions, but it is almost impossible to find answers, let alone prevent the loss of numerous lives, in the search for truth in such situations. It is, in fact, in such contexts, where problems, questions, and struggles happen that theology emerges as a way of seeking and building human life upon truth. Human awareness, and the revelation of God, leading to the ultimate truth, forms the basis of theology, and this takes place in concrete historical situations. Theology is that revelation contextualised in people's awareness.

(d) Every human experience has both the past and the future connected to it. Every context also has its past as well as its future. The only place and time where and when one truly talks about either the past or future, or both together, is in the present context. Contextualisation does not, and should not, intend to separate these time distinctions, even though the present is more-significantly focused than the past and the future. In fact, Third-World cultures still regard time in its wholeness. Therefore, it is proper to view contextualisation as an evolution of time. It envisages a struggle to free human life from the conditions of a previous time to pursue a future, which ultimately fulfils the hopes of the present life.

In many so-called "developing" societies, planning and operations in development activities are based on the belief that, if good investment is done in one area, it is possible to gradually spread the benefits around to others later on. The opposite is regarded as impossible; that is, if

[4] Robert McAfee Brown, "The Rootedness of All Theology", published in **Christianity and Crisis**, July 18, 1977, pp. 170-174. He taught ecumenics and world Christianity at Union Theological Seminary, New York. See especially page 170.

investment is spread around far and thinly it will be impossible for anyone to benefit. This whole belief is built on the principle of competition and materialism, which inevitably becomes corrupted by greed and selfishness. The few in a small space become richer and more powerful, and tend to dominate the rest, usually the majority. Much of this is conditioned by lack of understanding of equal rights for development and benefit; justice, freedom, peace, and fulfilment are the inalienable rights of everyone. As such, enjoyment of them by society should not be conditioned too much by restricting time and space to purely "secular" notions. We can say that contextualisation implies the sacredness of a particular context. The sacred value of the context must be realised in the wholeness of time. It brings to our consciousness the urgency of realising the future – the ultimate future – dawning upon human kind.

The attempt here is not to load the term "contextualisation" with all these meanings, so that every time it appears, it ought not to be understood for anything else. Also, the concept should not be considered merely as a method of doing theology. Rather, "contextualisation" should be felt as a process in which the decision and actions are directed at local situations seriously. Thus, theology rises from being the word of God to responsible and active involvement in the work of God, as proclaimed in Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of God, to bring about His purpose in a particular local situation. Theology, in other words, comes alive in a particular context.

(2) The Melanesian Context: a Papua New Guinea Perspective

In order for theology to reflect authentically the faith of Melanesians, it must definitely emerge out of the experiences of Melanesians themselves, and also directly with the conditions of their particular context. This is to say their faith in God has much to do with the way they have encountered Him through their history and culture. Their faith, history, and culture – their particular context – determine the way they conceive their future; that is, their hope and aspirations.

The Melanesian Papua New Guinea context today reflects a history and culture of a people dating back some several centuries. Although regarding themselves as one people and one nation, the continued existence of over 700 distinct tribal and linguistic groups or communities in that

context hardly make them a homogenous society. These numerous tribes have been separated by rough mountain ranges, valleys, rivers, forests, swamps, islands, as well as tribal wars. Even today, no less than 80% of the 3 million people live in rural communities. Their corporate contact with the outside world does not go back further than the last century, and the Christian church has been present for just over one century. However, the Christian church is very strong, claiming the adherence of no less than 90% of the whole population. This generally makes Papua New Guinea a Christian country.

(a) Social, economic, and political background

At its independence from Australian rule a decade ago, the nation inherited political and economic institutions prevailing at that time. Some efforts by the leaders have modified some of these institutions, besides creating new ones, to suit the social structure of the people, which is basically communal and rural. Yet, the impact of Western political and economic systems has increased in this last decade, to the extent that it is causing rapid change in the social structure. As a result, new value-systems are emerging, and, in some instances, these new systems replace the traditional systems, while, in others, the new systems come to exist beside the traditional ones. For instance, traditional land tenure is still prevailing, besides presently encouraged individual ownership. The family and marriage systems have now begun to break down to nuclear family patterns. Traditional concepts of work and ceremonies are being affected by employer-employee relations and leisure ideas of modern economy. Patterns of trade and exchange are rapidly becoming dominated by competitive private enterprise and a money economy. Urban and industrial developments are creating mass migration of people to towns and industrial centres, resulting in the growth of new kinds of social unrest and other related problems.

It has become very clear that the present economic and political systems, propagated by the institutions and policies that we inherited from our former colonisers, are being deliberately secured and encouraged to change the social systems inherent in the cultures of the people. To the dismay of the people, including the leaders, these economic and political systems are still being influenced greatly by foreign companies and political

powers. It has now been realised that, unless culture is preserved, and social systems protected, uncontrolled economic and political practices can destroy some basic values of human life and development.

This trend raises some very important questions about national development: what kind of life do the people want, and what sort of society do the people want to build for themselves and their children? At least they know that their traditions nurtured a society in which every individual was cared for, fed, and brought up with dignity within a community. The life of collective sharing of work and benefits, decision-making by mutual understanding and respect, basic rights and obligations protected by the extended family, and by tribal relationships, and communal support for sick, aged, and weak, are elements that characterised the previous indigenous pattern of life.

There is an obvious conflict in the way people think about a good society. Modern development seeks to build a good society based on material wealth and individual freedom. Traditional society proved that communal well-being grows out of mutual sharing and support. Interestingly enough, the nation has officially endorsed these two ways in all areas of development. There is a dual economic system – cooperative and laissez-faire enterprises. In the political system, there are liberal democratic practices adopted by the national and provincial governments, and community governments, based on village and tribal traditions. Within the social structure, there are new forms of social organisations, based on professions, and other emerging interests, beside the traditional patterns.

With these as the bases of national development, at least in economic and political terms, society has become reorganised into 20 provincial states, to plan and administer the affairs of their respective provinces. At the same time, the national (central) government takes care of international matters, as well as dealing with areas of common provincial, or domestic, origin.

(b) Religious background

In relation to the religious life of the society, Melanesians were basically animistic. Their worship, and other religious activities, were

preoccupied by the belief that gods and spirits live in the world, especially in trees, stones, land, and waters. Besides this belief, there is a special reverence for the spirits of the ancestors, and other dead relatives. It is important to note a fine distinction in this dual-religious tradition. The gods and spirits who live in trees, stones, land, waters, etc., are presumed to have come from other tribes, or simply from within nature. They are usually associated with powers to do harm, or even protect people from being harmed by the powers of similar spirits or gods. They can be manipulated by gifted men or women to do what these people want, as long as the rituals are properly, and correctly, performed. The spirits of the ancestors are confined to the welfare and discipline of the families or tribes from which they came. These spirits cannot be manipulated in the same way as the nature spirits. They do not live in trees, rocks, etc., as do the nature spirits. The ancestor spirits act, or react, with mercy, love, and discipline among their living relatives. They do not cause harm. They serve everyone, especially the weak members in the family or tribe. They protect the welfare and harmony of the family and cause situations of mercy, love, and care, through the discipline and wisdom of the elders.

In comparison, a sense of fear and horror is attached to the nature gods. They are usually the evil ones. The spirits of the ancestors and dead relatives are held in great reverence and awe. They are the loved ones. Unfortunately, this distinction was never realised by the missionaries or the anthropologists. Both considered the religious practices of Melanesians as being generally animistic, and considered family relationships to the dead (and ancestors) as worship of the spirits, with derogatory sense. As a result, in her condemnation of traditional religious practices as being animistic and "primitive", the church, from her early beginnings, could not realise if the almighty and loving God could ever be in Melanesia before the missionaries set foot on the shores of that land. In fact, the church ignored that question altogether, mainly because of the great degree of pluralism, and tribal conflicts, cannibalism, and head-heading, polygamy, and nudity, witchcraft, and initiation taboos, and so on. These were the signs of a primitive, immoral, and ungodly society, as far as the missionaries were concerned, and they were a sufficient evidence for the need of mass civilisation and evangelisation. By her first centenary, in the last decade, the Christian church had done a thorough job. She had converted about 90% of the 3 million people out of traditional religious practices to the religious practices of Western churches, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Two major concerns have grown out of this long effort; namely, the loss of some very fundamental and noble values, or traditions, and the growth of completely new religious divisions in what is supposed to be one faith, one baptism, one church, and one Lord. As the people became Christians (or, rather church members), they were taught to throw away all their traditional, and customary, practices, ceremonies, symbols, songs, and dances, with the attendant spirituality, and religious, or cultural; beliefs. In place of these, they were taught, and persuaded, to accept Methodism, Congregationalism, Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, etc. They were even taught to identify with the experiences of Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Knox, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope, or just the dreams of some moral fanatic from America, depending on which missionary confronted them. The old conflicts of the Reformation in Western Christendom had been resurrected in Melanesian Christianity. In the religious sense, the people are alienated from their society, and are living in Europe or America.

During the last decade, when the main churches dealt with localisation and autonomy in church structures, as a result of theological awakening, brought about by the project of indigenisation in Africa and Asia (as well as other Third-World communities), theological education was primarily "evangelical" and "denominational". Hence, the training of ministers, priests, and other church leaders or workers, had little to do with Christian unity or national development. In most cases, this was done deliberately; the missionaries, being foreigners, had to abide by the code of ethics given to them by their sending boards, as well as conditions of service set for them by the government of their host countries. However, in the event of the country becoming independent, the local leaders of the churches soon realised how far apart they had been separated in their own society, and in this one-and-the-same religion. They took up the projects of indigenisation and ecumenism, in the hope of recovering the broken ties between the church structures, as well as with their own people and culture. Success has been very insignificant, but one thing is sure to remain: the task of uniting the people in one faith, and in one Christ, has to take place from within the culture of the people, and, particularly, in the present context.

(3) Contextualisation in Melanesia

A genuine Christian, in such a context, cannot avoid being moved in faith by the conflicting, and contradictory, attitudes among his or her people, or even within himself or herself. The faith that reflects these conditions is bound to be genuinely emerging out of that context. This is basically the faith that is contextualised. Firstly, faith is built on the belief that God is present in Melanesia through the realities of human life. Christ is resurrected, in the hope of the people who are struggling to overcome the barriers or constraints in their lives. This implies a need for serious and effective involvement in developing Christian unity amongst the people by the church leaders, particularly the clergy. They are still highly respected, and often regarded as the custodians of Christian faith. Nevertheless, theology will not grow out of their involvement alone. They will need to discover the faith of the people as it finds its expressions in their struggles and decisions. Obviously, the goal of national unity, as expressed by their National Constitution, gives a basis for Christian collaboration. Not only is unity of all people in that one nation needed under the secular constitution, but Christian faith is fundamentally a matter of fellowship and communion with God and His peoples. It has happened already between some churches that ecumenism has led to church union. Actually, if it does happen again, the world should not be surprised. But, on the other hand, church union should not be attempted merely as a programme of Christian unity. Moreover, Christian unity should not be prevented or delayed by reluctance to allow church union to take place.

Ecumenism has to be undertaken seriously. In such a pluralistic society, Christianity can play a vital role in witnessing the unity Christ has prayed for, and demonstrated in death and resurrection; "that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (Jn 17:21 NIV). This unity has to be reaffirmed within tribal and linguistic groups first, since it is at that level that Melanesians truly identify their dignity and pride as human beings in their own right, created by the Almighty God. The richness of their relationship with their world – the wider society – is inherent in cultural and ethnic unity. The unity, which Christians proclaim in Christ, is diversified by gifts of God, beginning in the cultures within which God brings them into the world, and their subsequent development in relationship with other cultures. Hence unity in diversity.

Secondly, the faith of Christians in Melanesia cannot avoid being constantly faced by problems of human existence. The questions of survival, comfort, satisfaction, and peace, as matters of basic human or physical needs, have been considered, at times, only to be dealt with through human efforts, denying the church and Christians their responsibilities to share spiritual function as an integral part of total human life. It is obvious that attempts are being made to create separation between the "physical" and "spiritual" concerns by emphasising the division between the church and state. That is, the church is to concentrate on the "spiritual" needs of the people, while the state provides the social, economic, and political services. Unfortunately, this view, or conviction, is based on the belief that human life can be logically divided into "physical" and "spiritual" categories, as imposed by modern scientific minds from the West. This belief became more and more pronounced in the church, particularly during the struggle for Independence, by expatriate missionaries, who insisted that the church maintain her separate identity from the state, and "set her mind on the things of heaven, rather than on this world". However, Melanesians view life as a whole, and treat all human concerns in their social, economic, political, and religious inter-relations. He or she relates to every human concern with spiritual conviction, and conceives human life in the notion of wider existence.

There are many Christians and churches in Melanesia who misunderstand the implications of the process of secularisation. They believe that "secularisation" reaffirms the separation between "this world" and the "next world", "physical" and "spiritual", "this life" and "eternal life", and, therefore, divide human affairs in terms of "secular" and "religious". This view is rather intellectual and unrealistic. The word "secular", which comes from "saeculum" (Latin), basically refers to "this present age", in contrast with "the age to come". As such, it does not negate the "spiritual", "sacred", or "religious" nature of human life, or even of this present age. In fact, so-called "secular theology" seeks to articulate the sacredness, both of human life and of "this present age".

In Melanesian culture, the sense of secular responsibility cannot do away completely with "spiritual" or "religious" concerns in this present age or context. This does not mean he/she is not conscious of the distinction between the world of spirits and the world of physical existence. In his/her dealings with human concerns, the Melanesian Christian will find it quite

natural to respond with a faith that sees human kind and human society in an integrated whole. He/she regards society as a sacred institution. So, the Christian in such a situation does not expect "secular" engagements to be regarded as profane, anti-spiritual, and anti-Christian. In fact, one tends to feel that, if Christians or the church, do not involve in "secular" affairs, particularly affecting human life, Christ and His gospel of salvation, freedom, justice, etc., have no meaning for Melanesians. The sense of the secularity of the Christian faith is not present in that context. In other words, the challenge of the Christians in Melanesia today is to witness their faith and convictions in concrete human situations in order to fulfil the will of God in this particular context. Thus, faith in Christ and the will of God, as proclaimed in the cross and resurrection, becomes contextually secularised.

Thirdly, Melanesians have often reflected, in their various communities, the common belief in the coming of the ultimate future. The notion of a "golden age" has been present in their traditional myths, and has emerged, from time to time, in various religious activities. Cargo cults of the post-World War period, for instance, are a reflection of the common myth present in the traditional religious beliefs, which anticipated a radical revolution in the future to fulfil the hopes of human kind. This would seem to demonstrate some affinity to Christian understanding of eternal life – a new heaven and a new earth. The Christian Melanesian is, therefore, not surprised to find confusion in the minds of followers of the cargo cult movements, who easily adopt Christian symbols and ideas, such as, the bible, the cross, resurrection, and Saviour, to convey their hopes and aspirations for freedom and salvation.

It is important to note the pragmatic implications of the Melanesian messianic expectations, which have become much more strongly articulated in modern Papua New Guinea society than in the past. Evidently, many of the cargo cult movements have sprung up again in recent years as a form of resistance against the government, as well as the church, in view of increasing economic and political concerns. The cult followers feel that the way economic and political institutions and programmes are organised will never bring about well-being to everyone. They see human suffering increasing, and believe that more and more people will suffer more than at present.

This raises some very serious questions about the way the church preaches about the kingdom of God. Although the church conceives and proclaims the kingdom of God, manifested in Christ Jesus here and now, her usage of such terms as "eternal life", "eternal salvation", and "heaven" are easily limited to spiritual and other-worldly implications. The church would need to recognise that there is a close relationship between the kingdom of God and salvation, revealed in and through Jesus Christ, and the salvation and well-being of human kind, which can, to some extent, be brought about through human effort. The cross of Christ and the resurrection, as a confession of the presence of the kingdom God is the basis for the desire and spiritual ability to make manifest today the fact that salvation has already come. As such, in things, which others, perhaps, call human development, the Christian may witness a fulfilment of the kingdom of God in human life.

Thus, the Melanesian Christian considers the future apparent in the present life. The conditions of the present context do affect the way people think and act. It is, therefore, not surprising that people become engaged easily in social, economic, and political actions to bring about the future into reality today. As far as they are concerned, the future is contextualised in their faith and existence, here and now.

Conclusion

Christians in Melanesia can, and ought, to be involved in the struggles of their people, and society as a whole today. The struggles involve building up the body of Christ, and, creating with God, the new society – the kingdom of God, in which all problems, human and natural, find their solutions, and bring about absolute fulfilment. This kingdom, and its fulfilment, is not only beyond this visible world; we are already sharing in it, and living it out in concrete human situations.

The Melanesian is, firstly, a human person. His or her faith in Christ unites his or her contextual and cultural identity with other Christians in the same society, as well as of other contexts or cultural situations. He/she remains Melanesian, and, yet, shares in a wider communion. His/her commitment to Christ does not lift him/her out, or alienate him/her from his/her culture or context, and make him/her a Christian in a vacuum, or

another culture or context. Rather he/she becomes a Christian Melanesian – a Melanesian, whose outlook on life is renewed by faith in Christ. His/her Christ-like life is born in him/her as a Melanesian. He/she realises, in a new way, the seriousness of being a true Melanesian, by discovering the reality of God's presence through Christ in human life. Therefore, Melanesians taking a serious concern, with faith in Christ, about the realities of their particular context, are really proclaiming the truth of the incarnation, and affirming the servanthood of Christ Jesus as the basis upon which the Lordship of Christ – the kingdom of God, or the true church – is founded.

