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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Editorial: A Mouthpiece for Local Theology

Revd Christopher Garland

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Historical Perspective**

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Contributors

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Editorial

A Mouthpiece for Local Theology

The aim of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is to stimulate local theology. In this issue, the new Principal of Newton College, Fr Michael Hough, contributes the first part of a study of biblical exegesis. He begins by saying that, “The very first interpreter of scripture was scripture itself”, and, from this, he finds precedents from the Bible and from Jewish interpreters of biblical times for applying the Bible to the local context in a way that goes well beyond the apparent literal meaning of the text. We look forward to seeing how, in later articles, he will draw out, for local theology, lessons in how to be both faithful and creative in interpreting the Bible.

Next, we include two articles from students at colleges belonging to MATS, which have been forwarded by their lecturers, after appeals by the Editor for such material. It is to be hoped that other colleges will follow the example set here and forward student material they consider suitable. In the first of the two student articles, Ignatius Ketobwau, from Rarongo Theological College, asks what happens when people apply perspectives and purposes, inherited from traditional religion, to Christianity. Ignatius argues that one reason why traditional perspectives would be inappropriate would be because, he says, traditional religion had no concept of a personal relationship between the divine and the human. The Editor, himself, has, elsewhere, argued that the traditional myths and rituals of exchange between gods/spirits and humans implied the use of free will on each side, and so contained elements of an “I-Thou” personal relationship. However, Ignatius had posed a question very well that should be taken further. Meanwhile Ako Arua, from the Nazarene Bible College, has contributed an impassioned appeal for a Melanesian way of Christian worship.

In an article, written in 1984, by Ewan Stilwell, but only very recently submitted to the *Journal*, the author provides a critique for relating Melanesian thinking to Christian thinking, in a way that could be helpfully applied to papers, such as that by Ignatius Ketobwau. His handling of issues, such as respect for ancestors, is very sensitive. The indefatigable Fr Theo Aerts, though now retired from Holy Spirit Seminary, has been devoting the extra time he now has available, not only to fostering the growth of the religious studies programme at the UPNG, but also to promoting the ecumenical observance of the memory of the martyrs of all the churches of Papua New Guinea. As part of his activity in this respect, he has contributed an article to the *Journal* to set the record straight, and so promote theological reflection on the significance of the martyrs.

The Editor still welcomes contributions of book reviews. For the present issue, he would just like to draw readers' attention to the recent publication by the World Council of Churches of John Garrett's *Footsteps in the Sea*, a sequel to his *To Live Among the Stars*, which takes further his very useful study of the history of missions in the South Pacific.

The Problem of Exegesis: A Reflection from an Historical Perspective

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Introduction

Having to prepare a course on exegesis for final-year students here at Newton College has proved to be a more difficult task than I would have anticipated. One of the real stumbling blocks has proved to be the attitude the students have to scripture: how they understand the nature of the material they have before them. The first, and necessary, starting point in exegesis, then, has to be the understanding of scripture as scripture, and not as literature, or theology, or as a kind of source book for doctrine. Yet, coming to an understanding of scripture is not easy process, and involves the integration of a number of differing visions. In this, and in subsequent papers, I shall reflect on a number of these approaches, in an attempt to isolate a starting point for exegesis.

Jewish Exegetical Methods

The very first interpreter of scripture was scripture itself. This is not all that surprising, when we remember that the canon is the result of some thousand years of evolution and growth. Traditions have been modified, corrected, and, at times, contradicted¹. This, too, is a reasonable process, if we also consider the many, great, social changes that the nation of Israel went through, from the time of the Exodus until the final formalising of the canon. They changed from a semi-nomadic people, to an agricultural society; then moved into cities, had their own king, army, and newly-won territories. They, then, ended up occupied, and governed by foreign powers. Each of these factors had profound effects on the way the nation thought, worshipped, and used its sacred stories. What was written down, as the way of sacrificing for the desert people, did not always make sense to post-exilic Jews of the second temple period. Changes, then, had to be made to what was the accepted interpretation of their traditions. It is the ease with which these changes were made that is important to our search for hermeneutical guidelines.

¹ Hanson, A. T., *The Living Utterances of God*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, p. 7.

The book of Chronicles is a good example of this process, as it sets out to represent the past glories and sins of the people. Compare, for example, 2 Sam 24:1:

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying “Go, number Israel and Judah”.

with 1 Chr 21:1:

Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.

Some 500 years lie between these two works, and, in that time, there had been a great deal of growth and development in theology, and the understanding of God. By the time of the Chronicler, people would have found it very difficult to accept that God could “incite” the king to sin. Yet, that is precisely what the text from 2 Samuel is saying. Thus, the text had to be modified, introducing Satan, a figure who was just beginning to emerge as a force in theology. As someone who was opposed to God, he could well “incite” someone to break the Law. It does not matter what the mind of the original author was. Nor does it matter what the original *Sitz in Leben* was. The important key to interpretation was the audience of the Chronicler, and their needs and expectations (as perceived by the author). The second text actually meant what they had it mean, independent of what the original source was saying.² It is even more interesting to read the *Targum*, an Aramaic translation and commentary on the text.³ It takes the process a step further, and has the text reading:

Yahweh incited Satan against Israel.

Another good example for this process is found in a reinterpretation of Hos 1:4. That text reads:

For it will not be long before I make the house of Jehu pay for the bloodshed at Jezreel.

This is clearly at odds with the man who wrote the commentary in 2 Kings 9. He wrote his account in such a way as to put Jehu’s actions in a good and acceptable light, even to the point of having the prophet Elisha initiate the whole incident, at the behest of Yahweh. Hosea had a different message in mind – same Bible; same event, but varying understandings. A quick read through Psalm 78 will show a

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³ The Targums are an important part of the reflection, and will be studied at some length later on. But, for now, it is important to remember that they were much more than just a translation. They contained an interpretation, and an application of the text, all incorporated into the biblical passage being used.

similar kind of hermeneutical process, where the history of the nation undergoes a theological revision.⁴

We could go on and multiply these examples, as the Bible has many such forms (Hanson, in his *The Living Utterances of God*, has a good collection of them) and, at end, we would be forced into an obvious conclusion. The Bible has always been reinterpreted, with the new interpretation often moving far beyond what was intended in the original text. Hermeneutics, thus, requires something more than faithfulness to original meanings. What we have in front of us, in the form of these texts, represents a dynamic statement of faith, whose precise meaning transcends the recorded events, and calls on the new audience to accept the reinterpretation of what happened. Both the original account and the reinterpretation then become scripture despite, the irreconcilable differences.

The Septuagint

In a simple understanding, the Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. But, for our reflection on hermeneutics, it represents much more than that. It was seen as an inspired book, with its translators being referred to as “inspired prophets”.⁵ But, as we shall see, being inspired did not mean that interpreters and translators were limited by the clear meaning of the original Hebrew text.

Take, for example, Gen 2:2, which, in the LXX, is an example of *Halakah*. *Halakah* is the Jewish technique of taking a text, and applying it to everyday life. Given the rapidly-changing society, such applications were necessary, as the believer was facing situations never envisaged at the time of the first revelation. The Hebrew of Gen 2:2 reads:

And, on the seventh day, God finished His work, which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work, which He had done.

The problem with this passage is that it has God working on the seventh day, the Sabbath. This is clearly against the law, and unacceptable, even for God! The LXX translators worked on it, and rendered the same text:

And God finished the works, which He had done on the sixth day, and rested on the seventh day.

⁴ Lindars, B., *New Testament Apologetic*, London UK: SCM Press, 1961, p. 273.

⁵ Philo, *De Abrahamo*, cf. Hanson, A. T., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

And so the problem is solved. This change (and many others like it) in no way affected the authority of the LXX in the community. It was as much “scripture” as its Hebrew counterparts. This is a good example of how, in the process of translation, perceived difficulties in a text could be smoothed out for the sake of the needs of later communities. Similar texts can also be found that show how later generations changed texts to meet variations that had come about in cult with the passing of time (see, for example, Lev 24:7).

In another example, we find that the LXX adds a rather long sentence about the grave of Joshua at the end of Jos 24:30 that is not in the Hebrew. It is not a great theological addition, but, rather, a note that helps the community understand what was probably a much later ritual and pilgrimage associated with this sacred shrine. Similarly, it adds extra verses to the end of the Hebrew text of Job. This is done to show that Job can be traced back five generations to Abraham. What is important is that these Haggadic additions were accepted as “scripture”, in the very same way as were the originals. They were seen as clarifications, and probably improvements, necessary for proper comprehension by the believing community. It also provides us with clear insights into how they handled a text.

The LXX also has a clear tendency to remove anthropomorphic language from descriptions of the actions of God. From its Greek background, giving God human qualities would have been unworthy of His greatness. Some of these are:

HEBREW	GREEK
Exodus 15:3 Yahweh is a man of war.	The Lord crushes war.
Exodus 18:8 With the blast of Your nostrils.	With the Spirit of Your angel.
Exodus 24:10 They saw the God of Israel.	They saw the place where the God of Israel stood.
Exodus 24:11 Upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay a hand.	Of the elect of Israel not one was missing.

Again we are struck with the apparent audacity of the exegete/translator, who can change words and meanings, on the basis of the language and images used being potentially offensive. Again, we have a process that would be frowned upon today, but one that helps us understand how they approached the texts, and how they were in no way limited to what they said.

A perhaps more important reworking is found in Ex 4:24-25. The Hebrew text has the Lord going out to kill Moses, but he is saved when Zipporah, his wife, takes a knife and cuts off her son's foreskin and places it at the feet of Moses. God sees this, and decides that He would change His mind, and not kill Moses after all. This is probably a quite ancient tradition that the LXX had presumably decided is too difficult to manage, and so reinterprets it. The two texts are reproduced below, side by side, to better see the changes that take place. The Hebrew is on the left.

On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the Lord met him, and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint, and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly, you are a bridegroom of blood to me." So God let him live. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by the circumcision."

And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord met him by the way in the inn, and sought to put him to death. And Zipporah, having taken stone, cut off the foreskin of her son, and fell at his feet, and said, "The blood of the circumcision of my son is now staunch." "

The first obvious change is that the LXX has an angel of the Lord coming to kill Moses, and not God doing the deed. Then, Zipporah falls at Moses feet rather than having her place the foreskin on his feet. Finally, her cry is quite at variance with the Hebrew. Examples like these show just how interpretations of a text depend on many things beyond what was in the mind of the original authors.

In most of these changes, theology was clearly important. But good theology was not the only consideration. By the time of the LXX translation, the people of Israel had suffered greatly at the hands of the Gentile nations around them, and had developed an enormous depth of hatred for them. This strong anti-Gentile feeling also found its way into the handling of the Hebrew. In 1 Sam 17:43, for example, there is David's glorious fight with Goliath, and, in this verse, we see the Philistine warrior baiting the shepherd soldier with these words: "Am I a dog that you would come against me with sticks?" The LXX translators, reflecting the mood of the times, uses this to make a further point about Gentiles by adding a reply from David that the Hebrew misses out: "No, but worse than a dog!"

Mind you, not all the changes worked out too well. Compare, for example the Hebrew of Is 51:20, which reads:

Yours sons have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net

with the unusual LXX translation:

Yours sons are the perplexed ones, sleeping at the top of every street like a half-boiled beet.

Anyone who attempts translation work on the Bible will quickly discover that there are many passages in the Hebrew that almost defy reasonable and accurate translation, and the LXX does as good a job as any other in attempting this work. However, it is also very clear, just from the few examples given here, that, when it came to using the scriptures, the translators understood that what they had was much more than just a text. They had a revelation from God that needed to speak to their communities, and they were the ones, called and inspired, to make this message come alive and be relevant. If this meant adding theologies, clarifying words, changing old rites and customs to reflect current liturgical and social conduct, and taking out all those things they thought were inappropriate, then they did so without qualms or hesitation.⁶

Exegesis in the Qumran Community

The community that set itself up at Qumran, in the wilderness on the shores of the Dead Sea, was composed of Essenes. They were a strict observance group, who emerged from the struggles for independence, engaged in by Israel during the Maccabean period. They had two main principles that guided their exegesis:⁷ (a) prophetic scripture must always refer to the end of time (and, by prophetic scripture, they meant virtually all of the Bible, as they saw Moses and David as prophets); (b) the present WAS the end time. Their main exegetical device was the *peshet* technique. This sought to identify persons and events recorded in scripture with specific people and events from the Qumran community itself. This is not the same as going back to the Bible and finding in it characters who are models of present figures, or who are like people from Qumran. The community believed that scripture was written specifically with their group in mind, and that, when it was being revealed, God did not even make this future relevance known to the prophet doing the writing. They were the end-time community, and scripture was fulfilled in them. The word *peshet* can be translated as “the means”. The interpreters would quote the text they were looking at and then add “. . . *pishro* (this means) . . .” and go on with their interpretation. In its commentary on Hab 1:4, we can see this *peshet* method in operation:

⁶ It should be noted that, at this stage, we are not talking about a fixed Hebrew canon. Though many of the texts, in what we now call the Old Testament, would have been considered as “scripture”.

⁷ Hanson, A. T., *op. cit.*, p. 15.

And so the Law loses its hold. (*pishro*) This refers to the fact that the people have rejected the Torah, that is, the Law of God.

Yes, the wicked men get the better of the upright. The wicked (*peshher*) refers to the wicked Priest, and the upright is the Teacher of Righteousness.