Thus, it is more appropriate and meaningful to talk of "Christian Melanesian" than "Melanesian Christian". The former implies contextuality of Christian faith and the gospel in the life of the Melanesian. In this particular historical human experience (or context), Christianity emerges as the power of God in the world. The latter, on the other hand, can be easily understood as implying withdrawal or alienation from cultural roots and migrating into another space, to be known as Christianity. As such, Christianity is made into another culture – a super culture – out of the world. The danger in this second pole is that it leads to neglect, ignorance, and indifference. It robs the gospel of its concrete human relevance.

In view of the conditions prevailing in the Melanesian present context, those who call themselves Christians cannot be worthy of the name unless their lives bear that cross in the struggles for freedom and unity of human society. This is true contextualisation; theology contextualised in the world.

Other books and articles read in relation to this essay

"A vortex of East and West (Watsuji Tetsuro's phenomenology and the problem of contextualisation)", by T. James Kodera, in **Ecumenical Review**.

Christ's Lordship and religious pluralism, G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky, eds, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981.

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Elements of Filipino theology, L. N. Mercado SVD, Tacloban City Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1975.

THE USE OF THE QUESTION MARK: IN THEOLOGY BY THE PEOPLE

Frank G. Engel

My paper's title is "The use of the question mark". By this, I am not referring to the emotions or stress, which that punctuation mark can evoke in many social settings, when it is raised as a symbol, apart from its routine language functions. I refer instead to a possibly useful and healthy place for the question mark as a provisional response, neither yes nor no, but probing, on the way towards needed answers, which may well be there to be found.

1. To propose the theme, **Theology by the people**, is to imply that theology, contrary to some of its critics, is no mere blip, no zero value; that, whatever exactly we may mean by it, theology is, or may be, an enterprise that **warrants** involvement by the men and women who make up current human society.

Using the words **anthropology** and **sociology**, implies a presupposition that human beings, and human societies, actually exist. Similarly, employing **theology** as a word, normally implies the assumption that God is there, whether or not anyone has seen Him; and that He has important links with human affairs. To speak of "Christian theology" is to go some distance farther. It calls up onto the screen of awareness an image of that God of the patriarchs, the prophets, and the apostles, in whom we all live and move, and have our being, and who calls upon everyone everywhere to repent and follow Jesus Christ.

"Theology" can stand for a host of things. For some, it means speaking a message, or messages, that have come from God. In that case, there is no real question of "theology by the people", except in the sense of faithfully telling what has come from another source.

Perhaps, more commonly, theology stands for discourse about God, that has its origin within the human personality: discourse which is intended to expound the word of God, to apply it to this or that situation, to respond

to it; or simply discourse about God coming from a thinking, feeling, human being, as such.

Here there is a necessary place for theology by the people if "people" is used in contrast to the elite, the authorities, the apparatuses of secular and ecclesiastical power.

For one reason, there is no indication of God assigning to anyone, or any group, a monopoly on wisdom and His word. For another, scripture and human wisdom concur in affirming that no human person or society may properly, or justly, be restrained from addressing the issue of God, and of His relationship with man, society, and the world.

Still another reason for urging "theology by the people may be felt in an acquired disability of the elites and the structured authorities, the progressive atrophy of their powers of imagination. The elites, and the structured authorities in the churches, as in the secular domain are trained to be ruled by logic; they are expected to be judged by the norms of reason and order, i.e., of science. They cannot be blamed, then, if they keep trying to make theology fit the rules of reason and logic. The pity is only that sometimes they do not succeed.

But reason and logic are only half of the story. The other half is poetry, the first vision and language of the people.

2. In his essay, "Man and poetry", Ivan Svitak wrote:

> If the essence of poetry is life in its immediacy, then poetry resides, above all, in man's own life processes, as an acute awareness of his own being. . . . Poetry reveals the world through the prism of a child's sensibility. . . . The poet sees the world concretely, uniquely, apart from the sphere of abstractions, which do enter his world, but leave the integrity of his vision untouched. . . . From the point of view of exact science, the poem is a worthless thought structure with no logical consistency, a meaningless verbal artefact; but from the point of view of man – a point of view which is richer and more complete than that of science – the poem is full of meaning and deeply relevant. The poem integrates us into the universe, into the absurdity of being, into the chaos of existence, not through the operations of

> reason and logic, but immediately and directly by evoking the world of values and deeper levels of meaning; the poem returns us to our place among mankind, in an ordered world, in the universe; it gives us back the consciousness of our humanity. Poetry is not a manifesto of man's antirational aspects; on the contrary, it is the burning bush of truth, it is a geyser of pure reason, which surmounts the limitations of logic. Poetry is thought in flames. . . . Poetry is man's rebellion against literal reality, it is the revolt of his imagination against a given order of facts. . . . So the poet is a man who is constantly in revolt. And he is constantly amazed by the jigsaw puzzle of his impressions, which reflects the joy and torment of existence. The poet proclaims the meaning of life, and the meaning of its paradoxes he creates in the exaltation of his own time. . . . His passion makes it impossible for a poet to be a skeptic; he believes in the world, and in the value of life, because he knows its miracles. The poet speaks for all men, and only when he speaks for the essential nature of his species, does he write well.[1]

I suggest that when "the people" do theology, they should be applauded if they refuse to wear Saul's armour, or to fight with Gog's bow. When they turn to the persistent questions of God and the world, of truth and justice, of bread and life and peace, let no one discourage them from invoking that which is within them: the sight and the passion, and the images of the poet.

3. There comes a day, though, when you and I and the people meet in a common public forum, such as MATS, each having done his theology, and each bringing with him his analysis, his rational conviction, his insight, his poetic vision, his passion concerning the vital, pain-involving, sometimes life-threatening, moral issues that are before us. We meet, we compare. Alas, your syllogism and mine overlap, but they do not coincide. Your program seems incompatible with my operating system. The people read their poems, and, behold, there are as many visions as there are poems. What now?[2]

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[1] Ivan Svitak, **Man and his world: a Marxian view**, translated by Jarmila Veltrusky. New York: Dell Publishing, 1968, pp. 101-122.

[2] For the following, I am indebted to James V. Bachman, "Of pluralism, truth, and abortion: a constructive role for skepticism in public discourse", in **The Cresset**, March 1987, pp. 4-10.

As an *absolutist*, I may hold that, on the issue that is before us, there is one, and only one, moral reality, which can be described and defined in but one universal, true way. I now face the problem, however, that my private conviction on this matter, grounded, as I see it, in the absolute truth, is not shared by a large number of people, no matter how often I set forth my arguments to them. This may lead me to become frustrated and to withdraw from the discussion; or lapse into inaction; or, perhaps, to change my stance to that of a *relativist.*

As a relativist, I would hold that, on the issue that is before us, as well as on other issues, there is more than one moral reality. Your reality and truth will differ from my reality and truth, in ways related to how this issue has appeared and been experienced in your life and in mine.

That I am a relativist in the public forum does not automatically, and in practice, make me tolerant of your point of view. In my private mind, I am perhaps still an absolutist. "Your view and mine are both true," I say, "let's put it to a vote", hoping that my view will gain a majority and become the universal law.

As the debate continues between your view and mine, the *reductionist* soon also steps in. This is not a moral issue, or a theological question at all, he says. This is a personal matter; a political issue; a power struggle. Or: this issue is not debatable, because the authorities have already spoken. By reducing the issue down to something else than it is, the reductionist does his best to remove it from rational discussion.

To keep discourse alive on the critical moral questions that we face, we might look at the option of skepticism, at least as a stance for the public forum at a time when strongly-held private convictions do not command universal agreement. Some skeptics in the past have questioned the possibility of really knowing anything for certain. A contemporary skeptic might, rather, start with some other propositions, i.e.,

> There probably is one universal theological and moral reality in the world we live, and one universal, true way to describe, and to acknowledge, that reality; but

Contemporary human beings do not appear to be coming to any early consensus regarding that reality, and that way. Hence,

Ongoing public disagreement about many pain-involving issues of justice, peace, and development is a basic fact of life, to be forthrightly, if reluctantly, accepted for the time being.

Returning, then, to the title of our paper, the question mark can be seen as the symbol for a constructive and rigorous skepticism on all sides of the public arena, both civil and ecclesiastical. Such a stance would place all participants on an equal and just footing, and provide the basis for the people and leaders to maintain a vigorous, honest discourse in quest of a rational and mortal consensus, without loss of their hope of their deeply-held convictions, or of one another.

In conclusion, I have dealt here, for the most part, with that theology, which comes from many. By faith, I assert that, in the theology that comes from God, there are clearer answers.

" 'No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love Him' –
but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit."

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

PRAYERS OF THE PAST

Fr Theo Aerts

I. INTRODUCTION

Prayer is such a basic human exercise that people belonging to all religious traditions have used this kind of expression from the earliest times. There are hundreds of hymns and petitions, not only in our own Judeo-Christian tradition, but also in the tradition of Egypt, Babylonia, and the other people of classical antiquity.[1] Progress in human sciences has now led to collections from still-existing tribal societies. In this field, Africa has taken the lead with, e.g., the anthologies of John S. Mbiti, Aylward Shorter, and Anthony J. Gittins, and a few other more-specialised studies with a more-limited scope.[2] They prove to all that, in addition to the need of offerings and sacrifices, there is also a universal human need to communicate verbally with the world beyond.

1. Are there any Melanesian prayers?

Several anthologies of "Prayers from all over the world" have nothing, or almost nothing, to offer when it comes to Melanesia.[3] A case in point is the vast collection by Alfonso M. Di Nola, who manages to quote only one example. It comes from the Trobriand Islands, and part of it runs as follows:

> His name be extinguished, His name be rejected;
> Extinguished at sunset, rejected at sunrise;
> Rejected at sunset, extinguished at sunrise.
> A bird is on the **baku** (= village place),
> A bird which is dainty about its food,
> I make it rejected!
> His mint-magic, I make it rejected.
> His **kayro'iwa** magic, I make it rejected.
> His **libomatu** magic, I make it rejected (etc.).
> His caresses of love, I make it rejected.
> His bodily embracing, I make it rejected.
> My **kabisilova** spell, I make it rejected.

It worms its way within you,
The way of the earth heap in the bush gapes open
The way of the refuse heap in the village is closed.

This rather unusual text is the counterpart of the more-familiar love magic (**kayro'iwa** and **libomatu**), designed to attract a sexual partner. However, the above formula has the purpose of "causing to reject" (hence the name of **kabisilova**) a desired person, or to make a girl, her paramour, or her husband, wiped out from one's memory. Some may wonder whether the formula quoted is a prayer at all, even by the standards used by Di Nola, who says he limits himself to liturgical prayer only, and leaves out on purpose any home-made texts.

To our knowledge, there is, as yet, not one anthology of Melanesian prayers. Still one cannot say that there has been a lack of interest to document the pre-Christian religion. Bishop A. Navarre and Revd G. H. Codrington are two missionaries of the first generation, who noted down some "pagan prayers", but it was not easy for these foreigners to obtain the old formulas, and many a prayer specialist of the time has taken his or her secret to the tomb.[4] Subsequent anthropologists like G. Peekel, J. Meier, B. Malinowski, and a few others, have added to our store of information, but the results they obtained are often misfiled under such entries as "charms, spells, and magic". The most-readily available sources, then, are two major collections of very disparate anthropological data made by Fr Heinrich Aufenanger. He was associated with a catechist school at Guyebe, near Bundi, and sat down, during the final years of his life, with many village people in North-east New Guinea, to ascertain, as far as possible, the earlier pagan ways of life.[5]

So far we have touched upon some of the difficulties met in describing the Melanesian prayer tradition. Some problems, for example, the reason why the Melanesian picture seems so different from the African one, do not necessarily require our further attention.[6] One guess is that it has something to do with the prevalence of a high god in African religion, and also with the great degree of institutionalisation of cults in that continent, reasons which would apply also among Polynesian peoples. But, there remain other glaring questions. For instance, why are Melanesians, as such, so secretive about their prayers, when many modern societies have them printed in books for everyone to read?

Is there a difference between prayers, spells, and incantations? How much can one rely upon the information gathered in a haphazard way by scholars with different interests, or by others, who give their materials, without always adding the necessary details or guarantees?[7]

First, one should observe that it is only natural that prayers are **not** among the most obvious products of a human culture. They express such deep personal feelings that they often remain confined to the private sphere. Many times, too, they are "speechless",[8] or – unlike offerings and sacrifices – they are so short and different from one occasion to another that one might not recognise them at all. For instance, when a Simbu man says: "Sun, look at this", while holding up a taboo marker, which he is going to tie on one of his fruit trees, or when the Nakanai people, in moments of greatest distress, call upon "or Father" (**Tamamiteu**), or when they say: "The Lord of heaven (**Tauna Salemo**) has sent it", when the first rain falls.[9] These exclamations express, indeed, a belief in a Supreme Being, who is called upon for help, and to whom even a prayer of thanksgiving is addressed. Still, because these words come from a totally-different realm, as the ritual formulas of, say, modern church services, they might easily be passed over.

A second reason why there is so much reluctance to reveal religious formulas is that, because of their origin, and nature, these words are sacred, and also very powerful.[10] They were often revealed by spirit beings, and must remain secret. Their use in public robs them of their efficacy, with a consequent loss of the tangible advantages to the person who "owns" them. A powerful word, once spoken out of its proper context, has an independent existence, and can no longer be controlled. All this applies, in a particular way, to the divulging of secret names and titles, and to the identity of the spirit beings. In this case, then, the religious taboo merely enforces the way in which Melanesians behave towards their fellow human beings, both living and dead.[11] Modern people might not always be familiar with such an attitude, although many of them keep using the saying, "Speak of the devil, and you see his tail", and still heed the biblical injunction that "God's name is not to be taken in vain" (cf. Ex 20:7).

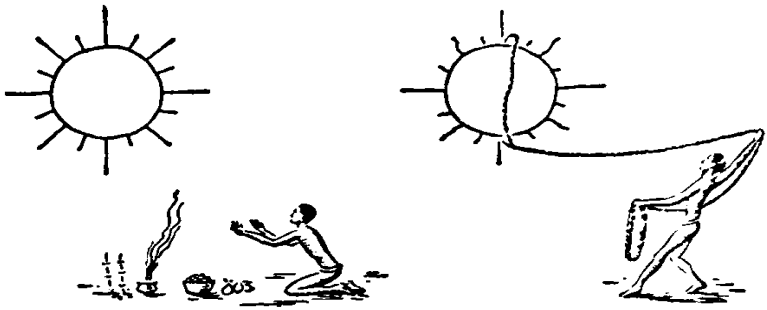
Yet, however hard it is to come by traditional Melanesian prayers, they do exist, and that for all spheres of life. It was noted by one critic of the missionary enterprise that it was, rather, the new faith, which was short in "prayers", and had nothing more to offer than the **Sign of the cross**, the

Our Father, and the **Hail Mary**, recited at Catholic church services. E. Rouga, an old Sulka philosopher, told Father Joseph Meier, sometime before World War 1, that his people had always been well equipped "to make the sick person well again, children grow strong and healthy, the fields yield good crops, to keep away illness and fire, make the pigs thrive, and the dogs become good at hunting wild boars, to procure a rich catch for fishermen, to preserve sea-going persons from drowning, etc. But you," he concluded his litany, "do not teach the people any such prayers, of which they stand in need so frequently" (Meier 1945, pp. 38-39.)

2. What do we call "prayers"?

Before proceeding any further, we would need to refine our definition of what prayer is. Does it include improvised, home-made invocations, or only standardised, traditional texts? Is any appeal to spirits or deities essential, or do the words have any intrinsic power? Can we apply the name of prayers also to spells and incantations in ancient, and maybe foreign, tongues? And what about words of bargaining and flattery, commands and threats to the world beyond, humble petitions, individual laments and confessions of sins? The simple fact that some missionaries did introduce foreign words to designate their Christian prayers and services (e.g., the **Tok Pisin beten**, or the Polynesian **lotu**), whereas others managed to use local terms (e.g., the Solomons Islands **fagarafe**, or the Kuanua **raring**) clearly shows the extent of the confusion that reigns.

In our opinion, one should, from the start, realise that an acceptable definition of "prayer" is only **one** issue of a much-broader problem, viz., the distinction between "religion" and "magic". In this regard, James G. Frazer submitted that the latter gives in to a mood of compulsion towards natural forces or agents, whereas the former manifests a sense of respect towards, and worship of, a supra-human element.[12] Some authors, with an evolutionistic frame of mind, have given priority to either the one or the other: that is, they either hold that religion did degenerate into magical practices, or that magic gradually evolved into a higher form, called religion.



RELIGIOUS MOOD
WORSHIP

MAGICAL MOOD
COMPULSION

The better answer is probably that it is impossible to reach, by historical means, the very origin of either magic or religion, and that manifestations of both, in the moods just described, do co-exist in every religious tradition. Samuel's "prayer" is definitely: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9), and not the command addressed to God: "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." Yet, there are innumerable psalm texts, which might not have exactly this second formula, but come very close to it (cf. Ps 4:2, 13:4, 17:1, 27:7, 39:13, . . .). There will hardly be anybody to disqualify these texts as true prayers.