This shows their understanding of the reasons for the existence of the community, as well as the problem of struggles within its own ranks. In the same prophecy, this time in 1:6, we can see how history is reinterpreted to become a commentary on current events. The text reads: “For now I am stirring up the Chaldeans, that fierce and fiery people.” To this is added, “Interpreted (*peshher*) this is about the Kittim, who are, indeed, swift and mighty in war, bent on destroying peoples far and wide. . . .” For the Qumran community, the Kittim are the Romans, not the Chaldeans, of whom Habakkuk writes. They would hold that the prophet, while he thought he was reflecting on his own situation, was, in fact, anticipating the situation that would be current to the Qumran community. This is apparent in their understanding of Hab 2:2, which reads:

Then Yahweh answered, and said, “Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read, since this vision is fulfilled, it does not deceive.”

The *peshher* reads:

God told Habakkuk to write down the things that were to come upon the latter age, but he did not inform him when that moment would come to fulfillment. As to the phrase . . . to be easily read . . . (*peshher*), this refers to the Teacher of Righteousness, who expounds the Law aright, for God has made known to him all the deeper implications of the words of His servants the prophets. This vision is for its own time only . . . (*peshher*), and refers to the fact that the final moment may be protracted beyond anything, which the prophets had foretold, for “God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform”.

So the prophet was passing on a message that he did not understand, a message that would only be revealed by the Teacher of Righteousness, for whom it was originally written⁸. Any thought of a hermeneutic, based on the message, as perceived by the original author, would be absurd to them. Exegesis was not meant to rediscover the original meaning, but the intended meaning for the receiving group.

⁸ Gaster, T. H., *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, New York NY: Anchor Books, 1976, p. 318.

The Targums and Exegesis

The Targums are very important in any study of early exegetical methods, because they are not only translators of the Hebrew scriptures from Hebrew into Aramaic, but are also theologies of the text under consideration. They:

give the sense, and make the people understand the meaning (Neh 8:8).

So while they would be “faithful” to the text, when they considered it necessary, they would add clarifications, so that the proper meaning, as they perceived it, would be understood by the audience. The Targums therefore:

lie half way between straightforward translation and free retelling of the biblical narrative: they were clearly attached to the Hebrew text and, at times, translated it in a reasonably straightforward way, but they were also prepared to introduce into the translation as much interpretation as seemed necessary to clarify the sense.⁹

Important, in the growth of the Targums, is an appreciation of the fact that post-exilic Israel was a nation in which Hebrew was a dying language. It had been replaced, over a number of years, by Aramaic, the court language of the Assyrian empire. Much of the Bible was, therefore, beyond the linguistic reaches of the ordinary man and woman. In the synagogue service, the text would be read in Hebrew, and then a translation and interpretation would be given (though it is probably more accurate to call it a paraphrase rather than a translation). In the *Mishnah*, Meg 4:4, we find these instructions:

He who reads in the Torah should read no fewer than three verses. He may not read to the translator more than a single verse (of the Law) at a time, so that the translator will not err; and, in the case of the prophetic reading, three. If the reading constitutes three distinct paragraphs, they read them one by one. They skip from place to place in the prophetic readings, but not in the readings from the Torah. And how far may they skip? Only so much that the translator will not have stopped (during the rolling of the scroll).¹⁰

These Targums are important in the study of exegesis, in that, like the works of Rabbinic literature, they throw light on the understanding of the text and its

⁹ Bowker, J., *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (1969) p. 13, quoted in Longenecker, R., *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 21-22.

¹⁰ Neusner, J., *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, London UK: Yale University Press, 1988.

meaning. How did people of the time see the Bible, its purpose, and how did they go about extracting the meaning from the text.

Rabbinic Literature

The rabbinic literature is an enormous body of writing that reflects a range of traditions, and which was put together in the period 2-6 AD. It is generally divided into two parts:

- (a) *Halakah* – which is about human behaviour. This is how the daily life of the Jew is modified by the Torah, and what these sacred writings mean in everyday life.
- (b) *Haggadah* – this is the illustration of the biblical texts, where original stories are expanded, heroes praised, and the full meaning of the text is coloured, for the edification of the reader.

Though these two are clearly distinct, very often the *Haggadah* would also include some halakic details, and the *Halakah* use haggadic pronouncements.¹¹ The *Mishnah* is the basic document for *Halakah*. It is made up of 63 tractates, called *Massektoth*, which are arranged under six main divisions. These are not generally attached to a specific text of scripture. It was collected, and put together, by Rabbi Judah (called *ha nasi* – the Prince – in Jewish tradition), who was born around 135 AD. The *Tosephta* is basically an expansion of the *Mishnah*, and another body of literature, the *Gemaras* (meaning teachings), takes the *Mishnah* and tries to relate it directly back to the scriptures. It is valuable, because it is

(a collection of) homiletical exegesis of scripture; moral maxims, popular proverbs, prayers, parables, fables, tales; accounts of manners and customs, Jewish and non-Jewish; facts and fancies of science by the learned, Jewish and heathen folklore, and all the wisdom and unwisdom of the unlearned.¹²

While never thought of as scripture, these works are important for us, because they highlight the way scripture was understood and used. When one reads through this impressive body of literature, one is faced with the overpowering certainty of the scribes that there is no such thing as a single meaning to a biblical text. Quite the opposite; what comes out clearly is that scripture is a very living, dynamic, and

¹¹ Longenecker, R., *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹² Hertz, J. H., *The Babylonian Talmud: Nezikin I* (1935), p. xviii, cited in Longenecker, R., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

adaptable gift of revelation from God, which speaks to one person, and one situation, in one way, and in a very different way to someone else. Having two messages in the one passage would not necessarily be a difficulty, or a proof of how scripture can err. Rather, it would show that the word of God was indeed “alive and active, cutting like a two-edged sword”.

The main exegetical method, found in the rabbinic writings, was that of *Midrash*. The word comes from the Hebrew verb (*darash*), which means “to seek”, “to resort to”,¹³ and covers all forms of interpretation. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* (vol 8) describes *Midrash* as

An exegesis, which, going more deeply than the mere literal sense, attempts to penetrate into the spirit of the scriptures, to examine the text from all sides, and thereby to derive interpretations, which are not immediately obvious.

It, in fact, covered many different types of commentaries on scripture, as well as exegesis, and virtually any form of writing that, in some way, referred back to scripture. What is important is the use of the word in the Bible. There are many examples in scripture of people “searching” for God, or “inquiring” of God, “looking” for God, and so on (cf. Gen 25:22; Ex 18:15; 1 Sam 9:9, etc.). The verb that is used here is *darash*. However, in some later references, we find that what is being searched for is no longer God, but the Torah of God. For example, in Ez 7:10, we read: “For Ezra had set his heart to study (*lidrosh*, from the verb *darash*) the instruction (the Torah) of the Lord.” Again, in Ps 119:155, we find: “Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not see (*darash*) your statutes.” This represents quite a profound change, and an important understanding of the nature of the revealed word of God. Whereas, in the past, the wicked would have been accused of not keeping God firmly in their sights (as we find in Is 9:12 and Jer 10:21), here their condemnation rests on their failure to study the Torah. It is possible, therefore, to see how, once the Bible was canonised, *midrash* became an important tool in the exegete’s arsenal in his search for God. For this is what the study of the scripture had become – not just an analysis to find God’s teaching, but to come into contact with God Himself.

Midrash, then, is a method that moves well beyond the literal interpretation of scripture, seeing, in the text, a multiple layer of meanings. It sought to capture the spirit of the text, looking at everything that was written down, examining it for its divine significance.¹⁴ It is immediately clear that such methodologies are easily

¹³ In the Genesius lexicon, we find that this can then be taken in a figurative way to mean “to read repeatedly”, “to discuss”, and “to search out”.

¹⁴ Horovite, S., “Midrash”, in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 8, p. 548.

open to a number of quite subjective interpretations, well beyond the meaning of the original text. It was to avoid this danger that strict guidelines were laid down to control the use of *midrash*. It was not just left to the individual to find whatever message he liked from the passage he was studying.¹⁵ Hillel proposed seven laws of exegesis, while Rabbi Ishmael came up with 13. As Hillel represents a pre-Christian exegesis, a list of his rules will be instructive:¹⁶

1. *Qal wahomer*: What applies in a less important case will apply in a more important case.
2. *Gezerah shawah*: Verbal analogy from one verse to another: where the same words are applied to two separate cases it follows that the same considerations apply to both.
3. *Binyan ab mikathub 'ehad*:
Building up a family from a single text: when the same phrase is found in a number of passages, then a consideration found in one of them applies to all of them.
4. *Binyan ab mishene kethubim*:
Building up a family from two texts together: the principle can then be applied to other passages.
5. *Kelal upherat*: The general and the particular: a general principle may be restricted by a particularisation of it in another verse; or, conversely, a particular rule may be extended into a general principle.
6. *Kayoze bo bemaqom 'aher*:
As is found in another place: a difficulty in one text may be solved by comparing it with another which has points of general (though not necessarily verbal) similarity.
7. *Dabar halamed me'inyano*:
A meaning established by context.

These rules represent an important development in hermeneutics, because they rest on an underlying theology of the nature and role of a text of scripture. Clauses, sentences, words, and even single letters, can be taken, independently of

¹⁵ Whilst it is true that the formalising of these rules was late, they are pulling into proper methodologies processes that were a part of the exegetical scene for a period well before this time.

¹⁶ Longenecker, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 34f.

setting and context, and examined for meaning. They can be linked with similarly-disjointed words and phrases, and be used to explain any piece of divine revelation. In fact, sometimes passages were joined on the basis of nothing other than an apparent verbal link.¹⁷ This means that any text or word can end up with two or more different meanings, by simply changing the vowels that go with the consonants,¹⁸ leaving out the weak consonants,¹⁹ changing the gutturals,²⁰ and, sometimes, allowing the Greek reading to be the text that determines the Hebrew meaning or reading.²¹ To a modern biblical critic, this seems like an abuse of the given text, but, for the Rabbis, it was a legitimate way of making revelation alive, and relevant to the people for whom it was given. It is about discovering what God is saying now in that text to a people chosen to be His own, and who are in need of direction, help, encouragement, or consolation. Provided one stayed within the agreed rules, there was little danger of being guilty of changing scripture to suit personal whims. Renee Block summarises it (*midrash*) in this way.²²

1. Its point of departure is scripture; it is a reflection or meditation on the Bible.
2. It is homiletical, and largely originates from the liturgical reading of the Torah.
3. It makes a punctilious analysis of the text, with the object of illuminating obscurities found there. Every effort is made to explain the Bible by the Bible; as a rule, not arbitrarily, but by exploiting a theme.
4. The biblical message is adapted to suit contemporary needs.
5. According to the nature of the biblical text, the *midrash* either tries to discover the basic principles inherent in the legal sections, with the aim of solving problems not dealt with in scripture (*halakah*), or it sets out to find the true significance of events mentioned in the narrative sections of the Pentateuch (*haggadah*).

With *midrash*, it is important to realise that what is being presented is the meaning of scripture. It is not a theology that uses scripture as a starting point, but

¹⁷ Here we are taking about the Hebrew verb stems and forms, which very often show no such similarity, and change in the English.

¹⁸ b. *Ber* 64a on Isa 54:13, reading *bonayikh* (your builders) for *banayikh* (your sons).

¹⁹ b. *Meg* 13a on Est 2:7, reading *lebayith* (housewife) for *lebath* (daughter).

²⁰ b. *Ber* 32a on Num 11:2, reading 'al for 'el.

²¹ b. *Yoma* 75a on Num 11:32, reading *wayyishatu* (they slaughtered) for *wayyistehy* (they spread).

²² Vermes, G., *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, Leiden: Brill, 1965, pp. 22f.

pure exegesis. Birger Gerhardsson puts this very clearly in what is almost a definition of the science of *midrash*:²³

Midrash is normally composed out of already-existing material, accepted as authoritative, because it comes from the scripture, or the tradition. Using this raw material, the new is evolved. Naturally, new terms, new phrases, new symbols, and new ideas are introduced, but the greater part is taken from that which already exists in the authoritative tradition. *Midrash* starts from a text, a phrase, or often a single word; but the text is not simply explained – its meaning is extended, and its implications drawn out, with the help of every possible association of ideas.

Modern scholars would not accept the methodology of *midrash*, but it is clear that it is biblical reflection, dependent on the text, which sets out to make the true meaning come alive to its audience. That the original author might not have seen the new message there is not really relevant, as scripture is a gift for a living, believing community. After all, scripture is a gift that is meant to be directing the life of the faithful Jew, and this was difficult, if there were passages that were confusing or unclear. The Rabbis would then move in, not so much to clarify some obscure text, but to highlight its true significance. They would not have seen themselves as changing the revealed Word of God, but as men charged with the task of exposing its inner meaning and value.

And so, the Jews studied the scriptures, each one looking for something to guide him, or his community, along the way of God. The Pharisees (from whom the Rabbinic schools developed) were interested in finding out what the Law was saying, and how it was to be applied to the daily lives of the faithful. While doing this, though, they also discovered much about God; who He was, and how He was acting. The Qumran community members went off to the desert to study the scriptures, and to find out what the writings of the past had been saying about themselves and the movements of history. They also developed a complete *halakah* for the governing of their lives. Philo the philosopher searched the texts to find the principles of life that would spell out, for him, the meaning of man's life before God, and in community. He also found, in the great men of the past, stories and values that were examples for the people of his own time to follow and emulate. They were motivated by their belief in these written (and spoken) revelations as being the Word of God. As such, it was not limited by time, place, culture, or language. It was intended to be used, and not kept as a museum piece (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). This was easy to do, because they saw scripture as having a broad significance that went far beyond the literal (though the literal could never be just

²³ Gerhardsson, B., *The Testing of God's Son*, Lund: Gleerup, 1966, p. 14.

abandoned). Once they accepted that the writings were inspired by the Spirit, they were unable to then turn around and say that its message was finite. That it was limited to the thoughts of the author, the events it was describing, or the characters involved.

Conclusion

What we have seen so far is merely an indication that, within the Bible itself, and in biblical times, there can be found a number of differing understandings of just what scripture was. These understandings influenced the process of exegesis. But it would be wrong to make any final conclusions of the basis of the above material. In future reflections, we shall need to go further, and look at scripture in the synagogues, typology, the importance of the finalising of the canon, and the early Christian use of scripture. Then we should be in a position to make some conclusions regarding the necessary starting point of exegesis. What we can see emerging is that exegesis meant something very different, from a biblical perspective, to our Western understanding today. While we cannot simply adopt these methodologies, they are important in orienting our minds to what it is we are working on.

The Trobriand Understanding of Gods/Spirits Compared with the Christian Concept of God

by Ignatius Ketobwau

When comparing Trobriand understanding of gods/spirits with the Christian concepts of God, one faces the difficulty that much of Trobriand primal belief has been lost as a result of contact with Christianity. However, from what remains of the traditions, we can say something about the object of faith, about the relationship of the gods, or God, with the worshippers, about the characteristics or attributes of the gods, or God, and about the means that bind gods, or God, and worshippers together.

We begin by looking at the nature of faith in Trobriand society, and in Christianity. Faith is a universal phenomenon, including every human being, and is experienced in whatever form of religion to which a person belongs. The traditional Melanesian way of living revolved around the world of gods/spirits, who have supernatural powers, and who are behind many aspects of natural or human activity. Thus, in Trobriand society, nothing happens by accident. All is originated by the gods/spirits: for instance, a good harvest is a blessing from the gods/spirits, and a bad harvest is a curse by them. As Simeon Namunu puts it: “Traditional Melanesian ways of living revolve around the world of the spirits. Melanesian communities are spirit-centred, and all explanations as to how and why things happen are concerned with the supernatural activities of the spirits. People’s social, emotional, educational, political, economic, and religious life is based on their feelings towards, and beliefs, in the spirits.”¹

We may compare this Trobriand faith in the gods/spirits with the Christian faith in a God, who is all-powerful, the originator of everything, and the basis of every aspect of the Christian’s life. Faith in this God, who is sometimes described, anthropomorphically, as loving, merciful, gracious, and righteous, or theologically as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, is very similar to Trobriand faith in the gods/spirits, who originate all activity.

When we turn to the relationship between God, or the gods/spirits, and the worshippers, we can ask whether or not the relationship was a personal one.

¹ Simeon Namunu: “Spirits in Melanesia and the Spirit in Christianity”, in Wendy Flannery, and Glen W. Bays, eds, *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (3) Point 4*, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1984, p. 93.

Christians believe in, and worship, a God, whose relationship with all human beings was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The establishment of this relationship began with the patriarchs, who worshipped the same God, who called them, and promised to be with them, and who whom each chose to be patron of their family. Unlike other gods, the Christian god is a personal God, who associated Himself with people rather than places. By comparison, the traditional gods are associated with geographical locations, weather zones, or a specific residence. Though they may be seen as family, clan, or tribal gods/spirits, they do not relate in a personal way, because they associate themselves primarily with locations, and so, are conditioned by space and distance.

The Christian God, in the time of the patriarchs, acted in love, to originate His relationship with His worshippers. According to Karl Barth: “God is Himself, or becomes Himself, in the loving act of creating fellowship with man”.² God, in Himself, established this relationship with man, only because He chose to do so out of love. God is known, only because He took the initiative to reveal Himself to man. Man, on the other hand, cannot, by his own efforts, find God. Yet, in the Melanesian culture, it is mostly man who finds the gods/spirits. So, the question to be asked is: How? How did man find those gods/spirits? Through philosophy? Through mysticism? Or through myth? If God did not personally reveal Himself, then the worshippers could not enter into a personal relationship with Him. Because the gods/spirits are attached to locations, the god/spirit of “Tuma”, of the Trobriands, cannot be summoned at Rarongo, in East New Britain, because he lives in a rock on Tuma Island, in the Trobriand group. Can he, therefore, be regarded as a personal god, when he cannot go where a worshipper wishes to go?

When we compare the characteristics, or attributes, of the Christian God, and the Trobriand gods/spirits, we find many differences, some of which will now be described. One very distinct difference is that the Christian concept of a God of love, mercy, and forgiveness is foreign to Melanesian primal religion. According to traditional beliefs, the idea of forgiveness is not only difficult to accept, but even irrational. The gods/spirits would *always* punish an offender. Because of this belief, Melanesian societies have accepted the maxim of “an eye for an eye” as their standard for justice. Punishment for any offence is by the disapproval of the leaders and the people, through which the offender feels rejected by the community. This system was seen as a legal code, which had originated from the gods/spirits. The early Methodist missionary, Dr Bromilow, found this to be very strong in the Papuan Islands region, when he introduced the concept for forgiveness, and so he wrote: “It was to them (the Dobuans), an absolutely new, and apparently

² *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988, p. 78.

incomprehensible, idea”.³ The concept of payback is strong in Melanesian societies. So, because of the fear of punishment by the gods/spirits, or their representatives, people lived in captivity. There was no escape from the fear of gods/spirits. Those fears were set aside, when people were feasting or playing, but were then taken on board again, when the festive time was over. In this respect, the effect of the coming of Christianity has been to bring freedom, by providing a new source of shade to protect the people from the fear of the gods/spirits. Many times, the conversion of people to Christianity is seen as a reaction against the pressures, and fears, of their old religious systems. Some see Christianity as a means of freedom from domination by the chiefs, who, in most cases, are representatives of the deities, and so freedom from such domination can be a quick road to status and prestige. In this way, new things are done within the perspective of, and for purposes set by, the old religion. Traditionally, a Trobriand islander could not own anything more than the chiefs, and so, Christianity gave an opportunity to put away the sanctions, which enforced that tradition.

The comparison between the transcendence of the Christian God, and that of the Trobriand gods/spirits, is a complex one. In the Bible, the Christian god is indeed transcendent, but He also relates Himself personally to His people as a “*Thou*”, and not just an “*It*”. In Jesus Christ, that “*Thou*” became a human being, who lives, communes, interact, and shares our daily lives in real-life situations. In this way, God is actualised in our life-situations, and His hiddenness is revealed through Jesus Christ, who is the “visible image of the invisible God”. In contrast, the Melanesian gods/spirits are still transcendent, hidden, and cannot relate, commune, share, nor interact with people. All concepts of traditional gods/spirits are metaphysical and abstract, not concrete. They cannot be actualised. Many Christians have carried over the traditional concept of the deities, and still see God as a spirit, like the gods/spirits, and not as a personal being. Because of this, God is seen as a judge to be feared, because He can be angered quickly, and will bring punishment on those who offend Him. Furthermore, when God is seen as a spirit, in the traditional religious perspective, He has no means of relating personally to the human race, and, so cannot be made meaningful in our human context. Commenting on this idea, Charles Forman stated: “The view of God’s nature that prevailed in such churches was what has sometimes unjustly been called an ‘Old Testament view’. Actually, it followed more the view of the spirits and gods that had existed in the traditional religions than any full-orbed Old Testament view, though some elements in it are supported by the Old Testament. God is seen as the

³ Bromilow, William E., *Twenty Years Among Primitive Papuans*, London UK: Epworth Press, 1929, p. 82.

one who created and sustained the natural world, and the human community, and who punished any transgression of the limits He sets in these spheres.”⁴

Finally, when we look at the means by which, on the one hand, the Christian God, and, on the other, the Trobriand gods/spirits bind themselves to their respective worshippers, we see a similarity, in that, in each case, there is an agreement between the parties involved. In the Christian case, it is God Himself who made the agreement, while worshippers in the traditional religion discovered their own agreements, by formulating laws, for religious purposes, and by not eating or drinking certain things. For Christians, the agreement is a covenant between God and man, which involves man in covenant obligations of worship, faithfulness, and morality. While the covenant is unilateral in establishment, it is bilateral in accomplishment. Melanesian societies, on the other hand, do not have covenants, but sets of taboos, by which to bind themselves together with their gods/spirits.

In conclusion, we may say that there are many differences between Christian and traditional religion, especially in respect of the characteristics of God, and His relationship with His worshippers, when compared with the characteristics of the spirits/gods, and their relationship with their worshippers. However, there is a similarity in the stance of faith, for faith is a universal phenomenon, expressed in a variety of cultures. The main difficulty for Melanesians, in transferring their stance of faith from gods/spirits to God, is that they risk applying old perspectives and seeking old purposes in their new worship of God. One example of this is that, in Melanesia, worship is compartmentalised, because, traditionally, there were many different gods/spirits responsible for different departments within the spiritual sphere. So, there is a risk of bringing a compartmentalised approach to the Christian God. The way to counter this is to begin one’s understanding of God from the historical person of Jesus Christ. To understand Christ is to understand God.

⁴ Forman, Charles, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1982, p. 93.

Christian Worship in Melanesian Churches

by Ako Arua

In Melanesian countries, such as Papua New Guinea today, there are lots of different Christian churches, with varying doctrines. Most of these churches are brought from foreign countries. Some of them have been localised, many years after the foreign missionaries first arrived. Yet, in all the churches, most of the members are Melanesians, and, in a few, there are hardly any expatriates at all.

Even though these churches are filled with Melanesian people, the worship in them is “Westernised”. The Melanesian churches have been left with a Western version of Christian worship. Melanesians don’t have their own version of Christian worship in their own churches.

One important thing that I don’t see in our churches today is Melanesian culture. It is mission in all the Melanesian churches. My question goes to all these Melanesian churches: Where is our culture? Where do we place Melanesian culture, in our Christian worship, in our churches? Many Christian churches are doing away with local culture. We must realise that culture is important, and God made culture for you and for me. Others have lied to us by saying: “Culture is evil, do away with it.” It is like throwing away the bones and holding the flesh of man. Melanesian culture is our bones, and our life.

God wants us to really worship Him in our own cultural ways. We need to use our cultural forms to worship Him. We think that Western forms and ways are the best ingredients for worshipping God. I believe God will be greatly honoured and pleased if we worship Him in the Melanesian style. I believe we have the best, and can do the best for God.

The following are some ideas as to how we can help to contextualise Christian worship in our Melanesian churches.

Melanesian Pastors

First of all, I want to talk about our Melanesian pastors. Nearly all of our national pastors have gone through some kind of study or training on how to deliver God’s message, how to care for the congregation, how to run the church, and how to pastor the church. We thank God for our national pastors, who are called by God to

help bring light to the people. These pastors are taught by foreign missionaries in foreign ways, methods, and ideas. That is fine. But the pastors do not go on, then, to put what they have learnt into their own Melanesian forms, and show the people how to worship in Melanesian forms and ways.

Some pastors are too Westernised. They do things from a Western point of view. They lead their people with Western ideas. They preach their sermons with Western skills and patterns. We must realise that everything we do for God is “worship”. We worship God when we sing praises. We worship God when we pray to Him. We worship God when we take part in Bible studies. We worship God when we talk to people about God.

Some pastors don't emphasise Melanesian Christian worship. This is particularly so in the town churches. They fear that people might say bad things about them. Remember that the Melanesian people want Melanesian pastors to help encourage the Melanesian church to worship God in a Melanesian way.

Christian Institutions in Melanesia

Secondly, let's look at the Christian institutions, such as Bible colleges, seminaries, theological colleges, and Schools. Some institutions have neglected our Melanesians cultures. They don't teach any cultural subjects in their institutions. On the other hand, other institutions do teach about some cultural subjects, and make culture become part of the institution.

I know some students and pastors, who have come out from their institutions, without knowing anything about their own culture. Their minds are full of Western ideas, and they know nothing of Melanesia. These pastors have influenced a lot of their Melanesian brothers and sisters with Western ideas. I know some of our older people in the villages and towns are being misled by some of these pastors. Some leaders are even confused. They think that Western ideas and ways are the only things to use in churches. Many of them are throwing away their own culture.

Institutions must help promote and retain culture in their schools and colleges. They must help the Melanesians to create their own forms and ways in Christian worship. Institutions like the Nazarene Bible College, in Mount Hagen, and the Christian Leaders' Training College, in Banz, are doing their best to help their students change the Westernised version of worship into their own Melanesian version, with its own forms and ideas. There are other institutions that are also doing their best, and those which are not, should start doing so.

Possibilities of Contextualising Christian Worship

A lot of people say that it is too late to contextualise Christian worship in our Melanesian churches. People have seen that our Melanesian churches have rapidly changed into Western churches. They think it is very hard to change these churches.

I personally do not believe that it is too late. I can give some reasons why some think it is too late for change. They fear that foreign missionaries might go against the idea of contextualising. They also fear that those, who have gone through higher education, might talk against them. But we must not base our actions on fear of what other people might think.

It is possible for us to try it, and when we do, we will find that our Christian worship will become active and more alive. People sometimes don't feel active and alive in their own churches, because they worship with somebody else's ideas, ways, and forms. Our Melanesian people are becoming "photocopiers" of the Western world. We hide our real selves, and want to be like Western people.

Sometimes, we make our own people suffer by worshipping in Western styles. Sometimes, our people find it hard to follow the Western styles. We must let them have a say in our worship services.

If our leaders and pastors emphasise more about changing the Western Christian worship into Melanesian Christian worship, it will be possible to make some significant change. It is not too late. We can help change it, bring life to our churches, and make our Melanesian churches more active and interesting. We must do something now. Let's work together, and bring about new changes.