What, indeed, matters in the debate about magic and religion is the purpose the petitioner has in mind, and the inner attitude, which inspires his human communications with the world beyond. Although not observable (and, therefore, insufficient to distinguish between "prayers" and "spells"), one has to concede that the intention, or mood, are integral parts of a person's dealings with the world beyond. To see "magic" and "charms" and "spells" only outside Christianity is sheer ethnocentrism, and not justified. Said one author: "The world is not divided into good Christians and bad pagans, but into good people and bad people. And God knows there are few enough of them in either rank." (Dagobert H. Runes.)[13]

(A) The above open-ended approach leaves enough space for further questions, such as, the problem whether pagan prayers are directed to an impersonal power or to a supreme being, to a minor deity, or to an ancestor, to a localised spirit (**masalai**), or to one or another ghost (**tameran**).[14] Considering the nature of our information, it is often impossible to be sure. As a matter of fact, the same people might use

different prayer models, depending on the situation. H. Meyer has noted, e.g., that in the Aitape-Wewak area, prayers are usually directed to the ancestors, but that when nothing else proves to be helpful, they are directed to the supreme god Wunekau (Meyer 1932, p. 854.) In other places, it is believed that the lesser deities (**tibud**, **buga**, . . .) might be manipulated, but that the supreme god Anutu can not be deceived by human wiles (Pech 1979, pp. 77-78.) Maybe it is good to realise that Christian prayers, too, are not always directed to the Godhead, or to the God-man, Jesus, and that it is unfair to demand from traditional religion a degree of precision, which is not found elsewhere. Again, there are from Melanesia quite a few prayer-like texts, which are transmitted without an explicit reference to any higher being. Some formulas just state the object of the request made, or do name a "natural" agent – maybe a force of nature, one or another animal, or even the person himself, who is speaking – to effect the desired result. We would feel that, even so, unless more-convincing proofs can be adduced, the said formulas are not disqualified from being true prayers. One valid argument to reject the latter texts **might** be that the people, themselves, categorise them differently.[15] If one does agree that a religious mood or intention is essential to a prayer, or that the sense or meaning of a text does not follow slavishly its grammatical form (which might be archaic, commanding, repetitive, etc.), then some of the first-sight characteristics to single out true prayers might not be very convincing at all. Once again, one may observe that, in Christianity, too, certain "prayers" are said, e.g., before a community service – in order that the subsequent sacred action, such as, the proclamation of the gospel, or some other "prayers", may be said worthily, and to the spiritual benefit of those attending. This fact warns us not to make irrelevant distinctions, or use extraneous standards, when it comes down to appreciating non-Christian religion.

(B) Another question, which could be asked, concerns the subject matter of the prayers: is it for purely material goods or even fame and status, or does it also express the need for spiritual salvation? The problem has been fully discussed, in relation to Melanesia, in some analyses of the so-called cargo cults. After various attempts, which stressed the foreignness and irrationality of these movements, a deeper understanding has emerged, which sees them, instead, as a "search for salvation".[16] Apparently, neat distinctions, of an academic nature – as the one between physical salvation (cf. the German: **Wohl**) and spiritual salvation (German: **Heil**) – are probably not made by the New Guinea food gatherers, and subsistence

farmers. There first concern is with poverty and hunger, extinction and defeat, sickness and death. In this regard, they are not much different from the psalmists in Israel, and their requests for healing and survival, and for "food in due season" (Ps 104:27). These Old Testament people, too, were surrounded by threatening enemies, and they did not use to mince their words when they wanted to curse their Canaanite neighbours (cf. Ps 35, 109, 137, 9, etc.) Still, Israel did hope for a better life, for "integral human development", in which the bodily well-being was only the starting point. Similarly, in Melanesia, there was a longing for justice and peace, for friendly relationships with the world beyond, and for a union with the spirits, which even went beyond the threshold of the tomb. It is to be expected that the concerns of traditional Melanesians will disconcert people with a technical, or urban, frame of mind. The latter will have little experience of, say, asking a spirit for forgiveness for having aimlessly wandered through the bush, and, so, possibly broken certain unknown taboos. Such a person is even less aware of the trespasses, which might have been committed by one of his or her domestic animals. Yet, these are some of the examples, which point beyond a mere physical outlook in Melanesian prayers.

(C) From here, we can go further, to a related issue, and that is whether Melanesian prayers show mainly self-interest, or pay also homage to the deity, or whatever supernatural agent is addressed. As with the problem of religion versus magic, one should again think of a whole gamut of possibilities, matching the ups and downs of the human soul. We, thus, arrive at distinguishing, at one end of the spectrum, the prayer of petition (sorrow, lament, etc.), and, at the other end, the prayer of praise (joy, thanksgiving, adoration, . . .). The borderline between these two is sometimes very thin indeed, just as the petitioner's mood can easily change to trust and confidence in being answered. Then there is something like the **captatio benevolentiae**, even on the human level, which does not directly look for personal benefits, but still is a distant preparation to maintain good relationships, should there be a danger that dark clouds gather. There is no doubt a lesson in the fact that the **Lord's prayer** starts with, "Hallowed be Thy Name", and only, in the second half, asks, "Give us our daily bread" and "Forgive us our sins" (cf. Mt 6, 9:11-12). Finally, there is the distinct possibility that true prayers of praise are so sparingly found in the sources because there are other ways to express this attitude, say, by offerings and

sacrifices (e.g., to fulfil a vow after being saved from disaster at sea). Prayer is only one segment in the religious experience.

2. An unfinished, but useful, task

There are many more questions, which one would like to ask regarding the traditional prayer experience in Melanesia, but the state of our information just does not allow many definite answers. What we really would need are several in-depth studies of particular religious configurations, backed up with an arsenal of philosophy, anthropology, theology, liturgy, etc., which can do justice to what the respective human groups possess in their dealings with the world beyond. This type of study is hardly available for Africa,[17] let alone for the hundreds of Melanesian societies. Hence the legitimate question, whether there is any use at all in having a selection of traditional Melanesian prayers made available to a wider audience.

One good reason for drawing attention to the riches of the indigenous prayer experience is that it shows one of the most-impressive aspects of pre-Christian religion, which, admittedly, had no developed priesthood, and was rather limited in formalised worship. Yet prayers were said for all occasions in life: "To give birth, to heal, to celebrate, to mourn, to hunt, to garden, to fish, to give thanks, and so on." (Narokobi 1981, p. 23.) It is this material breadth of experience, which we shall follow in presenting, below, the many prayer formulas found in anthropological literature.

Let us add, however, that the selection made is no doubt biased, and falls short, for that matter, of the spectrum where indigenous "prayers" are used to harm and curse people. A few examples have been retained, but, as a rule, the selection has left out requests to reduce the appetite of the guests at a festival, many demands to mete out a deserved punishment to thieves and garden-pilferers, some petitions to make trade partners foolish, so that they misjudge their business deals, the invocations to cause earthquakes and landslides, so that the enemies' gardens and crops are destroyed, an appeal to prolong a woman's labour in revenge for her having spurned a magician's advances, imprecations to kill sorcerers and abettors, and to annihilate, in the most cruel ways, the traditional enemies of a tribe.

It would appear that such an option is not completely arbitrary. In fact, people differentiate between what is good for themselves, and what will be less than a blessing, or also between words to be taken literally, and others, which are exaggerated fancifully. But such evidence would not be sufficient to separate "magic" from "religious", or "spells" from "prayers", or pre-Christian formulas from subsequent expressions. One could say that traditional morality is not guided by the principle of "the golden rule" (cf. Mt 7:12), but is more bound by the rules of survival for the individual and his group. Again, his age-old religion is full of ambiguities, and does not know – like Christianity – on one side, a good God, with His holy angels, and, on the other side, Satan and the evil devils. Instead – as a rule – the spirits are rather "neutral" or "ambivalent", i.e., protecting and avenging, at the same time, according to the circumstances.[18] And, whatever exceptional powers some individuals might possess (e.g., over the eyes, the fish, or the rain), they can use them either to heal or to hurt, to enrich people or also to disadvantage them. After all, what is harmful or helpful often depends on the respective viewpoints of its agent or its victim (MacDonald 1982, p. 6.)

Another good reason for presenting the following collection is that it shows a different style of prayer than the one used in the bible, or by the church. The latter prayers have often lost in concreteness and realism what they have gained in conceptual clarity and theological precision. In other cases, the "new" prayers get entangled in some kind of emotionalism and verbosity, so that all touch is lost with the experience of every day. This also applies to the archaic usages of **thee** and **thou**. But, in the best cases, e.g., when using texts of the ancient psalms, the faithful are confronted with a culture of shepherds and sheep, which is utterly foreign to them. In Melanesia, from time immemorial, prayer language is shaped by a different climate and environment, by the reference to other animals and birds, by the nearness of other mountains and streams, by a freedom of expression that might be refreshing for many one-track people of modern society. Besides the speechless prayers, there are some which were whispered, and some which were chanted, and there was even loud "shouting up" to the sky.[19] The accompanying actions, too, were very diverse, like touching and waving, and various forms of miming. There were solitary prayers, and others said in a responsive form. When there was a concern for rain or war, usually the whole community took part, but when the object was, rather, food or children, the family unit prayed, and when one's own life was at stake, the individual cried out for help.[20]

We realise that, especially in this regard, second-hand, and often third-hand, translations are not good enough. They, very much, lack the "genius" of any particular vernacular, the rhythmic cadence of the clauses, the figures of traditional rhetoric, the inimitable sound effects (cf. Malinowski 1922, pp. 428-452), the nuances of meaning, and the untold connotations of different expressions, say, their link with mythical stories and concepts (cf. Wagner 1972, pp. 59-68.) Just to give one example for philology, English is not familiar with the inclusive and exclusive plural, that is, whether the person spoken to is included (as Tok Pisin: **yumi**, i.e., "you and me") or excluded (as Tok Pisin: **mipela**, i.e., "we without you, the addressee"), but it is common in Melanesia. There is surely a different kind of intimacy implied when a petitioner identifies himself with the spirits (**yumi**), and when he does not. On the other hand, one may pray to "my" or "our" Father (cf. Mt 6:9) – instead of to "the" Father, without a personal pronoun (as in Lk 11:2) – and not show any particular intimacy. To be sure, the student should know whether the nature of a vernacular requires that all kinship terms must specify to whom they refer, or not. In the former case, the possibility of distinguishing between "Father" and "our Father" just would not exist! We have tried, therefore, to keep in our presentation, the useful hints found in the literature, not only regarding the place of origin (and whether the source also gives the vernacular formula), the indications of who says the prayer, to whom it is addressed, how it is executed, which gestures are made, and the like. The editing of texts from so many sources has been kept to a minimum, while exact references will always allow one to check the details.

A third reason for presenting the prayer formulas which follow, is that they can help us to understand better some aspects of the bible, especially of the Old Testament. We have already made some observations about Melanesian attitudes toward the efficacy of the word, and the use of names (see page 30). This applies to the frequent anthropomorphisms of primal history, where God "said, and it was" (Gen 1), and, even more appropriately, to the so-called patriarchal blessings, where a word, once spoken, cannot be made void (cf. Gen 27:30-38, also Sir 3:8). As to the use of names, we have, in the book of Genesis, the story of Adam "naming" all the creatures of the earth: "and that is how they all got their names"(Gen 2:19). Again, it is common knowledge that Israel has tabooed the name of Jahweh, and switched over to alternative designations, such as, "the Lord". A similar attitude is no relic of the past in Melanesia, but still of daily

application. Then, there is also the great concern in traditional prayers with war and survival. This can help us to gauge better the meaning of the "Holy war" in the scriptures, with Jahweh, the Warrior for Israel, to whom the people pray and sacrifice before engaging in a fight (1 Kg 8:44-45), to whom they shout loudly in their battle cries (Jos 6:5; Jdg 7:18-20), and to whom they "dedicate" all the booty they obtain (Dt 20:10-18). As to Israelite prayers proper, the constant concern with magic and counter-magic in Melanesia, opens a new possibility for identifying "the doers of evil" in the "lamentation psalms", whereas some of the petitions to destroy the people's enemies will shed a useful light (as said, already) upon the so-called "imprecatory psalms" of the Jewish bible.

Maybe there is still a fourth reason for undertaking a job which is doomed to be unsatisfactory, as long as more professional monographs are not available, and that is that even the present collection might influence Melanesian worship. This is, again, not something completely new, for there are actually some "Christian" prayers around, which look very much like those of traditional religion, but "baptised" – somehow, in the way the New Testament has baptised "in the Lord" the household codes taken over from Hellenism (e.g., Col 3:18-4:1). An unusual example, which has even the accompanying "rubric" printed in red, is the following "prayer for a new garden", used in the Yule Island Mission (cf. Sorin 1954, p. 54):

> Make a wooden cross, and take it to the priest to be blessed. Then put it in your garden, and say the following prayer.
>
> O Jesus Christ, You died on the cross to save me from the power of the devil. May this cross, which I now plant in my garden, remind me of that, and may it remind me that I have given my garden to You. Send down Your holy angel to watch over my garden. Keep far away from it all birds, pigs, rats, and other things that will do it harm. Protect it from the charms and spells of the sorcerers, which belong to the devil. Make all the things, which I plant in this garden, grow well. I ask this blessing from You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

This type of "adaptation" is not the end of the road. The next area of immediate application is home-grown songs, which could replace the wholesale adoption of both old European and modern American hymns.[21]

This, too, is a matter of, say, para-liturgical nature, where there are less strictures than for the official liturgy of the church. But, in the public liturgy, too, there is scope for innovation. It would appear that, in matters of content, more attention should be given to the proper place of the ancestors in a Christian "communion of the saints", and also to the real and down-to-earth concerns of grass-roots people. Finally, in matters of form – which will vary according to the different cultural groups – nobody can, as yet, predict what the eventual outcome will be. Maybe an example from Nigeria might exemplify what is meant here.

Speaking from a Roman Catholic background, it is safe to say that the Latin prayers at Mass were masterpieces of form and content. The 1974 version of the "collect" for Christmas, which was fairly literal, but, still cut up in four sentences, the one "period" of the Latin ran as follows:

> O God, when You created man, You endowed him with wonderful dignity, and You restored it to him more perfect than before.
>
> Your Son was willing to share in our manhood. Grant us to share in His Godhead. Through Christ, our Lord. . . .

One study of sacral Igbo language and literature has led to the following proposal:[22]

> O Carrier of the universe! One-who-utters-and-it-happens! Your handiwork! When an elephant marches, (people) see its footprint! Man is all dignity! From origin, You stuck eagle feathers on him! The common folk and the king are sticking eagle feathers on You, for much You have already done, (now) You have done more on top of it! Jesus, Your Son, God in fact, looked at, and considered us, and came into our world! We and He became one blood! And became actually salt and palm oil! Thus you gave us a new status! O! One-who-does-one-good-on-top-of-another! That dignity, with whom mankind came out in the world, burst out! Burst out like the morning sun on the world! One-who-speaks-and-acts! If a hill is still ahead, does one rest behind? Well then, come on! Carry the stakes right to the farm. So that the dignity of Christ becomes ours; so that His life becomes ours; so that His power becomes ours; so that His glory becomes ours! Becomes the man's and the woman's; becomes the

child's and adult's; becomes the poor's and the noble's, too! So that the kite will perch; so that the eagle will perch. Listen to our voice, because we are asking through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He, who with You and the Holy Spirit, are one God eternally.

If this is possible in Nigeria, it is not a vain hope that one day Papua New Guinea, too, will follow the lead. Our present purpose is only to give a first hint.

II. THE PRAYERS

1. House and home

1. Oh Sun! Come into the house!
   I am really a child of the sun.

Prayer said by the Gende, in the Upper Ramu Valley (Northern Simbu), when the central post of a house is put in position. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 41.)

2. Only when you (viz, spirits) move in with us
   will this house be warm and pleasant.
   Mount, therefore, on top of the posts,
   and take up your place.
   When you care, we will be doing well.

House blessing among the Mbowamb, addressed to the spirits, who earlier had been asked to decide the exact emplacement of the house. (Vicedom 1942, p. 142.)

3. O Father! Have mercy!
   I wish my wife to deliver her baby safely. . . .
   O Father! I am not strong.
   You alone are strong. You can help us.

The prayer is said by the father, in the region of the Chambri Lakes, when his wife is about to give birth. The second part is added after the husband puts a bamboo, filled with water, near the woman. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 85.)

4. As Nutu is strong, Oh, let my baby be strong.
   As Nutu is great, Oh, let my baby be great.
   As Nutu is good, Oh, let my baby be good.

Formula used by a Mengen mother (East New Britain), when dedicating a newborn baby to Nutu, the master of all things. (O'Neill 1961, p. 44.)

5. Oh Father! My wife has born a baby.
   I do not know anything.
   My Father! I wish the baby to grow up.

A similar prayer from the same area (with the original text added), which a father addressed to the sun, when a child has been born. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 84.)

6. Grandfather Sun, while you are watching him,
   this boy shall grow up nice and healthy.

Simbu invocation (with original text), spoken to accompany the dedication of a three-days-old baby. Afterwards, a special meal follows. (Bergmann 1972, p. 5.)

7. Oh Sun! You made this little child.
   It may be taken ill, or may fall (and get hurt).
   Oh watch! Oh watch! I am giving this child a name.

Invocation pronounced by the father, when sacrificing a pig at the name-giving ceremony (i.e., when the child is old enough to walk). Recorded among the Pala-Damba of Northeast New Guinea. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 36.)

8. Oh Sun! Our Father!
You see this baby.
Take care of it.

Common formula, which a Dom magician addresses to the sun, as the heavenly Father, to protect a small child. Meanwhile, the men stand outside the house. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 31.)

9. Oh Wonekau! You hover, you look,
you see my wife, my children, my mother, my father,
my sisters, my brothers, my aunts, my uncles,
my cousins, my friends, my people.

This request for protection is said in a loud voice, and separately by each of the "priests (**kinau**), at the end of an initiation ceremony. Note that each time the female members of the family are mentioned before the male relations. The original Karesau version of the prayer is also given. (Schmidt 1979, p. 39.)

2. Sickness and death

10. Oh Sun! The wind (or: the cold) acted fraudulently,
so the little girl fell ill.
Take this **ratan**-rope, and bind the wind.
It will try to come again; keep it tied up.

Prayer for healing among the Kulchkane people to accompany "the binding of the wind" (or: the cold), which has been diagnosed as cause of the sickness. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 63.)

11. Yanigelua! I am hiding in my house.
Other people don't know about it.
You always used to help me greatly.
Why did you forsake me?
I had not called your name for a long time,
So now you have punished me.
I am giving you this pig.

Lament used among the Ndika people to accompany a secret sacrifice, which a husband offers in his wife's house, in order to restore well-being and success. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 33.)

12. Oh Sun! You see I "found" (= gave birth to) a baby.
Will it live, or will it die?

Prayer of trust and confidence said by a mother, holding an open netbag, with her child, to her chest, and showing it to the sun. From among the Kondulchu people. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 36.)

13. Hintubehet (Oh God)! Please, keep us alive!

or also:

My Ancestor! Have mercy on us, let us not die!

Two invocations to the creator deity venerated on Central New Ireland. They are said in cases of extreme need. The original text in the Pala language is also supplied. (Peekel 1910, pp. 6-7.)

14. Kiyari, Kiyari (Oh sky)!
You fathered us, you put us here.
You must not be "hot" (= angry) with us.
Be easy with us.
Enough! Enough (lightnings)!

or also:

Kiyario (Oh sky)!
You put us here before.
You cannot kill us.

Two invocations of the Batainabara (Eastern Highlands), when the lightning strikes. (Watson & Watson 1972/1973, pp. 435 and 470.)

15. Ancestor! Keep us alive!
Send sickness and disease far from us.

This invocation is addressed at Namatanai (New Ireland) to the ancestor Tangrau, in cases where all other magical means have failed. (Neuhaus 1934, p. 15.)

16. You who dwell on the Rongmaya mountain,
release this man and go away.
You who dwell on the Sumale mountain, release . . .
You who dwell on the Wisa mountain, release . . .
You who dwell on the Rarapau mountain, release . . .
You who dwell on the **karape**-tree, release . . .
You who dwell on the **pai**-tree, release . . .
You who dwell on the **walega**-tree, release . . .
You who dwell on the **yare**-tree, release . . .
You who dwell on the **muli**-tree, release . . ., etc.

South Kewa litany, which lists all the possible spirits in the environment, and bids them to loose hold from a sick person. The healer, who uses this formula, will continue calling the names of various grasses, canes, bananas, vegetables, and animals. He concludes with mentioning the **bolali**- and **keali**-trees, in which it is believed that the spirit has come to rest. Then he climbs into the tree to chase the spirit away, and concludes his prayer by walking around the tree. (MacDonald 1981, p. 115.)

17. Oh Sun! We want to bury this man NN.
Oh watch! His soul is going up to you. You watch.
He used to stay with us, but now he is going up to you.

Recommendations of a deceased person, directed to Yanigelua, when the Ndika people are about to bury a corpse. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 32; for a Motuan prayer, said at the same occasion, see Butcher 1963, p. 34.)

18. Father up there! Take me!

Short invocation, with original version, from Kapriman village in the Timbunke area, said when people are very sick. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 320.)

3. General intercessions

19 Agunua! Take thou away fever and ague.
Take thou away headache.
Take thou away thieving,
so that our bodies may be light.
Take thou away a bad season, bring in a good.
Keep my feet when I climb an almond tree.
Preserve the taro so that, when planted, it may thrive,
and the banana, that it may bear good fruit.
Let none steal from my garden, none steal my pigs.
May the pigs increase; preserve the dogs.

Example of an intercessory prayer (**fagarafe**, literally: "to make one weary"), which is addressed to the creator spirit on San Cristoval, in the Southern Solomons. It is used when the first fruits of the harvest are offered in order to implore the divine protection for the coming year. (Fox 1924, pp. 80-81.)

20. Tsinmari! Help us catch fish and shoot pigs!
Send us rain! Kill our enemies!
Protect us! Cure our sick child!

Prayer of a headman, in the Chambri Lakes region, for various common and private needs. After saying this prayer, he offers to the Sun Man his black "sun stones", some betel nuts, mother-of-pearl shells, etc. Later, he takes everything back again. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 53.)

21. Ba-ba-ba-ba.
Protect us from sickness.
Bring us wild pigs in our snares.
Make the taro grow large.
. . .
Fip-fip-fip-fip.

Text from the Baktaman (near Kiunga), said by the cult leader, who, at a particular stage in the initiation ritual, addresses the ancestral spirit (Yolam). The initial words have no meaning, while during the

brief prayer, which follows, part-cooked meat of a sacred animal is rubbed against the right-side bones of the ancestor. A similar formula and rite follows, with the skull and mandible, while the prayer concludes with other paralinguistic sounds. (Barth 1975, pp. 67-68.)

22. I give you this, I cook it for you.
Give us many pigs!
Strengthen our taro gardens!
Make the taro tubers grow large!
Look after this set of men,
give them plenty of food, so they will be strong!

Another Baktaman formula, used during the initiation rituals. While saying it, a particular marsupial is first held up before the ancestral shrine, and then beaten with a stick till all the bones are broken. Finally, it is put over the sacred fire. (Barth 1975, pp. 89-90.)

23. Give us many warriors.
Give us many pigs.
Give us many children.
Give us many sweet potatoes, etc.
We make this request by the sun.
We make this request by the moon.

Some of the hopes and needs of the South Kewa, as expressed by a cult leader, while he rubs the spirit stones with blood and local oil. As in other prayers of this area, the formula concludes with a special appeal to sun and moon. (MacDonald 1982, p. 9; cf. also p. 6.)

24. Powerful Spirit (**tataro**), Grandfather!
This is your lucky drop of **kava**.
Let boars come in to me;
let **rawe**-pigs come in to me.
Let the money I have spent come back to me;
let the food that is gone come back hither
to the house of you and me.

This invocation to the dead is called **tataro** (after the first word of the text, which also refers to "a ghost of power", as distinct from a **vui**,

i.e., a spirit which never was in a human body). The text is pronounced among the Mota people of the Banks Islands, when making a libation of **kava**, and before taking part in this particular ritual. (Codrington 1891, p. 147.)

25. Oh Father Konsel! You are "sorry" for us!
You can help us. We have nothing,
no aircraft, no ships, no jeeps, nothing at all.
The Europeans steal our "cargo".
You will be sorry for us, and see that we get something.

Request addressed to an ancestor, that he might show "concern" (Tok Pisin: **sori**) with his people, and give them "cargo" (i.e., any goods the ancestors can supply). From the Madang area, circa 1947. (Lawrence 1971, p. 109.)

26. Bimbaio! Give us all the good things,
and give all the bad things to the dogs.

General invocation, which is said, with outstretched hands, along the Mamberano coast in West Irian, when the full moon appears, or whenever an important work is about to begin. (Moszkowski 1910, p. 951; see also 1911, pp. 324-325.)

27. Do not be angry with us.
We are going forth to cut the cane.
Guard us from hurt –
from bite of snake,
from sting of wasp and centipede,
from sago-thorns, from falling tree,
from accident wife knife or hatchet.
Be kind to us.

Example of an **ivaiva**-prayer, said at Orokolo by the man responsible (**kariki haera**) for the men's house, to safeguard the participants in an expedition, whether for hunting, sago-making, cane-cutting, or what not, from misadventure in the bush. It is accompanied by a food offering, but the beneficiary of this gesture is not always clear. (Williams 1940, p. 231.)

28. Partake, Oh Spirits, of your payment (ula'ula),
and make my magic thrive.

The above words, spoken by a Trobriand Island magician, when making a small food offering to the spirits, are espacially interesting because they seem to distinguish the autonomous efficacy of magical rites and spells (in general: **megwa**) from the assistance requested of the spirits. The latter, we would normally call a "prayer", whose object it is to perform a given act of "magic" in the proper way. (Malinowski 1922, p. 422.)

4. Gardening and husbandry

29. Yabowaine (Oh God)! Come down from above!
Come, break up the earth, my boundary catchers.
Break the earth in all directions.
Your breaking up the earth, letting light into it.
My breaking up the earth, letting light into it.
The **monolawa**-yams, the **gelaboi**-yams.
My breaking up the earth, letting light into it.

A Dobuan incantation, which is murmured under breath, i.e., spoken softly, and unlike everyday loud talk, so that the yams will listen to it. Meanwhile, the male ritualist plants some pegs (called Boundary Catchers) near the most centrally-located plot of the newly-made garden. The reference to two varieties of larger yams somehow anticipates the result hoped for. The whole ceremony includes still other formulas and actions, reserved for a female ritualist. (Fortune 1932, p. 111.)

30. Dembine, Great Man! Look at us!
We have prepared a big dinner.
We give it to you.
Help us, and give us a good yam crop!

Invocation said near Kaugia (West of Wewak) by the guardian of the yam-stones. Before planting, a dinner is prepared, and a pig slaughtered in front of the house in which the yam-stones are kept,

and the Great Man is called upon. When Dembine has "seen" the food display, all help themselves, assured that they have "brought down" the Great Man. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 368.)

31. Nyamben Mbampo (Sun and Moon)!
Come down and help me!
I wish to harvest large yams.
For a long time I have "eaten hungry"!
Now help me!

Prayer used by an important man in the Maprik area to forestall a rich harvest, and indicating that, for a long time, people have only been half satisfied ("eaten hungry"). (Aufenanger 1972, pp. 289-299.)

32. Oh Father, Oh Grandfather! Do not abandon us!
We are working in our garden;
bring the crop to maturity,
that we may have something to eat.

Prayer for assistance, directed to an ancestral spirit (**buga**), from the Madang region. (Hannemann 1954, p. 18.)

33. Oh Sun, Grandfather! Look at me (what I am doing).
. . .
As I do here (i.e., tottering and falling down),
so it shall happen to anyone
who steals this (garden produce).
I close (now) the door (i.e., obstruct the access).

Simbu formula (with original), used when a gardener prepares a taboo-sign to protect his property from theft. (Bergmann 1972, p. 54; also pp. 5 and 38.)

34. Look, Big Father!
. . .
If you make the vegetables grow well,
I shall eat them.
I have killed some rats,
and have cooked **wamugl**-plants (as a sacrifice).

or also:

Look, Oh Sun!
We have planted sweet potatoes.
Make them grow.

Two addresses to the Sun, the first from Dengglagu, and the other from among the Vandeke people, before planting sweet potatoes in a new garden. (Aufenanger 1962, pp. 6 and 2; for a similar prayer from Maprik, see Aufenanger 1972, p. 280.)

35. Grandfather (Sun)! Before your eyes I plant my garden.
I planted it, but it has not grown well so far.
Shine, therefore nicely,
and when you have brought it ready for harvesting,
then I can eat from it.

Request for a good harvest among the Simbu people, recorded by W. Bergmann in the Kuman language. (1972, p. 4.)

36. You are my Father, you gave me all.
Now I am ready to make a sacrifice to you,
and you will look after my garden and pigs.

Prayer to one's deceased father, from the Southern Highlands. (Collins 1983, p. 9.)

37. Mother! We want to plant taro. Come!

Private prayer addressed to a deceased mother. The woman's collarbone is taken from the grave, wrapped up, and placed on a decorated table, with a litter of cooked food in front of it. Similar rituals are followed on the Schouten Islands, with the jawbones of a father, or another important man. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 237; note also p. 228.)

38. Uruave! Look at my vegetables,
don't let them rot,
but, rather, make them increase.

Fuyughe prayer, said when the bright Uruave-star (i.e., Aldebaran) appears on the horizon. The people then hold all kinds of small vegetables to the sky, in order to persuade the heavenly body to be favourable towards them. After such an offering, the foodstuffs are either eaten, or given to the pigs. (Fastre 1987, p. 219; see also p. 218.)

39. My work is done, Big Father. I am going to rest.
You watch over the vegetables so that they may grow well.
. . .
Oh Sun! I can see you when you go down and when you rise.
Give my garden strength, so that it may grow well.
I am an old man, my teeth are broken;
I like to eat beans.
Watch over them, so that they may grow well.
. . .
Oh Sun! We have been working together.
I am now going to give you some meat as a reward.

Three-part prayer, said at successive stages during planting time, from Nauru village, in the New Guinea Highlands. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 19)

5. Harvesting

40. Watch, Oh Sun! We have planted sugar cane,
and provided it with sticks to support it.
We shall cut and eat it. May it grow well.
May the things we have planted grow well.
Oh Sun! Our Father! Keep watching!
we (too) keep watching.

Prayer from Nauru in New Guinea Highlands, to promote growth. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 19.)

41. As thick as the **mengema**-caterpillar is,
as (fat as) the **kamama**-caterpillar is,

as (big as) the Simbu-rock is,
as (strong as) the Tamba-rock is,
so thick and fat you shall grow.

Simbu growing spell (with original formula added), spoken when rubbing a mother sow and her piglets with ashes, so that they may increase and be healthy. (Bergmann 1972, p. 99; see also pp. 36 and 98.)

42. Look, Oh Sun!
I have planted sweet potatoes;
I will now eat the first ones.
The others may remain.
Oh Sun, keep on watching!
If you do, I shall eat them
when they have grown to a big size.

Prayer said by a Dengglagu husband, holding half a sweet potato, etc., in his hand. The wife repeats the same text, holding the other half. After the parents have eaten the first fruits, the children eat, too, and the remainder of the food is distributed to visitors. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 5)

43. Father! Come! Sit in the garden!
I wish to harvest large yams.
Give the staff you used to carry to the yams!
Watch well, that they grow as long as your staff!

Prayer from the Kaugia area (south of Maprik), used when people plant their yam garden. (Aufenanger 1972, 325.)

44. Oh Sun! Our Big Father!
Someone has stolen the vegetables that we had planted.
We do not know who it is. You saw it; you reveal it!
You are our Big Father.

or also:

Mininga!
If you watch, the man who took and ate it, will die.
I should like to see that . . .

Two requests to the deity to identify a vegetable thief, and work out the punishment he deserves. Used, respectively, among the Kuma peole in the Western Highlands, and in the Wahgi Valley. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 20-21; see also pp. 11 and 36.)

45. Dembine, Great Man! You have made us.
You are in the north, in the south,
in the east and in the west!
All of you (viz., my ancestors,) come hither!
Help me to take out large tubers.

Prayer of the Kaugia people, directed both to the "Great Man", and to the ancestors, called by all their names, when the yam harvest is ready. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 368.)

46. Oh Sun! Watch over my garden,
least the vegetables should be eaten by insects,
and we suffer from hunger.

Formula used by the owner of a garden among the Komkare, after he has made a food-display to the sun. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 6)

47. Oh Noabahagi! Oh fish hawk!
Your claws are sharp,
your teeth are sharp.
Eat the thief's face.
I place you on the leaves beneath the palms.
Eat the face of him who steals,
and make many holes in it.
He lies sleepless, he howls at night, he weeps at night.
Morning comes, and he still cannot sleep.
Your claws dig in! Tear away!
I place you on the road. Watch well!
A thief steals my things. They are not his but mine.
Eat blood, eat skin, eat nose.

The centipedes bite, the black ants bite,
the fish-hawk tears, the stingray stings. Eat his face.

Request directed to Noabahagi, the hero who first caused those who stole from his garden produce to be stricken with gangosa, a loathsome disease, which begins with a sore on the face, and ends with the nose entirely eaten away. From Wogeo Island. (Hogbin 1970, pp. 185-186.)

6. Hunting and fishing

48. Bush Spirit (Wewa)! I belong to this forest.
I am coming, you must not do me mischief.

The environment is, first and foremost, the domain of the spirits, so that one must make his presence known to them, as expressed in this prayer from among the Batainabura of the Southern Highlands. (Watson and Watson 1972/1973, p. 452.)

49. My Father! Come back to life!
Tomorrow I will start cutting my (new) canoe.

Ancestral assistance is sought for any work of importance, such as the felling of a tree to make a new canoe, as in this prayer collected in Kumwagea village, on Kitava Island. (Scoditti 1974.)