I am beginning to have big burden for our Melanesian churches. In order to have a strong Melanesian church, we have to put it in the Melanesian way, not the Western way. We can have active and powerful worship services, if we use our own worship forms.

We must make our churches to be true Melanesian churches, which worship God in the true Melanesian way.

Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion

Ewan Stilwell

Introduction

Christian conversion is a new beginning, and means, literally, “to turn”. “Turn” is the characteristic word in the Bible for conversion. The scriptures use this concept in the sense of a radical change of life direction. Thus, there is a turning-from, and a turning-to. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that conversion, in the Bible, is “always firmly grounded in history” (Wallis, 1981, p. 4). This means that conversion must be both culturally appropriate and culture-specific (Kraft, 1981, p. 333). The purpose of this paper is to explore an anthropologically-informed theological perspective on conversion, from a Melanesian point of view. As an Australian, clearly I cannot hope to theologise in a fully Melanesian way, however, my five years as a missionary in Papua New Guinea do enable me to begin to point in the direction in which such theologising ought to go.

Throughout this study, conversion will be considered as if it was a purely human activity. But, both human experience, and the scriptures teach that man does not have the resources within him to make such a radical about-face. This is not to say that man has nothing within him at all to contribute to conversion, but, rather, it is to emphasise that power from the spirit world is always needed for human success. No Melanesian would challenge this. The scriptures teach that God, the Holy Spirit, works both with, and within, man in the conversion process. He it is who opens the eyes of the blind, who calls and woos, who gives new life, who completes what He has begun. This truth is presupposed by all that follows.

Another presupposition of this paper is the concept of conversion as a process rather than a single act. While it may be true that there is a specific point at which a person passes “from death to life” (John 5:24), the scripture can hardly be said to focus on this point in its accounts of the conversion of men and women. What we see, instead, is a focus on the development of their relationship with God, and the way in which that is worked out in their lives. The significance of this, for this paper, is that the various parameters of conversion, which are discussed, should be understood as taking place, as part of the total process of conversion, within the context of a developing relationship with God.

It is also assumed that conversion may take place as a group response to the gospel, when the individuals, who make up the group, decide, together, that they

will turn to God as a whole group. Such group conversions are entirely appropriate in a group-oriented culture. Historically, this has been the characteristic form of response in Melanesia.

Christian conversion, as a radical turning, is, firstly, a turning-from; secondly, a turning-to; thirdly, a turning-into; and, finally, a turning-for. The New Testament commonly speaks of these four aspects of a complete conversion-turn in the words “repent”, “believe”, “be baptised”, and “serve”. Considered from the perspective of the imagery of turning, these four concepts refer to a turning from sin, a turning to God, a turning into a new community, and a turning for service. The following paper will make use of these four basic parts of conversion for its structure. It should be noted, that, because culture is an integrated whole, and the four aspects of a complete conversion-turn are intimately related together, it will sometimes be necessary to deal with the issues raised, in a cyclical manner, bringing different facets to the fore in successive sections.

1. Conversion: A Turning from Sin – “Repent”

The Bible speaks clearly concerning what it is an individual, or a people, must turn from, through its use of several different concepts and images. It speaks of turning away from “evil ways” and “wrong doings” (Jer 25:4b-5), from “idols” (1 Thess 1:9), and from “darkness” (Acts 26:18), from the “power of Satan” (Acts 26:18), and, perhaps most commonly, from “sins” (e.g., Mk 1:15). Taken together, these various expressions indicate that mankind is both in bondage to dark powers, which demand his allegiance, and is engaged in actions, which can only be characterised as evil and wrong. The New Testament sometimes uses the word “sin” to include both of these aspects (e.g., Rom 5:12, 1 John 3:4), and so, this word will be used as a cover word to speak of all that the Word of God calls man to turn from.

But sin is rarely used in the abstract in the scriptures. In the Jeremiah passage, quoted above, Jeremiah goes on immediately to specify the people’s “wrong doings”: “Do not go after other gods, to serve and worship them, or provoke Me to anger by making idols” (Jer 25:6). Jesus told the rich Jewish leader to sell all he had, and to give the money to the poor. This man’s first allegiance was to his wealth – this was his idol, this was his sin (Luke 19:18-24). And, if the scriptures focus on sin, and the turning-from of repentance, in the concrete and specific, then so must we.

Our exploration, therefore, must investigate the specifics of the “turning-from” within the Melanesian situation. Content must be given to the “idols”, the

“darkness”, the “evil ways”, and the “power of Satan”. The first question, which must be addressed, is that of the primary allegiance of Melanesians, since conversion is, at root, a change of ultimate allegiance. Anthropologists, working in Melanesia, suggest that “cosmic life and renewal” is the Melanesian’s first allegiance (Whiteman, nd, p. 4). By this is meant a drive for abundant life, life with a capital “L”. The Melanesian desires, above all, else to experience, and to go on experiencing, this life, which is a life of right relationships within the community, of high yield harvests, of abundant supplies of food, of plenty of healthy children, of strong, virile men, of many pigs, of success in hunting, of success in warfare, and a good share of modern Western goods and technology. In Melanesia, *kago* (English: “cargo”) has become the catch-word, bringing together all these aspects of this longed-for abundant life. Significantly, the Melanesian cannot even dream of experiencing this life, of enjoying the *kago*, apart from the other members of his clan – his brothers. In other words, his allegiance to *kago* is within the context of his allegiance to his clan. In fact, it is impossible to separate these two allegiances, for they are, in fact, two aspects of but one allegiance. However, for the purposes of this discussion, it will be helpful to deal with them somewhat separately, so as to explore the implications of conversion for each, individually.

Conversion, then, will mean, firstly, a turning away from *kago*, as the ultimate allegiance. God Himself, and His purposes, must take the place of this idol. Biblical faith demands that primary allegiance be given to God. One of the clearest expressions of this truth is found in the book of Job, a book with which the church in Melanesia must come to grips. Job is a man, who clearly enjoys the kind of abundant life, which the Melanesian yearns for. And yet, when he begins to find this life is slipping away from him, and then, later, when he finds that it has gone completely, Job demonstrates that he is truly a converted man. By his reaction to the tragic events, which overtake him, he shows that he had, indeed, at some undisclosed point earlier in his life, turned from the abundant life, as his primary allegiance, and turned to God Himself, and His purposes. Job is presented as a truly faithful man, a man who does not relate to God primarily for the benefits, the power for success, for *kago*, which God may give, but his loyalty to God proceeds from another motivation, a loyalty to God Himself, whom Job knows to be his gracious and just Creator and Redeemer.

Another expression of what it means to turn from sin is seen in the first of the ten commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Christians are those who have turned from the good life, as their primary allegiance. It is no longer their “god”. Rather, when God is given primary allegiance, they find that, on the one hand, their understanding of what constitutes the abundant life is subtly changed, and on the other, that they are motivated to seek that good life, in the first instance, for others, rather than for their own group. Beyond this, conversion also brings the

promise of a real fulfilment of this deep Melanesian yearning for abundant life, not in this present age, and not necessarily in exactly the Melanesian image of that life. Nevertheless, the promise of the Bible of “the age to come” is that it will bring life in all its fullness, a life, which will satisfy the deepest longings of all peoples, whose central allegiance is to the Living God.

The second aspect of the ultimate allegiance of Melanesians, is allegiance to the clan. This is not to imply that clan allegiance is sinful, in and of itself – not at all. At issue, rather, is, again, the question of priority of allegiance. For the Melanesian, the clan, and its welfare, is his central concern, particularly the continuation, the protection, the maintenance of the well-being of the clan. The clan would seem to occupy the place in the heart of Melanesians that, in Westerners, is occupied by what theology and psychology has sometimes called the “self”. If the Westerner can say “I think, therefore, I am”, or even more so today, “I experience, therefore I am”, the Melanesian would say, “I have brothers, therefore I am”. The interests of the community, the clan, are paramount.

This goal of promoting the clan’s interests, and its well-being, can be successfully achieved, in the Melanesian worldview, only with the help of supernatural power, often referred to in the literature as *mana*. For the majority of Melanesian societies, the source of this power is the clans’ ancestors. The ancestors, in Melanesia, are vital members of the community, concerned, too, for its ongoing life. But the ancestors, being now spirits have the power needed for success in life. Melanesians have thus tended to idolise their ancestors – perhaps giving to them the worship, the allegiance, due alone to their Creator. In this process, they have come under “the power of Satan” (Acts 26:20), as he has used this situation to blind men’s eyes to the truth. Conversion, then, means a turning away from the ancestors, as this power source, repentance of this idolatrous allegiance. However, this does not mean, it must be emphasised, a turning away from the respect and honour, which is due to the ancestors, for, indeed, God commands His people to do this (“respect your father and your mother”: Ex 20:12).

A crucial, related issue is the Melanesian assumption, concerning the means by which spirit power becomes available to man. In this worldview, ritual is the key to power. If the Melanesian performs the ritual correctly, he is assured of achieving his goal. The ancestors, or the particular spirit he is relating to, must work on his behalf. Here is a manifestation of the methodology of the realm of darkness. Manipulation is a hallmark of Satan’s activity, so man’s desire to relate to others (whether to his fellows, or to the spirits) in a manipulative way, demonstrates bondage to Satan. Such bondage is reflected, at this point, in the Melanesian worldview. Melanesian man does not only manipulate the spirits, to achieve good ends, but, equally, to bring evil upon his enemies. Conversion, clearly, must mean a

turning away from such a manipulative stance, and the adoption of a stance of submission.

But manipulation and respect, bordering on worship, is not the only thing, which characterises relations between man and the spirit world in Melanesia. At the emotional level, fear is probably the strongest reaction of Melanesians to the spirits. The reason for this is that many of the spirits, which Melanesians know, they characterise as evil, since their only activities, in their relations with man, are harmful. The ancestors, too, are never wholly benevolent; they are just as capable of producing sickness and disaster as they are of granting success and abundance. So, in an environment surrounded by various spirits, fear and insecurity are daily experiences within the community, and freedom from fear belongs to the hope of the abundant life. Conversion deals with fear, though, perhaps, not so much as something, which must be repented of, and turned away from, as something from which conversion liberates man.

Conversion also means, in the Melanesian context, a turning away from the “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” form of retributive justice. This attitude can be traced to the worldview assumption that the good life is only available to man, when all relationships are in correct balance. And balance can only be achieved by returning equivalent harm (or equivalent goodwill, when goodwill has been shown). Thus, it would appear that there is no real conception of grace, or forgiveness, in the worldview. In the highlands, either a demand for payment of monetary compensation, or a resort to physical warfare, is the method of retribution, after an offence has been committed against a group. Use of magic is the coastal response to an offence. But both highland and coastal forms of retribution belong to the “darkness”, and need the turn of conversion to receive the spirit of forgiveness of the “light”.

2. Conversion: A Turning to God – “Believe”

“Light” is certainly one of the dominant images in the New Testament, for the turning-to of conversion. Turning to the light is the flip-side of a repentant turning from the darkness. In one sense, the turning-to of conversion is a movement, which can take place only after the turning-from has begun. Yet, in another sense, it is the original sighting of the light, which gives motivation to repentance. The woven walls of conversion have no clear-cut joining points!

In Melanesia, the feature of the light, which attracts most attention, is its intensity, its power. In terms of the biblical story, it is the great power of God, demonstrated in the stories of the Exodus and the conquest of the promised land, the

fight against pagan gods during the period of the Israelite monarchy, the battle against demons and sickness in Jesus' miraculous works, and, above all, the victory of His resurrection over Satan and death, to which Melanesians first turn. However, the biblical stories must be authenticated in Melanesia, in the clan's, or individual's, own experience. The superiority of God's power over all other spirit powers must be before conversion can progress, before a believing commitment can grow. In the terminology developed by Alan Tippett, there must be a "power encounter:", a demonstration, in which God's power is seen to encounter the power of the ancestral, and other, spirits, and God decisively emerges victorious, resulting in a radical turning away from a allegiance to those spirits, and a new allegiance to Him (Tippett 1973, pp. 88-91).

At this point, is important to notice that the Melanesian insight into the reality of the unseen world, and its power, and man's inability to live successfully, without access to that power, conforms closely to the teaching of the scriptures. In regard, then, to the Melanesian focus on power, and the meaning of conversion, for this focus, the turning is not at the point of power itself (as it might be, perhaps, for the conversion of Westerners), but the turning must occur in relation to the source, and means of access to power. Melanesian power, *mana* is a neutral force, which is there to be used for either good or bad purposes. An important aspect of conversion to God, then, means turning to a new understanding, and experience, of power – and understanding of God, as the ultimate source of all power, and of Christ, as the pattern for man's use, and access to God's power. The converted person, therefore, will never attempt to use God's power, for either his own selfish ends, or for the ends of his clan, at the expense of other individuals or groups, or to cause another hurt or harm. He will refuse to do this, on the basis that this kind of use of God's power belongs to the evil one. The converted person no longer relates to this evil one as belong to the Evil one. The converted person no longer relates to this evil one as his master (either consciously, or, more usually, unconsciously), but as his enemy.

Further, conversion to God means that the converted individual or group will only seek access to God's power through Jesus Christ, "the one mediator" (1 Tim 2:5 AV). This means, as emphasised already, a turning away from all other mediators, at least in their role as mediators of power. Ancestor, then, will continue to be venerated, or respected, but not related to for power.

In relation to power access, conversion means adopting a new stance towards the means of access (as well as to the mediator for access). In the Melanesian worldview, power is made available to an individual, who both knows the secret ritual, and is able to successfully carry it out. Access is on the basis of what you know.