50. Oh Wunekau! Oh Akurum! Come down, help us!
We are about to cut this tree.
Take our offering, here, take it, eat this animal,
Oh you who dwell in the **lalal**-tree,
in the iron-wood-tree, in the **mera**-tree.
Ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka!

A similar invocation, made by a Yakomul priest (Northeast New Guinea), before he makes the first cut in a tree to be felled. (Meyer 1932, p. 846)

51. If, in our work today, as we passed through the jungle,

we have disturbed anything belonging to you,
any stick, or stone, or flower,
we did it quite unintentionally.
Please, do not be angry with us.
We are foolish men, and do these things in ignorance.

Prayer for forgiveness, recorded on Paneati Island (Milne Bay), so that the spirits will take no revenge for unintentional transgressions. (Bartlett 1946, p. 5.)

52. I intend to kill this pig.
Listen (You Spirits) and know it.

A similar prayer, from among Kamanuku Simbu, said before a pig killing, to propitiate for the unknown transgressions caused by a domestic animal, which might have interfered with the spirits' property. (Bergmann 1972, pp. 4 and 8)

53. Powerful (**Mana**) is the spirit of the net.

Words of praise, used with respect to a powerful ghost (**tindalo**) of a deceased man. They are said on Florida Island, after obtaining a good catch of fish. (Codrington 1891, p. 146; for a similar text from the Marind-anim, see Nevermann 1957, p. 14.)

54. If thou art powerful (**mana**), Oh Daula,
put a fish or two into this net,
and let them die there.

Another invocation of a Florida fisherman, to obtain assistance in his trade. Daula is a **tindalo**, generally known, and associated with, the frigate bird. (Codrington 1891, p. 146; see also Suri 1968, p. 33 with original.)

55. May they (i.e., the hunting spears) find the wild pig.
May they fell him surely.
. . .
Khe-khe-khe-khe.

These Baktaman words follow a cryptic chant, which pleases the ancestors, and is sung by a cult leader, together with the senior initiates. After the above-quoted request, the leader rubs the smoking meat of a sacred animal down the arrow shafts, shouting at the same time the last unintelligible words, and moving to a squatting position. The whole congregation follows his movement, and finally collapses on the floor. (Berth 1975, p. 70.)

56. Look down (viz., Vlisso)!
We have only **kumu**-vegetables to eat,
We have no meat with it.
Please, send us game in the forest!

Another hunter's request, from Antefugoa (Lower Yuat River), to be successful in hunting. (Laumann 1952, p. 902)

57. Yaboaine (Oh God), help us!
Take away this miserable pig we have caught,
and let us catch good ones.
You come down!

Typical understatement addressed to Yaboaine, the war-god on Normanby Island (Eastern Papua), after having caught a wild pig. (Rohelm 1946, p. 212; compare also the deceptions referred to in Bartlett 1946, p. 5.)

58. Search and find.
The rope (of the snare) shall get you.
the stick (holding the snare) shall pull (and catch you).
(Tomorrow morning), you shall lie (dead) covered with dew.

Simbu enchantment, addressed to the game, and spoken when laying snares and slings. (Bergmann 1972, p. 44, with original.)

59. Our family God NN!
Tomorrow, I am going to hunt pigs,
and will take the dogs with me.
You must direct the dogs to the pigs,
and help the dogs to kill them.

Make the pigs weak, when the dogs start fighting with them.
NN, this is all I have to tell you.
Come now and eat with us.
. . .
This is true, we all agree that you provide his request.

Prayer from Darapap (Murik Lakes), intoned by a huntsman before going out for wild pigs. All those present have to agree with the request, before partaking of the dedicated food. Any sign of discord would spoil the enterprise. (Tamoane 1977, pp. 175-176.)

7. On the sea

60. Powerful spirit (**tataro**)! Uncle! Father!
Plenty of boars for you,
Plenty of pigs, plenty of money.
Lucky food for your eating in the canoe.
I pray you with this, look down upon me,
let me go on a safe sea.

A prayer (**tataro**) from Mota, in the Banks Island, used before starting a sea-voyage. (Codrington 1891, p. 148.)

61. Qate! Marawo! Look down upon me!
Prepare the sea of you and me,
that I may go on it safely,
Beat down the head of the waves from me,
let the rip-tide sink down away from me.
Beat it down level, that it may go down, and roll away,
and I may come into a quiet landing-place.

Prayer for safety at sea, from Mota, in Vanuatu. (Codrington 1891, p. 148; see also a shorter form from Florida on p. 146.)

62. Please (viz., Wanekau)! Have mercy on me!
I have a lot of people on board. Watch over us!

A captain's prayer, from Mushu, on the Schouten Islands, said when he senses that an evil person has boarded his craft, so that it will be in danger of hitting a reef, take a wrong direction, or also run very slowly (compare Jona 1, pp. 4-7). (Aufenanger 1975, p. 254.)

63. Qate! Marawo! May it be –
let the canoe of you and me turn into a whale,
a flying fish, and eagle.
Let it leap on and on over the waves,
let it go, let it pass out to my land.

Another Mota invocation, directed to the **vul**-spirits, so that they may grant a safe journey. Note how the inclusive plural joins spirits and men together. (Codrington 1891, p. 148.)

64. Do thou (viz., Daula) draw the canoe,
that it may reach the land.
Speed my canoe, Grandfather,
that I may quickly reach the shore whither I am bound.
Do thou, Oh Daula, lighten the canoe,
that I may quickly gain the land, and rise upon the shore.

Prayer from Florida Island, to Daula, a spirit of the dead (**tindalo**), also called "Grandfather", to assure a prosperous sea voyage. (Codrington 1891, p. 145; see also Suri 1986, p. 33, with original.)

65. Please (viz., Sos)! Send us a good land-wind
that our people may reach the islands safely.

Intercession, on behalf of his people on a journey, said by a chief-priest (**kokal**), from the Bolkin-Wewak area. Meanwhile, he offers a sacred dish (**kamunggu**), with food, to "the Great Man up there", whose secret name is "Sos". The dish is left standing in the spirit house during the time of the trip; and nobody, who has committed a crime is allowed to enter the house. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 18.)

66. My Father! Of all of us, there is not one safe at home.
We are all here. Send us to shore and safety.

Short Manus invocation, during disaster at sea. (Fortune 1935, p. 246.)

67. Qate! You and Marawa!
Cover over with your hand the blowhole from me,
that I may come into a quiet landing-place.
Let it calm down, well away from me.
Let our canoe go up in a quiet landing-place.

Invocation, from the Banks Islands, that the spirits (of the sea) may come, steady the canoe, and speed it on its course till land is reached. (Codrington 1891, p. 148.)

8. Thanksgiving

68. Oh Sun! Come and see the vegetables that I have planted.
. . .
Oh Sun! You came and looked at me, according to my request
I am pleased.

Prayer of thanksgiving of the Tsiambugla for a good garden crop. The first part is said when planting; the second part when the vegetables have grown well. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 11.)

69. Ilufuna! You have given us much food.
You are our "Great one"!

Maprik prayer of gratitude, after an abundant harvest. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 290.)

70. Telhinime! Look at me!
I have taken out plenty large vegetables.
I love you!

Words addressed by the Aresell people to "the Great Man up there" (in the sky), in order to thank him for a good harvest. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 1.)

71. Sun! The bananas are good.
Sun! The mamis are good.
The sun is good.
The sun and the moon are good.

Another prayer of thanksgiving for good crops, from the Schouten Islands. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 302.)

72. Mande Tuo (Great Man)! You have been watching,
and so the vegetables have grown well. I thank you.

Words directed to the Sun, by the owner of a garden, together with his wife, after they have made a display of the harvest they have made. From Rovundogun, in the Prince Alexander Mountains. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 78.)

73. Saginduo (Great Man)! Come! We will eat together.
We have planted our garden.
You have helped us.
. . .
Thank you.

Invitation, said by a father, in the proper attitude for prayer (i.e., crossing one's arms before one's breast, and looking up to the sun). Meanwhile, the rest of the family keeps quiet, before the dishes filled with food. After all have said "Thank you", they partake of the meal. The original version, recorded in Hambugai village (near Wewak) is also given. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 119.)

74. You have given us this food.
Give us again next year a good crop.

Prayer said by an officially-appointed man (**kumbu ndu**) at Kaugia (Torricelli Mountains), after the harvest of yams. While pronouncing the prayer, he holds a saucepan with cooked yams and meat in his hands, looks up and shows it to the sun (**wale ndu**). When the sun has seen the food, the man eats it. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 326.)

75. Now we are going to eat.
You have given us the food, Wanakau!

or also:

Oh Sun! We are going to eat together,
while you are looking at us.

Two prayers before a meal, respectively, from Mushu village (Schouten Island), and from Bundi, in the Upper Ramu Valley. (Aufenanger 1975, p. 255; and Aufenanger 1962, p. 40.)

9. Good weather

76. Great Father! Watch over me!
I intend to go into the bush!

Greeting to the rising sun, from Rovundogun, in the Turingi area, said before people go out to work, or to hunt. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 78, with original; see also p. 299 n. 1 for a similar custom at Maprik.)

77. Look down (Oh Sun)!
Then everything will get dry,
and we can fire our gardens and plant.

or also:

Sun! Send rain!
The (our) body is hot!

Two prayers to the sun, from the Kaugia area, to change the weather into a dry spell, or into a cool shower. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 325, and p. 358 with original.)

78. That today the sun may shine again
we have fetched this water,
and poured it out on the house tops.

Simbu sunshine charm (with original in the Kuman language), to end a period of drought. (Bergmann 1972, p. 43.)

79. As I put these things in readiness on the ground,
so you make them ready up above.
As I break the coconut, so do you also.

A similar rain charm, directed to the heavenly Rainmaker-in-chief, from the Trans-Fly. It clearly states that the spell functions as the oral counterpart of the manual rite. (Williams 1936, p. 328, who provides, on pp. 326-327, several other vernacular texts, with commentary.)

80. Saginduo (Sun Man)! We cry out to you!
Saginduo! We cry out to you!

Public invocation to the Sun-man to send rain, said alternatively, and in a loud voice, by an important man, and by the people gathered in the spirit house. After these words, all stand quiet and motionless, some covering their faces with their hands, and others holding their arms on their chests, whereas the leader keeps his hands flat against both sides of his head. All think intensely of Saginduo, and observe one day's rest; next morning they all go to work. From Hambugal, to the South of Wewak. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 118.)

81. Oh Big Father!
The vegetables that I planted are burned;
I am not pleased with it.
Please, give us rain now.

In this prayer, a Kulchane magician first calls the names of the surrounding mountains, and then concludes with the words above. After the prayer, he dips some flowers in water, and throws them to the four points of the compass. The remaining water is poured on the ground, while the rest of the flowers and leaves are weighed down in a creek, till the time that the rain starts pouring down. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 9.)

82. Now it is sunshine, day by day.
That shall stop, and rain shall come again.

Simbu rain charm, which was said aloud and shouted, while some men cried, with the tears running down their cheeks. (Bergmann 1972, p. 43.)

83. Nya Mben (Sun Man)! Send us rain!
. . .
We are hungry. We shall die from hunger.
We cannot sleep (on account of being hungry).
Send us rain!

Traditional invocation, from Maprik, directed to the Sun-man, and said while the rainmaker pours water, originating from various springs, into one container. The second part of the text is pronounced while the ritual specialist breathes on the water. The whole action is performed in a small house, which only one man may enter. (Aufenanger 1972, pp. 280-281.)

84. What falls from the sky is not good.
It should return there, and not come back again.

Invocation, from among the Komengarega (New Guinea Highlands), addressed to Yogauwe, when making a sacrifice to stop the hail. (Zaumsegel-Bogner 1978, p. 11.)

85. Oh Sun! Do not go down! Watch over us!
If you go down now, it will get dark.
You may go down when we have gone to our house.

or also:

Father Sun! Hold back the rain till I have reached home.
Then the rain may fall.

Two invocations used by the Komkane and Tsiambugla people, when returning from their gardens after a day's work, or after a pig kill. (Aufenanger 1962, pp. 6 and 13.)

10. Feasts and celebrations

86. Take away these sins!
Have pity on us!

At the beginning of an initiation ceremony in the Wewak-Bolkin area, there is a rite to "burn the crimes" of the candidates' fathers, so that no harm will befall their sons. The participants in this **membari-** ritual are requested to manipulate some betelnut and tobacco leaves, which, in the end, are burned to ashes. The above prayer is said by the man, who will perform the operations on the boys, while tending the fire and looking up to the sky. (Aufenanger 1972, pp. 19-20)

87. Let the water carry away the dirt,
like leaves on the wind.
Let the dust be pinched off and carried from the eyes.
The contaminating things seen, let them be carried away,
here at the waters of the Kupi,
the waters called Kupindaka.

Enga prayer used at "the washing of the eyes", to purify them from having seen unseemly and tabooed things. This, or a similar text, is recited by the person who directs this part of the initiation rites, while the young novices lie on their backs, under a stream of water, which washes and cleanses them. (Teske 1978, pp. 79-80, with original p. 97 n. 1, and a "Christian" substitute prayer on p. 92.)

88. Oh Sun! Look at these children!
I gave them bows and axes.
You help them.

Another prayer, used among the Numa, New Guinea Highlands, at a certain moment in the initiation cycle, when the boys officially receive their first weapons. (Aufenanger 1962, p. 32.)

89. We now put on our feather decorations,
and are going to make the **mur-**dance.
You, our Spirits, will look at us,
and be happy with us.

Only when you do this,
will we be really beautiful,
and will we be alright.

The only Melanesian prayer recorded in the anthologies of P. W. Scheele (1960, p. 172) and of C. Einiger (1964, p. 150). It was said among the Mbowamb of Mount Hagen, before starting the **mur**-dance. (Vicedom 1942, p. 142.)

90. The water shall glide off and run down,
as it runs down from slippery stones (in the river),
as the drops fall from the **urumugi**-plant,
as the drops fall from the **waramugi**-plant,
as dew glitters and forms drops,
so even and smooth shall (the skin) be.

Free translation of a Simbu perfume charm (with original Kuman formula), said when rubbing the skin with oil or fat, to assure beauty and strength. (Bergmann 1972, p. 47.)

91. Tsurun! You take first this food.
We shall eat later after you.

or also:

Tsurun, you Mighty Man!
You have made all these things for us.
We call first your name.
We give you first a young coconut,
taro, meat and sago.

Two invocations, from the Yangoru area, directed to the great spirit Tsurun (dwelling on Mount Tsurun, Hurun, Turu, or Rurun), to whom the first morsel of food is reserved. A similar custom is also noted among the Chwaian people, in relation to Sagi, Sainduo, or Saginduo. (Aufenanger 1972, pp. 173 and 185)

92. Yaboaine (Oh God), oh!
Come to take this pile of food.

Take it, and give us a real abundance,
so that our supplies might still be greater.

Prayer, from Normanby Island, on occasion of a food distribution feast. (Roheim 1946, p. 214.)

93. You Great Man (viz., Saginduo)! Tsurun!
Have pity on us, and touch the livers of our relatives,
so that they bring many rings.
` Make them "deaf" (= stupid)!
Help, that the bride may give her groom angry words,
so that he and his relatives give many rings as bride wealth.

or also:

Saginduo! Move the feelings of our relatives,
that they may become unwise,
and bring us many shell rings!
They shall lose their power of reasoning,
that our name may become famous.

Two requests, from the Negri area, to obtain traditional wealth, which makes the success of every festival. Here, too, "one man's death is another man's breath"! (Aufenanger 1972, pp. 188-189.)

94. The tree, standing tall, fastened securely,
covered entirely with **waluo**- and **dabara**-vines.
My beloved village, fastened securely,
covered entirely, with **waluo**- and **dabara**-vines.
Old baskets are black,
black over the hearth, blackened by the smoke.
Food to eat, much food, fastened, secure, held tightly.

Although not specifically addressed to any supernatural being or culture hero, the above formula from Wogeo Island is designed to preserve peace and harmony at a festival, and to make all quarrelling cease. While chanting it, the headman stands firmly, with his feet apart "like an immovable rock". The vines he refers to completely

lock in the trees' branches, while "the blackened baskets" are also a sign of undisturbed peace. (Hogbin 1970, p. 182.)

11. Warfare

95. Harumae-ghost! Chief in war!
We sacrifice to you this pig,
that you might help us to smite that place;
and whatsoever we shall carry away
shall be your property,
and we also shall be yours.

Typical **fagarafe** addressed, with these or similar words, to a spirit (**adaro**), by the people of San Cristoval, when they make a sacrifice before engaging in warfare. (Fox 1924, p. 100.) It recalls some Old Testament concepts of "ban" and "holy war" (cf. Jos 6:17; 1 Sam 7:9).

96. Father, stand behind me!
Make me strong, and help me!

Before a fight, the Mambe people (South of Wewak), used to scrape a little dust from the armbone of a dead father and rub it on their hands to become strong. (Aufenanger 1972, p. 69.)

97. Eaboahine (Oh God)! Look down at my misery,
and strengthen my heavy body.
Eaboahine (Oh God)! Make me invisible,
help me in the attack, to run well, and to kill.

or also:

Oh Eaboahine! Help us!
Then we will be able to kill men.

Other warrior's prayers from Eastern Papua, requesting to become invisible, and superior in the attack. (Roheim 1946, p. 211. Original in Seligmann 1910, p. 650. See also Bartlett 1946, p. 5.)

98. Yaboaine (Oh God)! Look down here,
so that we can see you take away our vanquished enemy.
Take him away, draw him up to you,
but send down to us the killer (instinct)
so that we will be successful in more killing.

or also:

Yaboaine (Oh God)! Come down, u u u!
Come down, and take these cowardly captives away.
Only you can defeat the strong warriors!

Humble recognition of divine assistance, after a successful battle, from Normanby Island. (Roheim 1946, p. 210 with originals). This prayer recalls some Bible texts, which attribute victory only to Jahweh, and not to any human prowess or merit (e.g., Ps 20:7; 115:1 = Vg 113:9; Os 1:7).

99. You, Tsurun! You, Father!
I have always kept your commandment
and killed our enemies,
I am your son.

Another example of sacred war-ideology, from Northeast New Guinea, which states the divine command to kill all enemies (cf. Dt 20:16). (Aufenanger 1972, p. 173.)

100. Let us live,
and let those who speak evil of us perish.
Let the enemy be clubbed, swept away,
utterly destroyed, piled in heaps.
Let their teeth be broken;
may they fall into a pit.
Let us live, and let our enemies perish.

Fijian prayers generally conclude with malignant requests to annihilate the enemies, which once again recall the "imprecatory psalms" of ancient Israel (Ps 137:9; also Os 14:1) (cf. Codrington 1891, p. 147 note.)

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4. Bishop A. Navarre, 1889, pp. 92-93, gives a Roro formula used when fishing. It lists, in a litany form, the names of some spirits, then of various ancestors, famous for their fishing qualities, and concludes with the names of the one who says the prayer. Prayers from the Solomons, Vanuatu, and Fiji were published by R. H. Codrington, 1891, pp. 145-149, and some of them are reprinted below.

5. See Aufenanger, 1962, 1972, and 1975 (cf. Index under Sun, Prayers . . .). It is surprising that several recent books, which titles seem promising, do not add anything to the general information. So Garrett, Mavor, 1973; Poort, 1983, Collins, 1983, Wright, Boseto, 1985, and Deverall, 1986. As to indigenous "Christian" prayers, only a dozen or so have been published abroad (cf. **Bayrische Missionswerk**, op. cit., pp. 10-12, and by **Missio**, op. cit., passim), but neither of them quote their sources.

6. For the local scene, compare our: "Melanesian gods" in **Bikmaus** 4/2, 1983, pp. 1-54.

7. Anthropologists often mention the occasions on which people pray, but do not always specify the content of such actions. Sometimes they quote a vernacular text, but omit to give the translation. In other instances, a translation is given, but falls short in explaining certain options taken. Thus, it is not clear whether Saginduo (or a variation of the name – cf. prayer 91, below) is really a personal name, or whether it is, rather, a title, now rendered by "Great Man" (prayer 73), now by "Sun Man" (prayer 80).

8. An example of a silent prayer would be the repainting of sacred figures by Australian Aboriginals. This situation is not unlike the one which occurs in social relations, where a symbolic gesture suffices to indicate formally the suppliant's need (cf. Jean Guiart, **The arts of the South Pacific**, London: 1963, p. 124).

9. Cf. Laufer, 1951, p. 9. Similar remarks are made by Aufenanger, 1975, p. 312; Bartlett, 1946, p. 5; Williams, 1936, p. 327; Barth, 1975, pp. 17-18; and, in general, by Jan Van Baal, **Symbols for communication. An introduction to the anthropological study of religion**, Assen: 1971; Van Gorcum, p. 261: "the formulas accompanying the ritual act often pass unnoticed".

10. The thesis of Detlev K. H. Haude, **Das geistige Eigentum bei den Australier** (Inaugural Dissertation Philosophie), Bonn, 1970, about the suprahuman origin and nature of incantations and spells applies also to the tunes of songs, movements of dances, designs on artifacts, and the like, and is as valid for Melanesians as for Aboriginals.

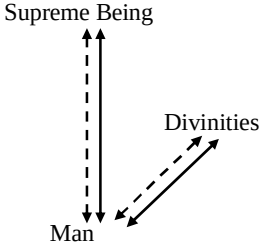
11. On name taboo at death among the Daribi in the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea, see Wagner, 1972, p. 98. On the prohibition on names between husband and wife among the Wiru (Southern Highlands), or between a person and his senior in-laws among Melpa speakers (Mt Hagen), see Andrew Strathern, "Wiru penthonyms" in **Bijdragen tot de Taal-Land-en Volkenkunde** 126, 1970-1971, 71 and 72 note. Further discussions in D'Arcy Ryan, "Names and naming in Mendi" in **Oceania** 29, 1958-1959, pp. 109-116; Karl J. Franklin, "Names and aliases in Kewa" in **Journal of the Polynesian Society** 76, 1967, pp. 76-81; etc.

12. On the classical problem of religion versus magic, compare – in the line of J. G. Frazer – the well-known booklet of Bronislaw Malinowski, **Science, magic, and religion, and other essays**, London: Souvenir Press, 1974 (esp. pp. 17-92). For recent discussions, see Mischa Titiev, "A fresh approach to the problem of magic and religion" in **Southwestern Journal of Anthropology** 16, 1960, pp. 292-298; and Murray Wax and RosalieWax, "The notion of magic" in **Current Anthropology** 4, 1963, pp. 495-513. The designs in the text, above, are taken from Felix M. Keesing, **Current Anthropology. The science of custom**, London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977, p. 332.

13. Quotation from H. E. Wedeck, W. Baskin, **Dictionary of pagan religions**, Secaucus, 1973; vide Shorter, op. cit. (note 2, above), pp. 8-13, has worked out, for his African materials, six different typologies of prayer, ranging from strict deism to relative deism. It would appear that his fifth model (strict deism), and sixth model (relative deism), are particularly relevant for Melanesia. They allow both for formal and experiential prayer, i.e., prayer as communication or speech (indicated by a regular arrow), and prayer as a continuous mode of livin of the believer (marked by dashed arrow line). His diagrams look as follows:

STRICT DEISM

RELATIVE DEISM



14. From this point of view, one can accept that "prayers" said in an ancient sacral language, which is hardly any more understood, should not, necessarily, be degraded to mere magic. Incidentally, the same problem presents itself also for some Aramaic expressions of the New Testament (cf. **Abba**, **Maranatha**, but also **Talitha cumi** and **Ephphatha**, which some scholars believe to be the words used by early Christian healers and exorcists).

15. Solomon Islanders seem to distinguish clearly between "charms" (**feirunga**) and "prayers" (**fagarafe**). The former use set formulas, often containing archaic words, which are transmitted, e.g., from father to son, and are accompanied by particular actions, like the blowing of lime (Tok Pisin: **kabang**), or the use of special leaves. The latter are much freer in their expressio, and can be said by anybody, and they are often accompanied by a sacrifice. (Fox, 1924, pp. 99-100, and, blow, prayer 95.) Similarly, in the Trobriand Islands, people would distinguish between the autonomous efficacy of rites and spells (**megwa**) and the help given by the spirits to a prayer made. (Malinowski, 1922, p. 422, and, below, prayer 28.) Among the Mekeo, too, there are cases in which, in addition to the muttering or chanting of spells (**mega**), a separate invocation is said to call upon the assistance of the spirits (**isage e pamagogo**, cf. Stephen, 1987, p. 60).

16. Friedrich Steinbauer, **Melanesian cargo cults**, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1971, pp. 102-103, distinguishes five main categories of interpretation. Coming after his survey, one should particularly note: John G. Strelan, **Search for salvation. Studies in the history and theology of cargo cults**, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977.

17. Compare, e.g., for Cameroons: Barthelemy Nyom, "Priere biblique et priere Africaine" in **Bulletin of African Theology** 3.6, July 1981, pp. 155-218; for Kenya: James Kihara, **Ngai, we belong to you. Kenya's Kikuyu and Meru prayer, Spearhead** 89, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1985; and for Nigeria: the full thesis of Anthony O.U. Echiegu, part of which appeared as, **Translating the collects of the solemnities of the Lord in the language of the African**, Munster: Verlag Regensberg, 1984.

18. It is reported, of the Koita people in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea, that they greeted the new moon by "yelling out", but it is not known what they actually said (cf. Seligman, 1910, p. 193). Roheim, 1945-1946, p. 210, reports a similar custom for Normanby Island, while Aufenanger, 1975, p. 312, has documented how, in the Timbunke area, after a good harvest, all the people shouted "Nya Vuntuma has given us plenty of good vegetables."

19. Compared with African prayers (cf. note 2, above), the Melanesian examples to be quoted manage only half their length. One should be aware, however, of the possibility that, with prayers, as with myths or stories, there might be "long" and "short" versions. The latter is obvious when it is stated in the literature that some "litanies" have been cut short (cf. prayers 16 and 23, below). One author, for instance, has noted a non-repetitive spell, chanted very fast by a prayer specialist, which lasted about 20 minutes, and contained many names of rivers, places, paths, and mountains in the area, while the ghosts were asked to help the family whenever they visited any of these places (cf. Feachem, 1972-1973, p. 278).

20. Some "Christian" indigenous hymns, from the Lutheran tradition, are presented by Rufus Pech, "An early indigenous theology expressed in worship" in **Christ in Melanesia, Point** 1977, pp. 87-121.

21. Cf. Echiegu, op. cit. (note 17, above), pp. 305-307.

22. One suggestion for "A eucharistic prayer for the Pacific Islands" was made by W. J. Ryan; it refers, in particular, to the people's ancient migrations, and their present living "in these islands" (cf. **Amen** (Manila) 40, 1970, pp. 79-83). Another Papua New Guinean "canon" was prepared shortly before Independence, but it has never received official approval, or even wider publicity (cf. H. te Maarssen, in "Catholic worship in Papua New Guinea" in **Worship in Melanesia, Point** 1980/1, pp. 82-88). There exists also a similar liturgy for Australian Aboriginals (cf. **Neue Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft** 1974/2, pp. 112-115), and several canons were produced for the African continent (cf. Afer, 1970/2, pp. 143-148; 15 1973, pp. 152-160). For general comments, see Boniface, **Luykx, culte Christian en Afrique apres Vatican II**, Immensee: 1974; furthermore, " 'Incarnating' Christian worship in Africa" in **Living Worship in Africa Today, Spearhead** 62, Eldoret: 1980, pp. 59-63.

RECENT CATHOLIC TEACHING ON LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Fr Carl Telford

INTRODUCTION

This paper has a precise objective – to explain two recent Catholic documents from the sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The first, called **Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation**, was issued on 6 August 1984 (hereafter, C.A.). The second was called **Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation**, issued March 22, 1986 (hereafter, C.F.).

Both are concerned with the theology of liberation – a theological reflection centred on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom. This theology is wide-spread in all Christian churches, but the documents are obviously aimed at Catholics. There is such a range of theologies of liberation that it would be imprecise to say "theology of liberation" – but correct to say "theologies of liberation". We find them in South America, Africa, and Asia, the Pacific. My own experience in New Zealand is that there is a real interest among Catholics, priests, brothers, and sisters, and laity for learning about liberation theologies.

These two documents have separate, but related, purposes, so must be read together, to see what the Catholic teaching is on theologies of liberation.

C.A. sets out "to draw the attention of pastors, theologians, and all the faithful to the deviations, and risks of deviations, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology".[1] It, therefore, has a warning role – to point out the defects of some theologies of liberation.

C.F. "has the task to highlight the main elements of Christian doctrine and freedom – to indicate its principal theoretical and practical aspects".[2] It

[1] C.A. Introduction.
[2] C.A. Introduction.

does not set out to explain every point on Catholic teaching, just the principal aspects. And each country's Conference of Catholic Bishops would have to set out more precise guidelines and teaching for their particular situation. These two documents give authentic Catholic teaching, that must be present in all theologies of liberation – and it is doing this for the whole church of 800 million Catholics. The Sacred Congregation is an organ of the Pontifical teaching authority – so has a real status.

In the reception of the documents, since the first, "C.A.", was negative, and seemed to "attack" some particular theologians, it was a media event. But the second document, C.F., the more-important one, and a positive document, was ignored, since it was not as newsworthy. My impression is that many people think the Catholic church is opposed to all liberation theologies. This is not true. The church is committed, more than ever, to liberation and freedom – and to authentic theologies of liberation.

So I have begun with C.F. – the more-important document.

PART 1 – FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING OF C.F.

A. Structure of the document

This document has five parts –

1. State of Freedom in the World Today
2. Man's Vocation to Freedom and the Tragedy of Sin
3. Liberation and Christian Freedom
4. The Liberation Mission of the Church
5. The Social Doctrine of the Church: for a Christian Practice of Liberation

It begins with the reality of the situation (Parts I and II), then moves on to explain how the church sees freedom – and what is the precise mission of the church (Parts III and IV), and, finally, the church's practice of liberation.

B. Aspirations for liberation

There are deep aspirations throughout the world for liberation. This word, "aspirations", is a common term in recent church documents,[3] and means the "in-most stirring movements" of people. People wish to be free, and responsible for their own destinies. It is a sign of the times, that persons desire a say in how their world is being run, and, at the same time, wish to be free from all that hinders their freedom. So we can see the quest for freedom from disease, from ignorance, from colonial rulers, from the oppression of a foreign culture, freedom from racism, and sexism.

Yet, at the very same time, the paradox occurs that this world is, more than ever, threatened by bondage, e.g., colonialism changed the foreign rulers, but, sometimes, the new local rulers were as bad, if not worse, than the foreign ones. Diseases have been cured, so that we live longer, and this can mean the tragic situation of so many old people, who are lonely and neglected, as in the developed countries, which now sees euthanasia as a way of solving this "problem" of the aged.

So, it is, that the more man freed himself from the danger of nature, the more he experienced a growing fear confronting him . . .what forces can protect man from the slavery of his own domination?

C. Christian freedom

These aspirations are universal. But how have, especially Christians, experienced freedom? Yet it has been said that the church opposes human freedom. But she is simply stating the truth "human reason must . . . function in the light of the revelation, which Christ entrusted to his church".[4] So the dangers in misuse of freedom must be pointed out.

But there is a deeply-Christian experience of freedom: "The reality of the depth of freedom has always been known to the church, they (know) that they are the object of God's infinite love."[5] The poor – the little ones – have

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[3] The development of recent Catholic teaching on social issues is well explained by Donald Dorr, in recent writing, Donald Dorr, **Option for the poor**, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983.

[4] C.F. 20.

[5] C.F. 21.

a special knowledge of this freedom and liberation. We can think of the great joy of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, serving the poorest of the poor. She possesses no goods, yet is deeply free, and frees others. As well, there is the wonderful gift of freedom from sin, and the bondage of evil. We are gifted with the mercy of God the Father – and His forgiveness.

Each morning this week, I have been celebrating mass in a squatter settlement of Lae. There is a new beautiful church, built in the middle of these shacks. Some would say that these squatters don't need a church – but only better houses, hospitals, schools, and yet, while their dignity requires that these schools and houses be built, the poor have the right also to know the joy of being loved by God, and given His grace, and to experience Christian freedom. However, our churches surely are an affront to the love of God, when they are not signs in healing the sick, instructing the ignorant, and other works of mercy.

D. Scriptural understanding of freedom and liberation

The document now moves on (43-60) to a long exposition of the scriptural understanding of freedom and liberation.

The Old Testament is centred around Israel's experiences of liberation by God. He has set them free "from the house of bondage, and He gives them a new land, and the status of free-born. But God requires that His chosen people also free others – and be just in their dealings. So we, certainly, find the prophets voicing God's anger that the people ignore their side of the covenant. The poor of Yahweh are "a people humble and lowly, who live in hope of the liberation of Israel". God alone can free from the slavery of a sinful world.

So when Jesus came, "The poor have the good news preached to them". This is a sign of the Messiah, but Jesus was poor Himself, and identified with the oppressed. "If you did to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

But Christ frees us, above all, by the power of His paschal mystery. He has achieved definitive liberation by this mystery.

The document summarises Christian freedom as "justification by the grace received through faith and the church's sacraments". That is the freedom God, as loving Father, offers us by the work of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit.[6]

This may seem removed from the need for liberation from hunger or disease. So I should like to explain one of the central, if not the central, idea of both documents. It is summed up in an important extract from Paul VI.

I will quote it in full:

> "Likewise, we profess that the kingdom of God, which has its beginnings here on earth, in the church of Christ, is not of this world, whose figure is passing away. The proper growth of this church is not able to be judged as being identical with the progress of human culture, or of the sciences, or of technical skills. Her proper growth, rather, consists in this: that the vast riches of Christ be more deeply known, that hope may be more constantly placed in eternal goods, that there may be a more-ardent response to the love of God, and that grace and holiness may be more-widely diffused among men. By that same love, the church is impelled to have, constantly at heart, the true temporal good of mankind. While she does not cease to warn her children that they have, here on earth, no lasting city, she also urges each one, according to his condition of life and resources, to foster the growth of a truly-human society, to promote justice, peace and fraternal harmony among men, and to come generously to the aid of one's brother, especially the poor and unhappy. Therefore, this great concern, with which the church attends to the needs of mankind – that is, to their joys and expectations, their sorrows and labours – is nothing else than the eagerness, which so vehemently impels her to be present to mankind, with this goal in mind: to enlighten men with the light of Christ, and to bring together, and join all men, in Him, who is their only Saviour. Indeed, this concern must never be understood as meaning that the church is conforming herself to the reality of this world, nor is losing the ardour with which she a waits her Lord and His eternal kingdom."[7]

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6 C.F. 52.