It is otherwise for the Christian: access to power is on the basis of who you know: God Himself, through Jesus Christ. The truly-converted person is one who no longer acts on the assumption that correct ritual in prayer will guarantee the reception of power. Rather, his confidence lies in the Person, and character, of the One to whom he prays, who has promised to supply all his needs (Matt 6:32-33; Phil 4:19).

This discussion of access to power raises another important issue for conversion, which is that conversion means relating to the source, and mediator, of power, in an attitude of submission rather than from a desire to manipulate. Because the Melanesians' traditional primary allegiance was focused on the achievement of the abundant life, and because, as discussed above, correctly-performed ritual was understood to guarantee the release of power by the spirits, for the good of the clan or individual, the stance of the Melanesian towards the spirit world was essentially manipulative. When the ritual was known, the spirits were at man's disposal. The spirits were never thought to have plans or purposes of their own for man, apart from maintaining the status quo. If the spirits acted, it was either at the instigation of men, or because men had departed from the tradition of the clan in some way. Melanesian man, in the context of his clan, was at the centre of his world. However, conversion must result in a deep change at this point. The scriptures refer to God as the "Living God", which emphasises that He is one who is actively at work in His world, and that He is sovereign. The activity of the Living God is neither focused on the maintenance of the status quo, nor is it instigated by His creatures. Rather, God is the one who initiates His own activities, activities, which are primarily oriented towards the reconciliation of His whole creation to Himself, and to itself, under Christ as the head (Eph 1:9). As such, God demands our worship and submission. The converted person ceases to think in terms of manipulating God for his own, or his clan's, ends, but now thinks in terms of submitting his own, and his clan's, plans to God for His scrutiny, and of fulfilling God's purposes for Himself and his clan.

Conversion to God, in Melanesia, also means turning to a God, who is transcendent. It is true that many, though apparently not all, Melanesian societies retained the memory of a creator-being, who was responsible for the original creation of at least the local environment, and perhaps also the original tribal ancestor. But, in all cases, this probably transcendent being had removed Himself from the immediate environment, and, hence, was virtually unknown. Here, it seems, we see a remnant of the Melanesian memory and knowledge of the God of the Bible. But Melanesians have given their allegiance to spirit beings, who are not at all transcendent. The spirits they have known, and related to, the ghosts of the recently departed, the spirits of their ancestors, and bush spirits, cannot usually be directly perceived with the senses, yet they exist on this earth, in and around the

territory of the clan. Although they have power, or immediate access to power, greater than the living, they are still subject, with the living, to many of the limitations of this earth.

But the God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, is not one among many immanent spirits. He is not one who is limited to the clan or tribal territory. He is unique. His only limitations are those He imposes on Himself, in line with His character. This does not mean that He has no interest in, or has not power to deal with, those concerns, which belong to the immanent spirits of the Melanesian world. Rather, the point to be made here is that conversion must mean the opening of the horizons to a Spirit, who is so much greater, and, indeed, qualitatively different, from Melanesian spirits. He is both the Creator and Lord of all, whether power, spirits, man, animals, plants, or the ground.

Conversion, in Melanesia, therefore, means turning to a Spirit Being, who does not easily fit into the Melanesian category of Spirit. Of great significance, is the fact that the Christian God is a God of Love, and a God who desires man to relate to Him, not on the basis of fear of the negative effects of His power, but out of a deeply-felt spirit of thankfulness and love for Him, as small children would relate to a good father. So, conversion is fundamentally entering into a loving, obedient, dynamic relationship with the living God, and believing in Him is the trusting commitment of one's life, which issues in lifelong faithfulness, lifelong allegiance to Him.

Conversion also has implications for the converted clan's, or converted person's, view of the world around them. In turning to God, the convert turns towards the creator and ruler of the world, so that the world, though the home of antagonistic bush spirits, for example, becomes a safe place, nevertheless, for those spirits are, in fact, under the authority of their creator, both by virtue of their creation, and, more especially, by virtue of His victory in Christ, over their rebellion. This means that the spirit world needs no longer dominate, and produce fear, within Melanesian man, and he is then able to live as he was originally intended, having dominion over his environment, rather than standing in awe of it. This should not be taken to mean that conversion means turning to a Western, materialistic perspective of the world. Rather, it is to recognise that the converted man and clan now have, as the result of their conversion, a new position in their world, a position of strength *vis-a-vis* the hostile spirits, because the authority and power of Christ is available to them. In this sense, it is appropriate to speak of conversion to the world as an important aspect of conversion to God.

3. Conversion: A Turning to Become the People of God – “Be Baptised”

From a Melanesian perspective, the *notion of peoplehood* has great importance. Personal significance and identity comes from membership of a family, which belongs within a clan, which, in turn, is part of a larger group. For this reason, the Apostle Paul’s discussion in Eph 2:11-22 would seem to be a suitable starting point for a consideration of the meaning of the church in the conversion process in Melanesia. In that passage, a contract is drawn between “no people” and “God’s people”, that is, between those peoples, who are still living in the darkness, and those, now living in the light, between those, whose allegiance is to the idol of *kago*, and those, whose allegiance is to the living God, revealed in Jesus Christ. Paul characterises the first group as “living without hope and without God”, as “foreigners” and “strangers” (Eph 2:12, 19), and the second group, as the “family of God” (Eph 2:19). In Melanesian terms, conversion means both joining, and becoming, a new clan, turning toward, and into, that people, who repent and believe; it means taking on a new identity: the people of God.

In the New Testament, the outward mark of entrance into the people of God is baptism. This is not to say that this aspect of the conversion-turn exhausts the meaning of baptism, but is to emphasise that baptism is the sacrament of incorporation into the church. In passages, dealing with the unity of the people of God, Paul invariably refers to baptism in this way, as, for example, in 1 Cor 12:13: “all of us have been baptised into the one body”. Fackre calls baptism the “portal of entry” into “a new household” (1975, p. 95).

If the biblical concept of the people of God has links with the Melanesian understanding of the clan, then *baptism relates to initiation*. Conversion is incomplete without baptism, just as, traditionally, growth to maturity was incomplete without initiation (at least for males). Baptism, as the sacrament of initiation, signifies a new status. The unconverted clan tends to see itself in relation to all other clans and groups as their superior, in all respects. Other clans are commonly perceived in terms of “no people”. In the process of conversion, there must come the recognition that, in the eyes of God, they, themselves, are also “no people”, “strangers” to God, having no special status in comparison with other groups, in His eyes. So, conversion means a change in the clan’s perception of itself. It is a turning from the arrogant pride, which views others with condescension. But, at the same time, conversion also brings with it the realisation and experience of a new status, based, not on any inherent or achieved superiority of the clan, but on their acceptance by God in Christ. Conversion is a turning to accept this new God-given status.

This new status, signified by baptism, results, firstly, in a new relationship with all other clans and persons, who, together, form the people of God. In baptism, the individual and clan affirm that the identity of the people of God extends far beyond the borders of their own group, and that their own identity, as a clan, is now secondary to their identity as the people of God. The apostle's words, "In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptised into the one body, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13), could be contextualised, "all of us, whether coastals or highlanders, whether Engas or Chimbus, have been baptised into one tribal group or clan". Such an affirmation must result in reconciliation with any Christian groups with whom the newly-converted has had a fractured relationship.

Conversion to Christ means, secondly, the adoption of a new attitude to those groups and persons, who do not yet belong to God's clan. Baptism signifies the replacement of the old attitude of superiority by a desire to identify with other groups as equals, a concern to communicate the good news to them, so that they, too, may turn to become the people of God, and a willingness to forgive and be reconciled, where relationships are broken.

Becoming the people of God in conversion in Melanesia means that the maintenance of *right relationships*, so important in clan life, is carried across into the community of the *clan of God*. Jesus' command that His people should love one another (John 13:34), is, of course, the basis of this, and, indeed, Melanesians have always understood the importance of love between brothers. Conversion, then, means the extension of this ideal to include all within the new clan of God. The term used by the first-century Christians: "brother", is, therefore, a peculiarly appropriate one for Melanesian members of the Christian community to use in the late twentieth century. But, conversion adds a new dimension to the brother relationship, the dimension of forgiveness. Traditionally, relationships could only be kept in balance by the continuing fulfilment of obligations, or the application of retributive justice, when obligations were not met. The behaviour of God, in Christ, is the model for interpersonal and interclan relationships, and this means that Christians must turn to forgive one another, as God has forgiven them through Christ (Eph 5:1).

Turning to become the people of God also brings change to the male-female relationship. The traditional male view of women as inferior beings, who are not to be trusted with the secrets of ritual, is revised by the realisation that God accepts women in exactly the same way, and on exactly the same basis, as men. There are no special secrets for men only in the Christian way.

The biblical call for servant-style leadership is also a call to the conversion of Melanesian leadership styles in the Christian community. *Leadership* in Melanesia was traditionally an achieved, rather than an ascribed, function. Conversion does not change this basis understanding, but it does call for some change in the kind of achievement, which is rewarded by leadership, and the way in which that achieved leadership is exercised. Traditionally, in most societies, achievements leading to leadership were fighting and hunting powers, wealth, oratory, access to power, and the ability to make alliances with the neighbouring groups. Some of these abilities may reflect underlying marks of character and gifts, which the scriptures lay down as desirable in Christian leaders. For example, the ability to forge alliances with other groups may indicate both the ability to manage groups of people (cf. 1 Tim 3:4-5), and a standing of respect within the wider community (1 Tim 3:7). An ability with oratory may be linked with the spiritual gift of teaching (1 Tim 3:2), or preaching, though this would not always be the case. On the other hand, fighting prowess, as the mark of a man suited to leadership, is hardly compatible with the call by Jesus for His followers to “turn the other cheek”, nor is the pursuit of wealth fitting for one who aspires to lead the community of Him who made Himself poor for that community’s sake, in order to make them rich through His poverty (2 Cor 8:9). The point is that not all of the traditional forms of achievement are suitable, when it comes to the leadership of God’s clan. So, to the concept of achievement, as the path to leadership, conversion adds the biblical concepts of spiritual gift – an ability given by God for the purpose of serving His people in some way, spiritual authority, and the call of God.

Just as importantly, the exercise of leadership must undergo conversion. There must be a turning away from the desire for prestige, position, and power, and a turning towards a stance of servanthood (Mk 10:42-45).

4. Conversion: Turning for Mission in the World: “Serve”

Biblically, conversion always has a purpose, which is related to the world. The first well-documented example of conversion in the scriptures is that of Abraham, who it is clear, was converted, for the purpose of becoming the progenitor of a new line of people, through whom God planned to bless all the nations (Gen 12:1-3). This pattern continues throughout the biblical story, sometimes the purpose of conversion is highlighted, sometimes it is in the background, but it is always there. A clear example from the New Testament letters would be 1 Peter 2:8-9: “but you are the chosen race . . . chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God”.

Mission is the most-comprehensive word to use in discussing the purpose of the conversion-turn. This was the concept used by Jesus to explain to His disciples

what He desired them to do upon His ascension: “As the Father sent Me, in the same way, I am sending you” (John 20:21), and, “Go, then, to all peoples everywhere” (Matt 28:19). Related closely to the concept of mission is the idea of service. “Service” was the term used by Jesus to characterise His own mission: “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45), and, in the same context, He indicated that this was also to the pattern for them to follow. Servant-style mission is included in the complete turn of conversion.

But the idea of *mission* beyond the borders of one’s own group is *alien* to the Melanesian mind, for two reasons. Firstly, Melanesian religion, by its very nature, is a local kind of religion – since the spirits in view are *immanent and local*, by virtue of family and geographical ties. And, secondly, the power of this religion is bound up with *secrecy*: when the rituals become public knowledge, their power is lost. No Melanesian, in his right mind, would dream of communicating them to anyone outside his group.

Clearly then, there are points of conflict between these assumptions and the Christian concept of mission. Conversion must involve the repudiation of these assumptions, and the acceptance of two new assumptions. The first of these has already been discussed, in relation to the nature of God as a transcendent being. His concern reaches to all the peoples of this earth. The second relates to God’s use of secrets. He has revealed His secrets to His people for the very purpose that they should pass them on to other people groups. God’s secrets are open secrets (Eph 3:1-13). Far from being the exclusive property of a few men in one clan, they are good news for the whole world. The third new assumption, to which Melanesians must turn, in conversion, is that God relates power and secrecy to each other in a unique way. His power is released especially to enable His people to share His secrets (Acts 1:8). *Power is for proclamation.*

But mission, in the New Testament, is more than proclamation. Mission includes all that Christ sends His church into the world to do (Stott, 1977, p. 30), so it includes acts of compassionate love, directed to those in need. Such acts are not new in Melanesia. In Melanesia, love cannot be expressed, except in concrete action, especially in the reciprocal giving of gifts. Here are deep roots, already established in the Melanesian’s worldview, upon which compassionate love can be grafted. Conversion will mean that the concern that the recipient reciprocate will lessen, as Christ’s style of loving, a style which gives and serves, even in the face of hostility, develops among the converted clan, and within the mind of the converted individual.

The biblical material, dealing with mission, suggests that mission and service frequently involve suffering (e.g., Matt 10:16-23). It is appropriate, at this point, to

discuss what conversion means for the understanding of suffering in Melanesia. Suffering, traditionally, is assumed to indicate, or to reflect, some kind of problem within the community, whether related to the breaking of a taboo, or related to a breakdown in a relationship in the community. The good person, almost by definition, does not suffer. Suffering, therefore, of whatever kind, is regarded only negatively, and, therefore, as something which must be removed as quickly as possible.