7 Paul VI, **Credo of the people of God**, 30 June, 1968.

This goes right to the heart of the paradox of our Christian faith in the world, but not of it – healing the body, yet our prime concern is for the soul. We could say, building both schools and churches . . . giving bread and the bread of life – working for justice and peace – as well as evangelisation – building the earthly city, yet waiting for the new earth and new heaven. Our human way likes to concentrate on one aspect – since that is easier for our human minds to grasp. Yet "faith embraces several truths, which appear to contradict each other. It is always the harmony of two opposing truths. This synthesis of such truths is the hallmark of a Catholic vision."[8]

E. The church's specific mission

C.F. discusses the church's specific mission, in the light of the situation and the gospel. How should Christians respond, as Christians? What have they to offer?

Her essential gift is one of offering integral salvation. "The church's essential mission, following that of Christ, is a mission of evangelisation and salvation."[9] She does this in the Spirit of the Beatitudes.

"She takes great care to maintain, clearly and firmly, both the unity, and the distinction between evangelisation and human promotion: unity, because she seeks the good of the whole person: distinction, because these two tasks enter in different ways into her mission.[10]

Once again, we see the importance of Paul VI's words. There is always a temptation to reduce the church's work to one dimension only – but all dimensions are her concern. She must remain, however, above all, faithful to our supernatural destiny.

C.F. – goes on to discuss three areas where balance is needed.

Option for the poor – a love of preference for the marginalised. There is a call today to respond to injustice by such an option and preference. We can see this preference in the life of Jesus, but it was never

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8 H. de Lubac, **The mystery of the supernatural**.
9 C.F. 63.
10 C.F. 64.

a purely earthly or material concern. "He taught detachment from earthly riches so we might desire the riches of heaven."[11] Jesus brought grace and peace to the poor, as well as healing, and bread. All human misery is, therefore, the concern of the church. But it must not be an option that excludes anyone – even the rich. In fact, there is a special call for love for the new poor in our society – the unborn, and the elderly.

Basic Christian communities are a vibrant way to show the church's concern for justice, so is a source of great hope, if lived in communion with the whole church.

The same applies to "local theologies", which come from a particular perspective. They can highlight certain aspects of the word of God. The strength of local theology can also be its weakness, it can become so inward-looking as to forget the wider experience of the whole church, and be enriched by it as it can, itself, enrich the universal church.

F. How to put the new commandment into practice?

This section of C.F. deals with the problem of putting this Christian teaching on liberation into day-to-day life.

Any practice must begin from the knowledge of the problems of society – and here we should use the skills of human wisdom and science, e.g., anthropologists, sociologists. What is going on? At the same time, there needs to be a deep knowledge of the gospel, and this will result in a social teaching, a social ethics, a set of principles that will govern our activity.

There are three basic principles that are always valid for Christian social action. The first is the principle of human dignity. Any social teaching must give full recognition to the natural rights and duties of each human person. This is a natural right that no government gives, since it comes from God Himself, and no government can take away the dignity of any human person, be he or she rich or poor, white or black, Melanesian or German, etc.

[11] C.F. 66.

The second principle is solidarity. We are all obliged to promote the common good, so there is no place for social or political individualism, or a capitalism that is laissez-faire. We are our brothers' keepers. There is an individualism that is unhealthy in the face of our world's problems.

The third principle balances the second – it is subsidiary. The state, nor any social body, must not take away the freedom of individuals by collective force: so that the question must be always asked, is this able to be done by a lower organisation, e.g., can the provincial government care for roads, or must the national government come in? For another example, should the local parish decide this, or does it involve a decision by the bishop? In the light of these three principles, we can judge social situations, structures, and systems. These principles are valid for any human situation, so in that they, in a sense, are not specifically Christian. The Christian church says that all governments and organisations must respect these principles, since every human being has rights, by the dignity of being a human being.

G. How do we understand unjust structures?

Liberation theologies are intensely concerned about structural change. There must be fundamental changes. C.F. gives some principles to understand structural change:

a. These structures are created by human beings, and are not the result of a determinism of history.

b. As such, structures are good in themselves, when they are conformed to natural law, and the common good.

c. But they will always be marked by sin. So how to change an unjust structure, e.g., a sugar-cane farm, where the owner lives in luxury, while his workers' children suffer from malnutrition.

The first priority is the conversion of individual hearts, an appeal to voluntary action, and the freedom of others. But this is not to be a passive reaction. There must be changes, but in a specifically Christian way. At every step of the way, the freedom and rights of all must be respected, so

that no human dignity, even an oppressor's, is lost by injustice. So Christians must reject systematic recourse to violence as the only path to structural changes. This involves rejection of the myth of revolution, to change by force and arms.

But, at the same time, there is, in Catholic teaching, a true place for armed struggle to free persons from unjust structures.

The document lists the many conditions, the discernment required, before this armed struggle takes place. This is a last resort, and may, in the light of the terrible force of modern weapons, not be justified. The church favours passive resistance as its favourite method of change.

H. Role of laity in the transformation of work, politics, culture, and education

C.F. spends much time on the way to work for an in-depth transformation of society. I can do no more in this paper than briefly set out some of the major points in this extremely rich section. Work is a key to the whole social question, and the dignity of human workers requires that all be given the opportunity to work, to use their talents. This seems, in my view, an area in Papua New Guinea that is a real key to the stability of the country: Pope John Paul has written a encyclical, **Laborem Exercens**, on this whole question of work. C.F. can merely briefly summarise the encyclical's main insights, so it is doubly difficult, in this article, to summarise a summary.

The question of solidarity, especially in helping the under-developed countries is mentioned (90-91). "The serious socio-economic problems, which occur today, cannot be solved, unless new fronts of solidarity are created: solidarity of the poor among themselves, solidarity with the poor, to which the rich are called, solidarity among the workers, and with the workers."[12] Mutual sharing is required for this transformation – a sharing that is not a manipulation or neo-colonialism.

[12] C.F. 89.

Freedom to follow one's own culture is necessary today, and, at the same time, this means the right to education. "The first condition for this is the elimination of illiteracy",[13] a challenging statement.

The state has to promote culture and education – but, at the same time, within limits. The family is the fundamental and primary educator.

Persons have the right to participate in this promotion of education and culture: no state has a monopoly. "No one can be excluded from this participation in social and political life, for reasons of sex, race, colour, social condition, language, or religion. Keeping people on the margins of cultural social and political life constitutes, in many nations, one of the most glaring injustices of our times."[14]

C.F. has briefly discussed the controverted role of priests and politics.

I. Conclusion

C.F. finally places the woman, who has experienced God's liberation by grace most deeply, Mary, the Mother of Jesus: "She is the most-perfect image of freedom, and of the liberation of humanity, and the universe."[15] It is, above all, in her song, Magnificat, that we can understand this liberation.

But she is also a woman who encourages us to faith in the victory of God's love. The poor have seen her as this sign of hope. Liberation and freedom are ultimately gifts from God. Before the immensity of the task, we could despair of ever freeing this world. Mary is a sign of the ultimate victory of God that nothing can hinder.

PART 2 – FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING OF C.A.

There are 11 divisions in this second document, which has a more restricted purpose than C.F. I will not summarise the first five divisions, which cover: Aspirations for freedom, Biblical foundations and

[13] C.F.92.
[14] C.F. 95.
[15] C.F. 97.

interventions of the Magisterium. These topics have been covered more thoroughly in C.F.

What is special about C.A. is its critique of certain theologies of liberation. It is important to be clear that C.A. is only discussing those limited number of theologies of liberation, which are dangerous new interpretations of Christianity, and so "seriously departs from the faith of the church".[16] C.A. is clear that the document is not to restrict or hinder those theologians involved in writing on liberation. It has the very **limited** aim of correcting defective theologies, by pointing out the defects, and the true Catholic perspective that is missing.

The major defect in these theologies is their uncritical acceptance and use of Marxist analysis and ideology. This analysis and ideology contains, at its heart, a materialism that denies the dignity of the human person and their eternal destiny.

As well, this analysis leads to a subversion of the meaning of truth. How? This Marxist analysis believes history shows the gap between the oppressors and the oppressed. These theologies of liberation claim to come from the viewpoint of the oppressed, and this is the only valid view-point. The oppressors' theology is false, because it comes from their selfish quest to be master, and to enslave others. So, they and their theology, must be rejected. The oppressed find the true theology, because they are participants in the struggle for liberation. Only praxis against oppression discovers this view-point. Only those in this struggle can analyse. Truth is, alone, found by participants in the struggle for liberation against oppressors.

The principle of class struggle is accepted by these theologies of liberation as the fundamental law of history. There is only one history. Human history of God's saving work is the history of His work, saving the oppressed. Liberation movements are salvation history, if it is human progress of this oppressed, then God is there. So there is a denial of the transcendence of God's kingdom, which is not identical with human progress.

[16] C.A. 6.

The theory of class struggle means that love of enemies is counter-productive. There is no real place for Christians from oppressor and oppressed classes to mix, even at Mass. They belong to opposed views. The true church is the church of the poor, and even the hierarchy is seen as an organ of oppression. They would seem to especially apply to "Roman" theology. There can be no compromise, or real dialogue, with the enemies of freedom, who belong to the ruling class, be they in church or society. This is, of course, a political reading of the Christian message, which reduces it to this world.

So, it departs from this tradition, in setting a Jesus, who is only a man struggling to liberate His people so Jesus, God and man, is replaced by a political reformer, who is divisive and only on the side of the oppressed. The church is called upon to follow His example, so her spiritual nature and transcendent message, and sacraments of grace, are ignored. There is a reductionism.

C.A. concludes with a call to a true theology of liberation, that is faithful to the three truths that John Paul II spoke about at Puebla in 1979: the truth about Jesus, the Saviour, the truth about the church, and the truth about man. These cannot be changed without becoming unfaithful to the gospel and tradition. The church must proclaim the true liberation that occurs by true reform of a person's heart by the Holy Spirit. This liberation is never by violence.

Finally, "there is need for social teaching of the church, which is open to all the new questions, which are numerous today. The contribution of theologians, and other thinkers in all parts of the world, to the reflection of the church is indispensable today."[17]

CONCLUSION

Finally, I should like to offer a few reflections, after studying these documents.

[17] C.A. 11.

A. Theology in dialogue in 1987

These two documents are part of a dialogue that is going on between the Christian faith, traditions – the wisdom of Christ's word – and the 1000s of men and women involved in the struggle for justice. There is a great need for a conversation between the needs of the oppressed and the gospel of freedom. The genesis of C.F. is an example of the need for dialogue. After the strong critique of some theologies by C.A., there was felt, in the Catholic church, especially from the Latin American churches, that the second document should be more positive. So, C.F., itself, is explicitly open to further development. It does not claim to be the final word. It wishes to aid the progress of a better theology of liberation. One big help to dialogue is the avoiding of labels. Some see Pope John Paul II, or Cardinal Ratzinger, as "conservative", and Boff or Gutierrez as "Marxist". These are "media-style" labels that categorise, simplisticly, someone's views and opinions. What is the truth of the other person's position? That is the question we need to ask about differing theologies if there is to be a real dialogue.

B. Theology in shock

By this, we mean that we can no longer afford to do theology in isolation from the aspirations of humanity. That is what theologies of liberation are saying loud and clear. Theology will never be the same again. The answers of traditional theology do not satisfy many people, passionately concerned in the quest for a just society. For myself, as one teaching theology, I must take greater care to listen to this movement in the church. I see it as a call to conversion, to a deeper intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.

Both documents are clear that they should not be taken as "no" to liberation and work of justice. This work is needed more than ever. Profound changes are required, and there can be no retreat from the church's involvement in the authentic liberation of humanity. This is a loud call to the whole church to be more involved in justice and peace.

C. Theology from below

This conference is concerned with theology by the people. That concern for theology from the grassroots people is a sign that these Christian people wish their human dignity to be respected. They are no longer satisfied with only a theology from above. These "grassroots" wish to be involved in the exploration of revelation. It should not be the preserve of theologians, and, certainly, no theologian can claim to have the final absolute answer. This is especially difficult for a theologian to accept. Our theological learning is hard-won. We must work hard to gain theological insights, so it is difficult to have to admit that we can gain something from those who have not our theological experience. Yet, surely, we can learn from each other, even from "grassroots". What is God teaching them? Liberation theology is concerned about listening to this Christian experience of the poor. So, all theologians should be listening to the "grassroots", and learning from them, as the "grassroots" can learn from theologians.

D. Where liberation theologies need correction

This paper makes no claim to have studied all liberation theologies. So, I can only make a few general observations.

The first distinction is between good theology, that is open to new insights, and defective theology, that overstates its claims, or is a transformation of the basic gospel. Also there is an arrogance that would claim modern movements alone are liberating. The history of the church is full of the work of so many Christian men and women, who have worked with the poor, to free captives, to educate the ignorant, to heal the sick.

All liberation theologies wish to remove present oppressive structures, but what then? What is the ultimate goal of liberation? What is their explicit vision of the new world?

Those who are involved in liberation, and all theologians, need the gifts of self-critical reflection. Why are they involved? I gained much from an article that studied the psychology of those involved in work for justice

and peace.[18] There can be a projection of unresolved personal conflicts on to outside groups or institutions.

E. Liberation theologies and Papua New Guinea

How can these documents help us in Papua New Guinea? First, we can avoid the mistake of others, who have supported liberation movements, that have eventually become oppressive, when actually in control. The documents ask a critique of underlying assumptions and anthropology in any theology of liberation. Does this liberate, in actual fact?

Secondly, we have institutions and structures now that need liberation. It seems to me, the family, the unemployed, and youth, all need urgent attention, so that they become a priority for church and government.

Finally, the specific work of the church is to proclaim Christ as liberator of the whole person, body, and soul, and of the whole world. So, we are called, as church workers, to proclaim this liberation more urgently, and with greater conviction. The church is being challenged in a profound way. We have no option but to respond with deeper Christian love than before.

[18] Unfortunately, our library here in Port Moresby does not seem to hold this issue of **Human Development**, from memory, an issue in the early 1980s by an American Capuchin, a graduate of the Institute of Psychology at the Gregorian University of Rome.

A POEM

THAT MONUMENT

Mr Kumalau Tawali

While their lips speak deceiving words
of DEVELOPMENT
and their minds imagine vain
economic justice
their hearts lust after
housing estates
great luxuries
foreign investments
PROFITS!
The Six-Mile dump dwellers
can wait
until the next election!
stinking bread is good for them.
Let us build a political monument –
an immortal symbol
of our debts to foreign money houses.
The people cry for bread
but are given snakes to EAT!
even maggots at BARUNI RUBBISH DUMP!
the people long for the hope
of a place to sleep
but are given that cold monument
to worship.
Is this the hope
we promised our people
when from mountain tops and islands
we pledged with solemn words
to serve and bring to fruition
the aspiration of our people's
HEARTS?
Noble men and women
called into one household

voices of a thousand tribes;
stand tall and strong!
let your people hear and SEE.
Let the stream of integrity flow through your hearts.
Let truth and sacrifice in you
be the offering to our people.
not a monument of Italian made in marble
but the living streams of life
in your hearts,
in our people's hearts
from mountain tops to palm-covered shores
from simple village huts to skyscraper
in our lakes and rivers
and from deep in the soul of the ocean,
TRUTH, INTEGRITY, SACRIFICE.

MELANESIAN ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

SECRETARY'S REPORT

(Presented to the Secretary/Directors of Theological Associations Meeting, Singapore, July 25-27, 1987)

Revd Kasek Kautil

The Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, by its membership, draws most major theological seminaries in Papua New Guinea, representing mainline churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, United church, as well as an alliance of evangelical missions and groups). Ethnically, the name implies that a large number of people, served and represented through member schools of MATS, are Melanesians, but we are also glad of our associations with our neighbours in Australia, the Solomon Islands, and the rest of our Pacific and Asian neighbours. Geographically, our Association accounts for the mid-Western Pacific, with a total of around 3-5 million people. A third general description of our Association is in the fact that our member colleges represent the so-called third-world churches, or third-degree churches. (Unfortunately, I don't even know how we got ourselves into the third-degree churches, let alone, third-degree Christians and theologians.)

In Papua New Guinea alone, there are over 100 missions and religious organisations, besides the major-established churches, most of whom are involved in some form of religious training and theological education. The churches, as a whole, run more than 60% of the schools in the country, of which around 40% are for religious and theological training. Comparatively, at the present time, MATS has only nine active members of the Association in the country, and the other two are in the Solomon Islands and Darwin, Australia. This is only 4.4% of religious and theology-related schools. This suggests to you the obvious need for engaging the remaining 35.6%, who are not involved with us in our joint efforts in theological education and sharing.