The biblical testimony regarding suffering is admittedly complex, and cannot be adequately dealt with, or even summarised, in a few sentences. On the one hand, suffering is presented as the result of sin, and thus a part of the total complex of opposition, which God will overcome on the last day. Yet, on the other hand, God takes suffering up into His purposes, to the extent of submitting to it Himself, in the person of His Son, in order to ensure its final defeat. At another level, God frequently gives relief from suffering, and healing from the sickness, which is frequently its immediate cause, in response to the prayers of His people. And yet, in a mysterious way, He also calls His people to share in Christ's sufferings, for the sake of His mission in the world. It is this last aspect of the reality of suffering which conflicts with the Melanesian worldview (and, indeed, with many other worldviews). Conversion to God's mission means turning to an acceptance of suffering, as, actually, an authenticating mark of a genuinely-Christian missionary witness (2 Cor 11:16-33). Suffering and weakness are not necessarily the mark of a life without power. The opposite may, rather, be the truth: God's power is strongest when his witness is weak (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Conclusion

This study has emphasised that conversion in Melanesia is fundamentally a turning, a radical reorientation of life, whether of the group or individual, in the direction of the living God. It is the turning away from a primary allegiance to the complex of the clan: *kago*, and the ancestral spirits; and a turning, in allegiance to the living God, who has revealed Himself as the God of power and love in Jesus Christ. As such, conversion, from an anthropological perspective, is actually a *process of worldview change*. Conversion, in Melanesia is thoroughly community oriented, both from a reading of the Bible, where conversion means becoming the people of God, and from a Melanesian understanding of the nature of man, as one who exists in relationship with his brothers. And conversion has a purpose, best expressed as a servant-style mission in the world, which means a radical turning to other communities, to declare and demonstrate the message of God's power and love.

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Papua New Guinea Martyrs

Fr Theo Aerts

Introduction

Although this essay has a short title, every word of it calls for an explanation. We might start with the last term, really a theological concept. Here, one can ask whether the martyrs concerned are some of the people of the beginnings of Christianity in Oceania, such as the LMS missionaries, James Chalmers and Oliver Tomkins, who lost their lives on Goaribari Island, on April 7, 1901. Or should we extend the term “martyrs” to, say, Saint Peter Chanel (+1841), “the first martyr of Oceania”, who was canonised in 1954, or also Blessed Giovanni Mazzucconi (+1855), who died near Woodlark Island, and was beatified in 1983. As a matter of fact, Catholics were hesitant to use the term for Peter To Rot, who died during the Pacific war, because the decree for his beatification has, as yet, not been promulgated. In our essay, we will adhere to the broader meaning, and also concentrate on the recent past of only 50 years ago.

The word “martyr” is, obviously, used in the plural, and this also poses problems. There were, of course, foreign missionaries, and local people. But how many of them were there, in the period from 1942 until 1945? A usual count – of which I ignore the origin – gives the number of these people as 239, belonging to four different churches. They include 12 Anglicans, 15 Lutherans, 24 Methodists, and 188 Roman Catholics. A more-recent computation has shown that other churches, too, were involved, and has come up with names of 40 more people, putting the total at 279. We do believe that there are still many more, and will discuss this, too, further on.

Now, the title also contains a geographical limitation. The name “Papua New Guinea” is rather an anachronism, because it entered into daily usage, only after independence in 1975. Before that time, there was another designation for the same geographical area – particularly among the Anglicans. They counted, in their own church, about a dozen “New Guinea martyrs”, all killed during World War II. Still, we feel that, nowadays, there is good reason to use the modern name of the country, and also to recall other denominations as well, and refer to all war victims on the mission staff as the “Papua New Guinea martyrs.”

I: War in Papua

To speak about the “New Guinea martyrs” has, for many, the connotation that the whole Pacific War did not touch Papua, in any way worth mentioning. But it did, and the local reaction to it was quite obvious, even though different, in various parts of the country. One might say that, in the south, the people’s response was most evidenced in the support given to the Allied soldiers, e.g., by the “Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels”. In the north, the local attitude towards the war was more evidenced with opposition manifested against the invaders, e.g., by the assistance given to the coast-watchers. And, if on either side, there was betrayal, on each side the people had to pay heavily. Above the Ranges, they were beheaded by the Japanese, while, south of the Ranges, they were hung by the Australians.

Of course, there was no Japanese invasion along the south coast of Papua. However, it should be clear that the Japanese advance from Lae first reached Buna and Gona, on the Papua north coast, in July 1942, and that, a month later, it also hit Samarai, on the eastern tip of Papua. Both localities were part of the same Australian Territory. Again, it was in the north-eastern tip of Papua that the Anglicans lost most of their mission staff. Hence, using the political sense of the term, there were, no doubt, in the south, several “Papuan” among the New Guinea martyrs, even though the churches lost many more of their people in the north, in what was then officially known as the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea (1921-1942).

If Papua be restricted to the south coast of the island (as is commonly done), there is no doubt that – after the fall of Buna and Samarai – it also suffered seriously from the Pacific War. Actually, it was the professed aim of the Japanese to reach Port Moresby. They first tried to do this by sea, but the battle of the Coral Sea, in May, 1942, thwarted this plan. After that, they tried to do the same, overland, via the Kokoda Trail, and they were stopped only 60 miles from their goal. There is even some evidence for a third attempt by the Japanese, when, in early September, 1942, three Japanese dive-bombers landed on the beach of Table Bay, on the south coast of Papua. Some authors believe that these enemy planes were probably a scouting party, who were attempting to survey a second Kokoda-type trail, to surprise the Allied Forces. In other words, these Japanese planes has not just lost their way, or happened to be off course, but they had come with a purpose of their own.

Reconnaissance flights, and bombing raids, over Papua began early in the war. In the first quarter of 1942, Port Moresby was strafed many times, beginning on February 3. This was the signal for the Australians to increase their forces, and to conscript all able-bodied males of British citizenship, between 18 and 45 years.

Many missionaries enlisted voluntarily, among others, the rector of Port Moresby's Anglican church, Revd Henry Matthews. But, because he had passed the legal age, he was discharged. At the same time, white women and children were evacuated to Australia, and shiploads were organised to transfer the mixed race population from Port Moresby to the islands near Daru.

In August, 1942, Mr Adrian Matthews, a medical assistant, accompanied the first group of people to Daru, while his father, Revd Henry Matthews, took the second group of evacuees to safety. On the small coastal vessel, in which he travelled, the *Mamutu*, there were 75 mixed-race people, a number of Papuans, and the crew. However, on August 7, while the ship was 30 miles to the west of Bramble Cay, a Japanese submarine – later identified as being of the RO 33-type – shelled the vessel four times, hitting the wireless room, the bridge, and the hull (twice). Later the submarine returned to machine gun the drowning passengers. The boat sank rather quickly, while an Australia plane, which, on the next day came to the rescue, was also downed. In the end, there was one single dinghy left for the survivors. Out of the 142 people on board, only one man survived: Billy Griffin, from Rigo. At the same time, Fr Henry Matthews, and a Papuan teacher, Leslie Gariardi, who was with him, became the first two Anglican martyrs in the Pacific War.

The scope of the Japanese air war did not only cover the capital, but also its hinterland, the Goilala Mountains, and all the surrounding area from east to west. The island of Yule was strafed. Visitors to the Catholic Mission are still shown the holes from the bullets in the wall of the Father's House, as well as the hole at the spot where, a few moments before, Fr Andrew Supeyrat sat down! At the time, there were no military installations on the island, although, later, a US Air Force radar unit was established there.

Terapo, 120 km to the west, on the south coast of Papua, was also lost for the Mission. The Allied Forces made it a base to unload materials for the building of a proposed road between Bulldog and Wau – to provide access to the Territory of New Guinea.

Two Catholic mountain stations were machine-gunned. At Ononghe, Fr Theophile Cadoux, a visitor, had the experience of a bullet hitting the confessional, in which he was sitting, while at Oba Oba –now a derelict place in Kuni Territory – the shooting from the air damaged the church's roof, and pierced the missal laying on the altar. Both events happened on Sundays, right before High Mass, when many people had gathered. Some suspect that the enemy pilots might have believed that they were witnessing a meeting, with a paramilitary purpose, or also the strafing of church buildings would alienate the local population from the white missionaries.

At the beginning of the war, some of the Roman Catholic mission personnel of Eastern Papua had been evacuated to Yule Island. Others, like Fr Norbert Earl, enlisted as chaplains in the army, and served in the New Guinea campaigns. However, after a few months, Fr Bernard Baldwin, who had gone to Yule Island, returned to his Samarai Mission. He saw how the church set-up in Milne Bay had been completely destroyed, while the churchgoers had dispersed into the bush. After five days, the Japanese returned to shell the place again. On one of his trips up Milne Bay, Father's own launch was strafed by Zero planes. Luckily, there were very few casualties.

Despite many setbacks, Fr Baldwin was able to keep in touch with the faithful. He later wrote that, all the time, he found the people surprisingly good, and longing to see the missionaries return. Papuans, who had joined the Army, made themselves known to the chaplains, while those, who stayed back, revealed a high degree of initiative, without being spurred on by the Australian missionaries. In one particular village, one boy performed 33 baptisms, while one girl had 28 new members to her credit. As to Fr Norbert Earl (who after almost two years of absence, during which he also served on the Kokoda Trail), when he returned to his mission station, he discovered that two young ladies had 58 children in their new school, and 40 people prepared for baptism.

What has been said here about Catholics, also applies to other religious groups. An LMS authority, Bernard Cockett, also President of the Australian Council of Churches, said that, materially, Methodist stations were devastated, European mission workers made prisoners of war, and the rest of the people evacuated wholesale. Yet, those who stayed on, kept the faith, and were doing all the good they could. He continues, "Had the natives given help to the Japanese, New Guinea would have fallen. Then Australia would have been invaded . . . and if Australia and New Zealand had fallen, the Pacific would have been open to enemy aggression, right to the western coast of the United States and Canada.

It is not our purpose here to pay tribute to the bravery of the Fuzzy-Wuzzies, the cargo carriers, the stretcher bearers, the guides and scouts and messengers of the Allied Forces, although their work, too, reflects credit to the missions who had trained them. Bernard Cockett noted that, of the 6,000 carriers, who crossed the Central Ranges of New Guinea, 75 percent came from places where the LMS had laboured for 70 years, and, thus, provided the formation, which now proved to be so useful. For our purpose, it might suffice to give just the example of Maiogaru Gimuleia, who showed herself to be a good Samaritan for a foreigner in need.

The story of this nurse is well known. She worked at the Kwato mission hospital, near Samarai, and saved the life of Bill Whetters. This Australian pilot had

parachuted out of his disintegrating Kittyhawk, and landed behind the enemy lines, somewhere off Samarai. In a way, no Papuan had anything to do with this war, going on between Australians and Japanese, and nurse Maiogaru could have left it at that. Still for her, it was business as usual, for friend and for foe, alike. She brought the pilot into her own house and nursed him. For more than a week she hid him from the ever-present Japanese soldiers. After a while, she had a letter brought to the competent ANGAU officer, and, in the end, she travelled with the injured man across the bay to deliver him into safe hands. Whetters was laid in the bottom of her canoe, covered with a pandanus palm mat and baskets of vegetables, while she, and a man from her village, paddled forth, right under the eyes of an enemy patrol. Eventually they made it. When asked what repayment could be given, Maiogaru only indicated a few items, which she believed would make her a more-efficient nurse. A jungle angel, with a mission background, and, till today, one of Papua New Guinea's living legends. A martyr? No. A witness to Christianity? Yes.

The title of “New Guinea Martyrs” has been a usage of the Anglican church. I would like that it has something to do with the overseas appeal of the term where, in geography, the island of New Guinea – covering both its eastern and western political sections – is a handy concept. In addition, in some languages, at least, the term “Papuan” has something of a derogatory sense, referring to “the last unknown on earth”. However, the true reason is, I suspect, that, for a long time, the Anglican Mission was known as the “New Guinea Mission”, as distinct from the “Melanesian Mission”, which cared, e.g., for the island of New Britain, till that, too, was incorporated into the New Guinea Mission. Then, in 1975, the country became independent from Australia, and, only in 1977, the official status of the missionary diocese of New Guinea – formerly a dependency of the Church of England in Queensland – also changed. The region now became the independent Anglican “Province of Papua New Guinea”. In other words, there is no longer need to stick to the old term. Times have changed.

II: Indigenous Martyrs

How many nationals died at the hands of the Japanese soldiers is very hard to assess. Probably nobody today is able to justify any specific number. This lack of information is not necessarily the effect of racism, but has wider implications. As a matter of fact, overseas sending agencies always used to keep personnel records, before the war and after. They also received letters from the survivors, which then were published in mission magazines – or are still kept in their archives. On the other hand, a villager would not have this type of advantage, yet, some expatriates did not have them either. One known example is that of the Catholic nuns, who prided themselves on providing a supportive role only, and just appear as numbers in

the records of the mission work. They did not even sign, with their own names, the account of their experiences during the Pacific war, published in the book *Red Grew the Harvest*.

Father Leonhard Mueller MSC, who had been interned in the prison camps of Vunapope and Ramale, volunteered, before a United States board of inquiry, that, during the war “about 163” Papua New Guineans were killed, just because they were in the way. He must have known that many names to have been able to be so specific, and have gathered these names, through research, after the war. However, the real total of casualties was much greater. One might safely discount the children under age, and the local people, who were faithful believers, and died of old age, or of disease. Yet, if one includes all those killed by brutal treatment, calculated torture, beheading, choking by smoke, medical malpractice, and burials alive, etc. – both in Papua, North-East New Guinea, and the New Guinea islands – the final count easily be doubled.