With the foregoing need, a two-fold direction in our theological education and training can be realised and pursued. Firstly, an effort to engage those schools and institutions, which are not part of our sharing at the present, no matter how small and low their standard of training. Secondly, to assist those schools and collective groups to pursue higher academic training for various needs of member churches, at both graduate and undergraduate levels within the country. Pursuing graduate training overseas is necessary, but cannot cater for the bulk of our graduates. This cannot be the key to our success story. For it is a slow and costly process, besides the emotional and cultural cost. We cannot send five students abroad at a time to do a doctorate programme, for this alone would cost in the hundreds of thousands of kina.

This is part of our justification for pursuing an ultimate goal of a time when we can have graduate studies for as many of our graduates as we can. This may not, altogether, remain a dream, for there are good signs. MATS, together with the Melanesian Council of Churches, have recently met for a consultation on religious studies at the University of Papua New Guinea. As a result of this consultation, and previous initiatives, a curriculum is being prepared for introduction at the Goroka Teachers' College, hopefully in 1988, while a joint committee is liaising with the university authorities to reintroduce religious studies, with a long-term view toward establishing a full department of theology, providing for both graduate and undergraduate programmes. Indications so far are that, if churches have the money, the university will be happy to take it up, perhaps only initially. A religious or theological studies programme at the university is not to take the place of what the individual churches, and their seminaries, are doing. Rather, it is to provide for graduate and continuing studies for many, who, otherwise, would not be able to pursue such studies abroad, for reasons mentioned earlier in this report.

Recently, MATS undertook the challenge to publish its own *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, which is now surviving its third year of infancy. If we can consolidate our funding sources with a more local and self-supporting base, it has a good chance of growing, and providing a forum for theological discussions in Melanesia and the Pacific. While the Journal tries to conform to a standard publication of a similar nature, at the same time, it tries to avoid technical jargons, which are academically prestigious, but are out of touch with the average reader in theology.

The bi-annual Study Institute continues to be an important forum for ecumenical theological dialogue, and sharing between member colleges. Within seven days or so, participants from member schools will be arriving in Lae for the 8th Study Institute, taking up the current general themes: **Theology by the People**, with theological reflections on issues ranging from peace, justice, development, which are all important issues for the church and society, though not fully realised as a church's urgent concern. What I personally propose for this, and future Study Institutes, is to have a mutual sharing with neighbouring associations, such as, the Australia-New Zealand Association, the South-East Asia Theological Association, and the Pacific Association of Theological Schools, and others.

Activities

Accreditation continues to be a major purpose of MATS. Accreditation teams have just completed rounds of evaluation visits, and are compiling their reports for the bi-annual assembly, which will be meeting the week after next.

Faculty development also plays an important part in MATS programmes, though it is a slow and costly exercise, as mentioned earlier. Finding the money is one thing, and developing the right people to meet our goals, both collective and individual, is another.

Student exchange is still a useful programme MATS has undertaken, for quite some time now, though a proper evaluation would help in assessing its past and future purpose.

Faculty exchange has not been pursued during the last four years, at least during my term as Secretary. Informal discussions were held, but not as a collective effort. This is the programme I would like to see pursued as a component of faculty development, as it is often stated that theology is best learned by doing.

Current membership in MATS includes the following:

Bishop Patteson Theological Centre, Honiara, Solomon Islands (Anglican).

Christian Leaders' Training College, Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea (Evangelical Alliance).

Highlands Lutheran Seminary, Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea (Lutheran).

Holy Spirit Regional Seminary, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (Catholic).

Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, Papua New Guinea (Lutheran).

Newton Theological College, Popondetta, Papua New Guinea (Anglican).

Rarongo Theological College, Rabaul, Papua New Guinea (United church).

Nungalinya College, Darwin, Australia (Anglican).

St Timothy Lutheran Seminary, Wabag, Papua New Guinea (Lutheran).

Senior Flierl Seminary, Finschhafen, Papua New Guinea (Lutheran).

Melanesian Institute, Goroka, Papua New Guinea (Ecumenical).

Salvation Army School for Officer Training, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (Salvation Army).

Some concerns and issues

1. The old Adam of "self-centredness" continues to isolate member schools, and are not open for serious discussions and sharing between member schools.

2. Developing a graduate programme at a master's level is our urgent need and concern. Common effort toward this goal is a viable option. Initial steps are being taken, as already referred to, as an initiative to establish a religious studies programme, and, eventually, a theology programme at the University of Papua New Guinea, which aims at meeting at least three purposes:

    a) Produce graduates with competitive qualifications that the church needs urgently.

    b) Provide alternative education for national leaders, both in government, private, and church.

    c) Provide education that is contextual.

    d) The influx of new religions, and Pentecostal revival movements, both within, and from outside, that cause growing instability, calls for an urgent need for theological education that is contextual, and true to its historical traditions (biblical, doctrinal, etc.).

3. Self-support in finance and manpower is also a serious concern for us. We received support from PTE, and other outside sources, for many of our programmes can not go on forever. We do not want to be dependent forever. Initiatives are being taken to move away from this dependence, but they are very slow.

Conclusion

MATS is now in its 18th year. While progress made so far is good, we can not remain at this level forever. Review of our achievements toward the future is due. In concluding, I would like to thank PTE, through its director, Dr Samuel Amirthan, for its support in our programmes, and we look forward to greater ecumenical-theological sharing as a tool for effective service and ministry of our Lord.

BOOK REVIEWS

GUTIERREZ, Gustavo, **We Drink from our Wells: the Spiritual Journey of a People** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books/Melbourne: Dove Communications , 1984), pp. 181, US$7.95.

In some quarters, the theology of liberation still has the reputation of being "unspiritual", "too-political", "horizontal", rather than "vertical". It is fitting that Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian Catholic priest, whose book **A Theology of Liberation**, made him the "father" of liberation theology, should now present this study of the spirituality, which has always been at its source. Both the theology and the spirituality bear the marks of their origins in Gutierrez's experience as a pastor to the slum-dwellers of Lima, yet both are deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. Among the authors most-frequently quoted, are Saints Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and even Therese of Lisieux ("a powerful saint", 111). The book is rich in its use of scripture, and trinitarian in its theological structure. Yet it is closely attuned to the Latin American situation. Though it is simply written as Gutierrez's personal statement of the spirituality that has guided and nourished him, the tensions and paradoxes of Latin American Christianity are never far from the surface, coming to their most-moving expression in the frequent testimonies of Latin American martyrs and prophets, whether known (like Archbishop Oscar Romero), or unknown. These often-lengthy quotations from prison letters and spiritual diaries are among the book's greatest treasures.

This very traditional spirituality is, at the same time, "new", because it incorporates experiences peculiar to the Latin American context. It is not individualistic, but entirely of the people, the laity, the oppressed, as they struggle, not for rare and esoteric spiritual experiences, but for survival and their most-basic human rights. It contains a special note of anguish, because the persecutors are not pagans, but Christians. It emerges from the catacombs of a Christian culture. When it speaks of conversion, it implies solidarity and commitment to the liberation struggle; when it celebrates the gratuitousness of grace, it envisages efficacy in working for structural reform; when it holds fast to the joy of Easter, it repudiates the sadness of

the lonely and satiated, and embraces the suffering and sacrifice demanded by a objective situation of injustice.

Christians in the Pacific will be shocked and bewildered by some aspects of this book, yet it is so profoundly ecumenical that I am sure it can be a means of communicating with their brothers and sisters in the much-harsher circumstances of Latin America. Our challenge is to prevent the kind of institutionalised injustice that prevails there from establishing itself here. Gutierrez's reminder that we drink from the same wells of theology and spirituality as his slum dwellers and peasants is timely and prophetic.

Dr John D'Arcy May,
The Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

TROMPF, Gary W., ed.: **The Gospel is not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987), ix + pp. 213 paperback.

This book is a good collection of Melanesian writings, gathered primarily at a conference held in Australia in 1981. The collection was then enlarged by adding writings of other important indigenous persons from the South Pacific region.

It is difficult to critically review a book, which contains so many pearls from so many friends. There is so much here from so many great leaders from the South Pacific, that in any limited review, someone's contribution is bound to be left out, or overlooked. Thus, if articles appear to be overlooked, I apologise. It is impossible to critically review such a varied collection without writing another book of almost the same size. Better that readers, interested in the theology of the Pacific, read these authentic contributions from black theologians from our region.

And, I must say, that a review of this book would be doubly difficult if the Melanesian writers actually did set out to show what **The Gospel is not**. . . . At the risk of using a double negative, the lasting value of this book is not in showing what the gospel is not in the South Pacific, but rather in the many helpful articles that show the **unique way in which local**

people have planted and nurture the gospel of Jesus Christ in our region. Readers, therefore, ought to be encouraged to take much more seriously the secondary title of this book, which is, **Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific**.

The rather negative book title, **The Gospel is not Western**, does give fair warning that readers may not naively ignore the devastation caused by what Bernard Narokobi has called **the "tidal wave" from the West**. Garry Trompf, the editor, quotes Bernard in his introductory article, and the quote is worth repeating:

> Our countries have been invaded by a huge tidal wave from the West, in the form of colonisation and Christianisation. Like any tidal wave, the West came mercilessly, with all the force and power, toppling over our earth, destroying our treasures, depositing some rich soil but also leaving behind much rubbish.

Some must rake through the rubbish, others must bury rubbish thrown up on the shore. But to read Bernard's tidal wave image, as if it were past tense, suggests that, for most of the writers, the worst of the storm is over. This may be true for some who are still experiencing the first flush of newly-won independence. Yet, for many newly-independent Pacific nations, their struggle continues as a more-subtle, neocolonial sorting through of the rubbish, and a need to gently clean up to see what trees and local vegetation have survived.

If we simply read Narokobi's words and images in the past tense, they are inadequate for some of the contributions in this volume. Our region is so diverse, that to say that a colonial wave **has passed**, is simply not true for all. For Trwar Max Ireeuw, from West Papua – sometimes called Irian Jaya; and for Pierre Qaeze, of the Loyalty Islands, sometimes called New Caledonia; any deceptive peace they may experience may be best described as "the eye of the storm".

And, as most Pacific Islanders know, the deceptive calm of the eye of the hurricane means we are still right at the centre of the storm, and the worse may be yet to come. "Gospel", for these Pacific and Melanesian theologians, therefore, means day-to-day survival in a life-and-death struggle for a yet-to-be-experienced, liberation of their people.

This book brings together articles by Aruru Matiabe (Papua Highlands), Polonhou S. Pokawin (Manus Island New Guinea), Bernard Narokobi (Sepik New Guinea), Rose Kunoth-Monks (Central Australia), Dave Passi (Torres Strait Islands), Willington Jojoga Opeba (Papua), Esau Tusa (Solomon Islands), Guboo Ted Thomas (South-East Australia), Mick Fazeldean (West Australia), Simeon (Namunu Papuan Island), Michael Maeliau (Solomon Islands), Rose Kara Ninkama (Highlands New Guinea), John Kadiba (Papua and North Australia), Sevati Tuwere (Fiji), John Momis (Solomons and New Guinea Islands), Utula Samana (Morobe New Guinea), Trwar Max Ireeuw (West Papua), Walter Lini (Vanuatu), Pierre Qaeze (Loyalty Islands New Caledonia), Suliana Siwatibau (Fiji).

It is a little tiresome to need to say, again and again, that black people in our region are rightfully dignified members of the human race. Pacific people may not be classified as sub-human, pre-Christian pagans. Aruru Matiabe encourages us to repeat a counter-affirmation again and again, with conviction, to counter the realities of subtle degradation, which are still very much alive and well in our colonial and neocolonial world.

And Aruru is helped in this collection by the humour and down-to-earth stories of aboriginal healer, Mick Fazeldean, who tells of his struggles to heal whites. One can imagine the twinkle in Mike's eye as he says in the book,

> "I found whites very, very hard to work on for a while, but since those early days it has become much easier. They find it hard to relax, their bodies are very tense, and it is hard to work through with my mind. But now, in time, and with much more prayer, they do relax and I can heal. . . . An important happening led me to heal more people: I had to raise a horse! I thought if I could heal a horse, I could heal a European person. And it happened."

Women make an important contribution to this book. Rose Kunoth Monks gives an excellent, balanced, and concise account from Central Australia. In relation to the vicious payback killings, she says that the gospel was a God-send.

There were, of course, conflicts, and, on the one hand, she outlines points at which Aboriginal and Christian beliefs are diametrically opposed

and mutually exclusive. She gives examples where Aboriginal elders and missionaries agreed that a choice between the old ways and the new was necessary.

On the other hand, she also cites examples of Aboriginal customs, which missionaries wanted the people to abandon, and the people wanted to retain. Rose clearly shows where this missionary push to jettison certain cultural values was not shared by Aboriginal Christians, and she asks that her people be able to choose. Her conclusions are as follows:

> "In short, innovations, that do not offer the possibility of rejection by Aboriginals, are destructive of Aboriginal society. I believe that when there has been no real choice, tensions and chaos have resulted. Some blacks blame the whites; the whites blame those who stir things up, and, in the midst of this, the disease that is racism, breeds. . . "

Positively:

> "When religious innovation was offered at Hermannsberg, people did have a genuine choice. They chose those aspects they found to be meaningful, and rejected those they could not accommodate to their system. This occurred without conflict, simply because choice was actually possible."

When we come to the field of theological education, this book contains two excellent articles by practising Pacific educators.

John Kadiba is interested in developing a Melanesian Systematic Theology, which is "home grown" and "rooted in our own soil". In a very sensitive way, Kadiba exposes the "foreignness" of imported theologies. These foreign theologies, impose religious symbols that are always exotic for Melanesians. In addition, they are very often alienating, destroying the very Christian values they purport to bring. Kadiba's strong call is for a theology that is the creation of Melanesian Christians, rather than one that is expatriate-external-"Western", a theology written, perhaps, as a legitimate response to a crisis overseas, but one which will always be foreign in Melanesia.

Kadiba calls for Theological Colleges in Melanesia to be flexible and innovative, and, above all, responsive to the local people. His quote, using the words of Dr Sione Havea, is also worth noting,

> "When I say "Pacific", it means, to me, a **focus on people**. People who are human and not puppets. They have tears, blood, and sweat. When they are young and need care, when they are sick and need treatment, and when they are "itchy", they want to be scratched (where it is itchy). They are people born to be free; they want to make their own decisions, and list their top priorities."

Together with some clear comments about the Melanesian context, John Kadiba has the courage to record that 80 to 90 percent of the people in Melanesia are still rural dwellers. And he reminds us that our theological focus must not neglect that datum! From this point, he goes on to give an interesting outline of some of the tasks before theologians in Melanesia. . . .

As readers, we might, ourselves, notice that, in the tertiary world, Kadiba mentions in his conclusion experiences, which reflect something of the same colonial bondage, that other Melanesian Christians struggle with in the political arena. Kadiba concludes,

> "The time is ripe for a systematic Melanesian theology to develop. But it will be a slow and long process, so long as foreign theologies, and foreign Christian traditions are maintained in and through the theological institutions and the churches. The churches must be open and sensitive to God's work among God's people, seeking to look through Melanesian eyes, and not to be bound by present traditions and foreign theologies."

This also is a cry for different priorities regarding funding. In a neocolonial Melanesia, the application of overseas funding in educational institutions often determines whether or not educators have freedom to do local research and to be innovative.

Sevati Tuwere takes these concerns further in his article. He, too, avoids the temptation to neglect traditional village and community life. He says,

> "A current problem results from an all-too-heavy emphasis on the past and on what we have lost, with the future being almost entirely out of sight. A new community life is needed that embraces the dynamic dialectical relationship between past and future. This is important now, because some people, particularly young people, are overtly caught up in things modern. Many find themselves rootless, and become frustrated by today's changes. We must educate our young people, not only with formal education, but also in ways to combine modernity with the skills of our forebears, and the wisdom of our elders. . . .
>
> "A real soul searching is going on in Fijian villages today, because most people desire, above all, a sound community life. They do not necessarily want an alternative-type community, but only one that is adaptable to the changes occurring all around. Many models in indigenous culture already find endorsement in the Christian faith's commission to carry the gospel.
>
> "Fiji is all about the dynamo of reciprocity, of creatively passing things on, and receiving, in return. . . ."

Sevati, it appears, would be very much at home with Bernard's article entitled "Broken pearls and new-born shells".

In summary, there appears in this collection a wide variety of home-grown theological pearls from the South Pacific region.

I have some questions, myself, about the way the collection is organised editorially, and would wonder whether more Pacific categories might not have been chosen from the writers' own images and thinking. In some ways, the organisational categories of "tradition" and "Christianity" seem inadequate and "Western". Some of the sub-sections do not invite us into the fascinating world of the south-western Pacific theological reflection, in the way that the material merits.

In addition, perhaps the articles raising community and justice issues might have come earlier. There are writers here who are giving us their risky and dangerous response to colonial history. If their articles had appeared first, they might have led us into the more-subtle neocolonial

struggles, where political independence is nominally in place, and where local churches appear to be in control of their own affairs, but are still experiencing a more-subtle bondage, as wave after wave of modernisation washes over them.

Nevertheless, Fr Martin Wilson is right, when he says, on the jacket of the book, that the resources in this book "will feature in many a footnote and reference for years to come". This will certainly be the case in the academic world, while, at the same time, the writers, themselves, will be actively and creatively giving leadership to the churches, and the region, as a whole.

Gary Trompf is to be congratulated on the five years of work that has gone into making this book available to scholars in our region.

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