Oral witnesses confirm that nearly every village had its war victims. In the North Bainings, for instance, there were 12 villages before the war, but only five remained in 1947. In another Baining area, a pre-war total of seven villages were reduced to two. Such results cannot be attributed to introduced sicknesses alone, as some authors would like to have it. Such depopulation is, no doubt, also related to savage executions and bombings, which, when combined with a decline in the birth rate, finally resulted in the amalgamation of those villages, whose populations had grown too small.

To gauge the effects of the occupation on the people, we should distinguish various examples of how the people coped with the effects of the invasion. We could reduce them to three kinds. Thus, there were some people, who gave up their old allegiance. Then, there were others, who became stronger in their faith, and – finally – there was that small group who lost their lives. They are the “martyrs”, who shed their blood for the faith. But, the English language does not admit this title to those who died after rescue, and whose death was hastened by their past experiences. And what about those who escaped death by a split hair, when their companions in the same trials did not survive? In treating these categories, we will concentrate on the New Guinea islands, although the picture is true for all occupied areas in Papua and New Guinea.

1. Human Reactions

Just as the PNG people had not exulted, when, in 1914, the Australian colonial administration was established, so they accepted, after 1942, the Japanese

role: the new masters were too strong to resist. This also affected their attitude towards the churches. Reasons for falling away from the church, once the chance was given, were plentiful, one being just to save their own skin. But there must have also been dissatisfaction with the kind of Western Christianity, which had been preached for so many years, and still was full of secrets. Hence, the fact that a return to past ancestor worship got another lease of life. Incidentally, such a belief was also a kin to some Shinto beliefs, which now and then, were proposed by Japanese soldiers.

Use of magic, to become invulnerable against bombs, and bullets, and swords was also a reason why church practices declined. Again, moral norms, taught by the missionaries, were also undermined, when observant locals saw the activities of the Japanese geisha girls, and deduced that this behaviour could explain the fertility and growth of the Asian masses. A local consequence was total amorality, or a return to polygamy. And then there was the March, 1944, edict of the invaders, banning all religious activities: “*no moa Kristo*”. In short, the people were both afraid and free. Where they saw freedom, they went back to pre-Christian attitudes, and slipped easily into license, and it is rather surprising that many remained so faithful towards Australia, and towards the foreign mission agencies.

A particular case, summing up the above, was the revival of cargo-cult notions, for instance, the one led by a certain Batari of Nakanai. Already, in 1940, he had urged the people to destroy gardens, fruit trees, and animals, in order that the ancestors would send unlimited amounts of cargo. He tied up, and beat, the Catholic priest, Fr Joseph Weigl, and stopped the Methodist students from receiving further training. But, when the cultists tried to take the Japanese cargo, the soldiers beat them up, and put them promptly in jail. Yet, Batari led many people astray.

Famous also is the case of Embogi, who had wanted himself to become “King of the Brown People”, and was bribed by the occupation forces. He betrayed three Anglican missionaries near Gona. His fatal deed was offset, though, by the warnings given to the expatriates by faithful villagers. Unfortunately, their words were not heeded. Five months later, Embogi and his gang of rascals, were hung by the incoming Australian Army. His memorable last words were, “I taught you what is wrong, and now, before I die, I, leader, commend you to go to the missions.”

The lack of missionaries also had the strange result that some locals “switched religion” – or fell away from their former mission allegiance. We know of Hosea Linge, on New Ireland, who suggested to Catholics-without-a-shepherd, that they join, for the time being, in the worship of the Methodists. And we know also of Fr Bruno Stapelmann, in North Baining, who sent Vunapope catechists to shepherdless Methodists, asking them to join his church. Here, “Christian religion” was not at

stake, and the effects were felt in either direction, with many standing up for their true, old convictions.

Sad to say, there were also several denunciations of Christians, or betrayals of people who had “confessed” their faith. One case is that of Marcus, and his wife Cecilia, of Matong village, near Pomio. Here, an American plane had crashed, and via a *tavur* message, everybody was notified. This particular couple nursed the survivors, giving them food and bush medicine. However, the Bigman O, denounced them to the Japanese soldiers in Malmal, and, while the airmen were imprisoned at Palmalmal, the Christian couple was executed.

2. The Martyrs

A second group of indigenous people were those active in the service of the church, and who sacrificed their lives, especially, perhaps, in the latter part of the Japanese occupation. Previously, some religious services and preaching had been forbidden, but, when the Japanese advance was being stemmed, and – especially after the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the one of Milne Bay, in the course of 1942 – the tide began to turn in favour of the Allies, suspicion increased about clandestine radios, and about the passing on of messages to the Allied Forces. Hence, the repeated house searches, and the general nervousness, of the Japanese. On one occasion, they heard a Father using his manual typewriter, and were convinced that he was sending out a message in Morse code. They believed that Christians has a kind of hot-line to God, so that Christian prayers were cause of stopping their military advance. One Methodist catechist, Benjamin To Golo, who had led religious services, was imprisoned. Because of cataracts, he had gone blind, and the Japanese played many tricks on him, to test whether his blindness was real, indeed. In the end, they released him. He did not become a war casualty.

One native nun, Sister Teresia FMI, was reported to have said, “*Inglis nambawan; Nippon nambaten*”. She promptly got the “bamboo treatment”. The soldiers made her kneel down, and put a green bamboo behind her knees, and then moved the ends of the stick up and down for several hours. Although the Sister kept denying, and the local superior, Sister Cecilia, offered to be killed instead of her, the torture went on. Sister Teresia died, after rescue, in 1946. She is counted as a war casualty.

Things went even worse with the Catholic catechist, Peter To Rot, who was killed in July, 1945, although he is not among the 63 missionaries, whose names are recorded in the memorial chapel of the Vunapope church. Still, his tomb, at Rakunai, testified, from the beginning, that he was a “catechist and martyr for the

church". In 1944, he was instructed to no longer assemble people for *lotu*. After four such warnings, he was put into prison, beaten on the face with sticks, released, and then betrayed again by To Metapa, a local policeman, who was bent on taking a second wife. During the subsequent confinement, two soldiers, and a Japanese military doctor, came "to give him medicine". Late that night, some of the prisoners, returning from their meal, found Peter lying on the veranda of a house, as if he was asleep. The cotton wool in his nostrils and ears betrayed the fact that he had been poisoned, and had just died. Earlier that same day, having a premonition of his death, Peter had said: "Do not worry. I am a catechist, and I am only doing my duty."

In the Methodist church, the losses, among local church workers, were really high, although we are short of specific stories about the victims, and do not know the dates of their executions. According to the book of Revd Neville Threlfall, *100 Years in the Islands*, two local ministers died: Revd Benjamin Talai, who was beheaded in prison in 1945, and Revd Aminio Bale, who died after the war, as result of the hardships he had endured. Then there are the names of just ten catechists, or senior pastors, who had the oversight of several villages. They are listed in the Journal Resolutions of the 1946 District Synod, now kept in the United church archives at Rabaul. In addition, there also exists another list of 17 pastors, being the people who cared for one village only, and taught there, in the elementary schools. Of these persons, 12 are recorded in the said District Resolutions, but other sources, consulted by Revd Threlfall, add five more names to them.

Although one can argue about this point, it is clear that the Methodist church is of a congregational type, in which lay people have a higher profile than in other churches. There is, therefore, a special reason for including the mission workers, and lay members, who were beaten up, and tortured, by the Japanese, and whose death can truly be called war-caused. Again, mission workers from overseas are usually remembered in other churches, so these people from New Britain and New Ireland should be properly added to the group of other indigenous martyrs.

While, in the previous cases, death was expected, or did also occur, there are several cases on record, where church workers died, as it were, by accident, thus without any expressed intention of true witnessing, at least at that time. One case is that of the pastor-teacher, Hosea To Ilip, who was murdered by an Australian scouting party, when fishing with a lamp off Lihir Island. The soldiers had thought that he was signalling to the Japanese, and acted accordingly. Another case is that of the young local lady, Magdalena Aiwaul, from Tumleo Island, who wanted to become a nun, and refused to leave the Holy Spirit Sisters, when they were arrested. Afterwards, on March 17, 1943, she found herself on the *Akikaze*, a Japanese destroyer, sailing between Manus and Rabaul. Together with Bishop J. Loerks

SVD, and many others, she was gunned down on the ship, and her body dumped into the sea. She is usually counted among the New Guinea martyrs, not, however, the two infants, of Chinese extraction, and the German-born baby, Erich Gareis, who drowned, at the same time, with his parents.

Another disaster at sea occurred with the *Yorishime Maru* – after the usual European pronunciation, rather referred to as the *Dorish Maru*. This ship was strafed by American B25 bombers, when it sailed from Hansa Bay to Wewak, full of Catholic and Lutheran missionaries from north-east New Guinea. Besides the expatriates, there were, on the vessel, also some 30 Catholic lay people. Of the latter, 22 survived the air attack, but eight of them died from bullet wounds. They are Charlie, Allan and Dora Mathies, Jimi Johnson, Elsie Kraemer, one indigenous girl Paula, and two teenagers. They were all people associated with the mission: men working in the workshops, and women assisting the nuns. In a way, these friends of the mission often underwent more hardships than the expatriate mission staff, because they also suffered the loss of their relatives, and other members of their families.

Similar, is the end of the boy Nagi, the adopted son of the Lutheran missionaries, Jacob and Adele Welsch, who was abducted by the Japanese in 1944, and never seen again. According to another source, the same happened to a local boy, adopted in Hollandia by Dr Theodore Braun and his wife. The lad was taken away by the Japanese soldiers, under the suspicion of being a spy, and was never seen alive again. One might suspect that the two Lutheran couples were concerned with the same boy (?). A case exists, also, among the Anglicans, were Mr Leslie Gariadi, a young Papuan teacher-evangelist from Boianai, drowned with Fr Henry Mathews. This happened between Port Moresby and Daru, when the BP Vessel *Mamutu*, on which they were travelling, was torpedoed on August 7, 1942.

3. The Confessors

A third group of indigenous people contains the bulk of those who, technically speaking could be called “confessors”, that is, men and women, who professed their faith, in the face of great danger, and did not hesitate to risk life and limb for it. Quite a few cases have been recorded, witnessing to the truth that the war had also some good effects. True, materially, churches and mission buildings were razed to the ground, but – as one witness of Raluana said: “People felt a great faith in God in those days. They called on Him in all dangers, and felt He preserved them.” And another witness from New Hanover testified: “It was not until the war came that I was thrown back on God and that I really learned what religion meant.”

There are some gruesome stories by Papua New Guineans, who survived the war, and were able to relate their tortures. Thus, Peni Lelei, a pastor-teacher of Ulu Island, was arrested by the Japanese, and hung from a tree, head down, and beaten, till he fainted.

After regaining consciousness, he was so tightly fastened to a tree that he fainted again. Finally, he was made to dig his own grave, but, at the moment that he would-be executioner drew his sword to cut off his head, he could say, “If God does not want me to die, you will not be able to kill me with that sword”, and the soldier left him. Again, at Rاپitok, several Methodist churchmen were put in large tunnel, awaiting their hearing before the military court. Meanwhile, piles of coconut husks were lit at the entrance of the tunnel to choke them to death. Then came the hearing, after which they were, once more, put in the tunnel for two days, and, once again, ordered not to conduct any religious meetings.

As a matter of fact, *lotu* went on, for instance, in caves and other hidden places, or also before dawn – when the soldiers were still asleep, and when the air raids had not yet started. Again, Bibles and sacred vessels were kept safe, so much so that, after the hostilities, catechist To Papuan, of Tabar Island, could give the tabernacle key to the first Catholic Father he met. Among the Mengen, catechist Max Roroa could do the same with the Mass vestments and the altar wine, which he had kept safe all the time from any profanation.

Similarly, Joseph Lomon, the coworker of the Lutheran missionary, Friedrich Doepke, on Manus Island, was able, in 1947, to hand over to the returning Friedrich Walter, the sum of £A132, with which they then could start to reconstruct the Evangelical Church of Manus. A special word of gratitude must go to the native FMI Sisters, of East New Britain, who used their freedom of movement to supply garden produce for up to 363 hungry stomachs in the camps of Vunapope and Ramale. Two of them lost their lives in air raids, two in the POW camp at Ramale, six in various places, and one – Sister Teresia – died after the war was over.

They were what we would call ordinary people, that is, men and women, who were not professionally engaged in the ministry, they also bore convincing witness to their Christian life, through acts of mercy, or sheer charity. Earlier on, we already recalled such a case, concerning Marcus and Cecilia, of Matong village. In general, it has been estimated that there were at least 100 Australian survivors of the Pacific War, due to the help given to them by the Papua New Guineans. But, there are more. Let us give two more examples.

One grateful American, Fred Hargesheimer, had his plane shot down, and was rescued by the people of Nantambu village (West New Britain). He was nursed by

Apelis To Gogo and his wife, Aida, who gave her own milk to restore him to health. After the war was over, the American kept retelling the story, till he had raised enough money to build the “Airmen’s Memorial School”, in Ewasse village. This was his way to try to repay, somehow, those Nakanais who had helped him when he most needed it.

Again, one missionary, Reverend Rudolf Inselmann, of the American Lutheran church, escaped from the Japanese, and was first hidden, and protected, by the local people. Eventually, he could make it overland to Port Moresby, and the United States, from where he later returned, and served here till 1946. Looking at the past events, it is not easy to give their proper due to all the local Christians, who practised, so generously, the Lord’s command to love friend and enemy.

The Anglican Missionary, Fr Romney Gill, who continued his work, during the Japanese invasion, from camps in the bush near his station, paid tribute, in a newspaper article, written soon afterwards to his local assistants: “Father John Livingstone Yaviri and Vincent Moi have deserved the highest praise. John has taken the sacrament right into enemy-patrolled territory. . . . I think, perhaps, that it would be safe to say that the church in New Guinea has produced no greater saint and hero than Robert Somanu. . . . Fancy going up to the station, when a shattering air attack had just passed – when it might be starting again at any moment.”

Although the Japanese occupation can be seen as a ruthless exercise of military power, one must agree that things were not always so oppressive for the people, and that the same restrictions did not apply all the time, nor everywhere, in the same way. There were, for instance, different sectors of command, which could mean that, what one officer had allowed, was a breach of regulations in another sector. Hence, when Revd Mikael To Bilak, and some Methodist pastors, were about to be executed, for conducting services of worship, one Japanese officer, who had given them permission, intervened at their trial and said, “I will have to die, before you kill these men.” Then, there are also cases, where the foreign soldiers shared the Christian beliefs of the Papua New Guineans, and even joined in some of their religious services. And, finally, it cannot be denied that, say, the prohibition of church gatherings could also have been made for a good reason, such as the avoidance of mass killings under the strafing of the Allied Forces. This, as a matter of fact, did happen for Methodist churchgoers at Ratuval village, in East New Britain, and it nearly occurred at Ononghe and Oba Oba, on the Papuan side of the Ranges. Here, as in all judgments about the past, many factors have to be taken into consideration.

III: On the Making of Statistics

It is commonplace to say that, with numbers, one can prove anything, although professional statisticians will strongly disagree with such a layman's opinion. Still, the number of people, who died an unnatural death during World War II, is a particularly hard case. Their totals run into the millions, although much uncertainty surrounds each of the possible figures. It is a fact that certain persons were not seen any more, after a given date, but they might have survived, joined the mass of the "displaced persons", and started a new life, forgetting whatever there had been behind. Yet, others might have died a lonely death, without any witness, without any record.

Things are not much better when one zeroes in on the victims among the mission staff, or even on those who belong to one particular sending agency. The case of Sister Maria Molnar comes directly to mind. She worked for the Evangelical Church of Manus, and there is contradictory evidence about her final whereabouts. Did she die at sea, or did she survive? There are, however, more expatriates, who can swell the list of war casualties, or also be left out of it.

1: Too Many?

From an abstract point view, it is quite possible that the total of war victims among church personnel has been inflated. Intriguing it is, for example, that existing listings of Anglican casualties of the Pacific War differ from one another, firstly, counting only 11 Anglican martyrs, and then also adding Revd Bernard Moore. The same is true among the Catholic FMI Sisters of Rabaul, firstly, supplying names for 10 local Sisters, and later adding also Sister M. Cicilia, of Malagunan. One reason for upping the numbers would be that these numbers were used overseas to obtain new personnel to fill the gaps, or to assure funds for rebuilding destroyed mission stations. Still, this concern would not be enough to darken a picture, which was already so sad by itself.

There is also the consideration that, among the war casualties, one may also like to count the people, who passed away during the war, but from natural causes, and in whose case the military hand only hastened the end result. The latter is, no doubt, the case of Sister Hedwig Karzer, a Catholic nun, who died of old age, on her mission station at Gayabu. The same is true of the Adventist Pastor, Arthur Atkins, whom the Japanese, after a forced march, brought to the hospital at Vunapope. Thus, he became the first war casualty among all Christian missionaries.

Having said this, let us now look at the possible reasons to discount some people listed as "martyrs". A first ground for limiting the total, is that some persons,

of British nationality, had felt it their duty to defend their motherland, by enlisting, for instance, in the Australian Imperial Forces. One of them was the Lutheran church worker, Mr Adolph Obst. He left the mission work, and became a coast-watcher on New Britain, where he was bayoneted in a man-to-man fight with the enemy. We did not consider him a mission worker.

We have also omitted one “Reverend Constantine” (or Consterdine), because we have only one witness saying that he might have been imprisoned in Kavieng in 1944, and presumably died there. We suspect, however, that this person was the New Ireland planter, Assunto Constantini (a third spelling!), who, once upon a time, belonged to the Sacred Heart Society, but had left the Mission of Rabaul-Kavieng many years earlier. Further research may put at rest this suspicion. Meanwhile, there is no church organisation, who could claim a person with such, or a similar, name.

Then, there is also the case of the Anglican priest Geoffrey H. D. Voss. He first worked on the south coast of New Britain, last of all in Au village. After that, he had then done supply work in Rabaul, when the regular parish priest had gone on leave. However, at the time of the invasion of the Japanese, he had taken on a civil job in Rabaul, and was put on the *Montevideo Maru*, a POW ship, which was to sail for Hainan Island, near South China, and fell victim to the US submarine, *Sturgeon*, near the Island of Luzon. As is well known, this POW ship was sunk off the coast of the Philippines, in “the greatest single disaster at sea during the Pacific War”. This event accounts for the lost of over 1,000 lives, including those of various missionaries. G. Voss is remembered for having told his catechist, Tomas Passingan, that – if he could make it – he should go back to Au village, and look after it, till he, himself, would return after the war. The name of Voss is now only mentioned among the victims of the *Montevideo Maru*.

Still on the Anglican side, there is also the case, referred to above, of Revd Henry Matthews. He enlisted voluntarily in the AIF, but was discharged, because he was already over 65 years of age. Still, he assisted his people on their escape route from Port Moresby to Daru, and died at sea on August 7, 1942, the day before his chaplaincy was to have expired. The Anglicans have always included him as one of their martyrs.

Following a slightly different way of arguing, a case could be made to also discount the music band of the 2/22nd Battalion, which, at the beginning of hostilities, was based at Rabaul. Officially, the bandsmen were part of the military, and the army paid them as soldiers. The Japanese had also interned them, with their Australian comrades. Some of these bandsmen died, e.g., in the Tol massacre, but most of them were loaded on the *Montevideo Maru*, and died at sea.

It should be repeated that not all Christian churches share the same concept of what the church is, and how it should operate. Now, the Salvation Army is known to regularly engage musicians as its helpers. Secondly, a distinction, which was upheld at the time, was made between a “church” (designed for serving the expatriate population) and a “mission” (whose task it was to evangelise the local people). On this account, too, the bandsmen would qualify to be counted, as having a task with other Australians. Thirdly, if 16 other church personnel, who perished on the ill-fated POW ship, are taken into account, the same should apply to the 17 Salvationist, who died likewise, even if, at the time, there was no Salvation Army established in the country.

The latter case could also be treated as an instance of “friendly fire”, that is the unintentional killing, in time of war, of one’s own people, or of one’s own allies. There were two such incidents at sea. One such incident dates from 1942, and accounts for the loss of 33 missionaries of various creeds, who – as said above – drowned when the POW ship *Montevideo Maru* was torpedoed. Later on, in 1944, a similar incident happened with the *Yorishime Maru*, which resulted in the loss of 50 missionary lives, “not counting the 15 people who” died a few days later, as a consequence of the wounds inflicted. And, finally, there was the mistake made by Allied soldiers, who belted to death the Methodist pastor, Hosea To Ilip, after a night of fishing, off the Coast of Lihir Island. Maybe there are other cases as well.

2. Or Too Few?

Notwithstanding the above remarks, there is also the other side of the story, which increases the death toll among missionaries, although in no definite manner either. As a matter of fact, no detailed records were kept about the local people, who died for upholding their Christian ideals. We know, however, of many of them, who assisted complete strangers in need. They did not ask, firstly, whether somebody was a friend or a foe, and they had often to pay for their generosity with the loss of their lives. Names are hard to come by.

Sometimes, the situation is slightly better. We know, for instance, the names of a great many Methodist mission workers, together with their last-assigned places, although most other details about these war casualties are missing. The church historian, Revd Neville Threlfall, reckons that, if we leave aside the expatriate victims among the church staff, and omit the local workers, who were left in broken health because of the war – there are still 98 or 99 Methodist church workers, who died in PNG between October, 1941, and September, 1946.

Although the names of all these 99 people have been preserved, we hesitate to retain as martyrs, even in the broad sense, all 32 (or possibly 33) pastor-trainees enrolled in the George Brown College, at the time of the Japanese invasion. In fact, it would seem that no other church would count those still in training as fully-fledged mission staff. On the other hand, there is no doubt that, subsequently, just these people would have become the most outspoken defenders of the Christian faith, and that some of them might have died in doing so.

Among the Catholic population, which, in the same area of the New Guinea Islands, has about the same strength as the Methodists, one would also expect an important number of church workers to have been killed by the Japanese. But where can one find the evidence? One Bukei, of Suna village (Manus), gave, before a war court in Kavieng, the names of 40 people, whom he knew that were executed by the enemy: four Chinese, four half-castes, eight locals from Lemakot, and 32 locals from Luburua. Some of these people were surely from Catholic villages.

Unfortunately, the testimony of Bukei does not specifically include each person's denomination, and is, therefore, not very helpful. Anyhow, Catholic church workers have never been singled out for "fighting for the enemy". Neither do they figure prominently among the people punished, after the war, for murder and treason. Some, of their persuasion, are, no doubt, included among the 34, or possibly over 100, people who were hung for war crimes (depending whether one follows the figures of Dr Hank Nelson, or those of the Victorian MHR, Mr Barry Jones). Yet, a precise number cannot possibly be assessed, although it will be higher than that of the one local catechist, Petro To Rot.

There is also a further element, which enters the discussion. Names like "Papua New Guinea", "Solomon Island", or "West Irian", are all new, and are post-independence creations. If one avoids these anachronisms, and sees the picture as resulting from the Japanese advance in the Pacific (or, also, from the point of view of the sending agencies), there is every reason to mark up the number of victims. For the Marist Society, one should not omit the two SM Fathers, and four SMSM Sisters, of their mission, who died in the Solomon Islands. For the Sacred Heart Mission, the losses in the Pacific War include also one bishop, four priests, and eight brothers, who died in the Moluccas, on July 30, 1942. In addition, they mourn five OLSH Sisters, and seven MSC missionaries, or a total of 25 people in other parts of the present-day Indonesia. There were 16 more deaths in the Pacific area, being 11 Fathers, three Brothers, and two OLSH Sisters, on Celebes, Manado, and in the erstwhile Gilbert Islands, all victims of the Japanese advance. It is clear that, with this, not all mission agencies have been listed.

By way of conclusion, one can state that, in making up statistics, much depends on the historical, or geographical, frame of reference, and also on the theological notion of who really is a “martyr”. One thing, however, is sure, and that is that the end result had gradually been growing. Right after the war, Father L. Mueller MSC, of Rabaul, stated that there had been “about 163” war victims in New Guinea. Others after him, spoke of 188 Catholics. Anglicans have gone from 11 to 12 recognised martyrs. Revd Threlfall recently increased his 93 PNG war victims to 98, among the Methodists alone. Hank Nelson, in his recent *Taim bilong Masta*, is surely on safe ground when he puts the total of lost church workers at “over 200 foreign missionaries”.

We would, with some hesitation, propose that there were at least 333 people, whose names have been recorded. However, allowing for the comments made, above, there is solid evidence to put the total still higher. Naturally, they were not only Melanesians, although, among them, there were at least 84 persons who would nowadays qualify as PNG citizens. And then, we do not count, yet, the 32 “nationals”, who were still in training, and the 40 other war casualties, mentioned above. We must leave it to the Lord to remember all the Papua New Guineans, whose names are known by Him alone.

Summary I

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1942 Sinking of <i>Mamutu</i> and <i>Montevideo Maru</i>	8	12	16	–	2	–	2	40
1943 Execution on <i>Akikaze</i>	46	–	–	–	–	5	–	51
1944 Strafing of <i>Dorish Maru</i>	57	–	–	7	–	–	–	64
Air raid wounds, shot, beheaded, or bayoneted	43	1	3	6	9	–	–	62
Abducted, unknown, or unaccounted	3	–	1	3	–	–	–	7
Prison, sickness, neglect, or old age	27	62	–	–	1	–	2	92
After rescue on mission station	14	1	2	–	–	–	–	17
Total:	198	76	22	16	12	5	4	333

(1) Catholics

(2) Methodists

(3) Salvation Army

(4) Lutherans

(5) Anglicans

(6) Evangelical church of Manus

(7) Seventh-day Adventists

(8) Totals

Summary II

CATHOLICS				Total
Madang	1 SVD Bishop 9 SVD Priests	19 SVD Brothers 2 lay helpers	37 SSps Sisters 3 lay helpers	71
Wewak	1 SVD Bishop 14 SVD Priests	18 SVD Brothers —	18 SSps Sisters 1 Aspirant	52
Rabaul-Kavieng	24 MSC Priests — —	17 MSC Brothers 1 Catechist —	5 OLSH Sisters 5 MSC Sisters 11 FMI Sisters	63
Bougainville	3 SM Priests 1 Priest (USA)	3 SM Brothers 3 FMS Brothers	2 SMSM Sisters —	12
METHODISTS				
New Guinea Islands	11 Ministers	10 Catechists 17 Pastors 38 Lay helpers	—	76
SALVATION ARMY				
	—	22 Bandsmen	—	22
LUTHERANS				
Finschhafen	1 Revd	1 helper	—	
Madang	5 Revd	7 helpers	2 Sisters/Wives	16
ANGLICANS				
Papua	3 Revd	3 helpers	4 Sisters-Teachers	
New Britain	2 Revd	—	—	12
EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF MANUS				
Manus	2 Revd	—	3 Sisters/Wives	5
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS				
New Britain	2 Revd	2 helpers	—	4
Total:	79	163	91	333

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