

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



A Visit with MATS

Yeow Choo Lak

Christian Faith in Melanesia

Peter Miria

Towards a Melanesian Christian Theology

Robert Hagesi

Some Thoughts on Possible Challenges for

Melanesian Theology

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The Name of God in Melanesia

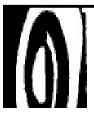
Rufus Pech

Instances of "God-talks" in Melanesia

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Symposium: Theologies in Contexts

JOURNAL OF MELANESIAN ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS





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The **Melanesian Journal of Theology** aims to stimulate the writing of theology by Melanesians for Melanesians. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at a scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians will be considered.

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

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Editorial: Introducing MJT

Sir John Guise, in his **Times of Papua New Guinea** column "The Last Word", wrote recently (Feb.17, 1985) of the religious divisions caused in Papua New Guinea by "the inflow of numerous Christian sects, mostly originating from a prominent foreign country which unfortunately has created disunity, antagonism, and bad feelings among village communities and families and against the established churches, where, once upon a time, there was peace and goodwill." In search of a solution to the twin problems of religious harmony and national unity, he proposed: "How about the creation of a Melanesian theology, which may eventually emerge since the people of this country, before the coming of the missionaries, already believed in many Christian concepts, such as (a) spiritual world, (b) the art of forgiveness among families and communities, etc., etc."

Whether or not "a national Melanesian church governed by a Melanesian theology may be the answer," as Sir John suggests, is a proposition many will, no doubt, want to debate. But the call for Melanesian Christians to determine their own indigenous expression of their Christian faith is timely as we introduce this first journal of theology by and for Melanesians.

Has the time indeed come for Melanesians to carry on serious theological discussion in their own right? On the answer to this question depends the success or failure of this new venture by the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS): to launch a journal for the specific purpose of developing indigenous theology in Melanesia. The present executive of MATS, which consists entirely of Melanesians, decided on this momentous step while meeting in Lae in March 1984. Coupled with this decision was the refusal to wait for the possible revival of the **Pacific Journal of Theology**, but to go it alone and create something characteristically Melanesian, while participating in the "Pacific Theology", which is slowly but surely emerging.

The Melanesian Institute in Goroka has kindly offered us the use of its typesetting and editorial facilities to begin producing MJT. This in itself should be enough to dispel the impression, which is bound to arise, that MJT is an unnecessary duplication of Catalyst, which, over the years, has provided a forum for many a debate on the foundations and shape of Melanesian theology, and has published the work of many a Melanesian writer. Implicit in the MATS decision, however, is that the time has come for differentiation of roles, and specialisation of tasks: MJT is envisaged as complementary to Catalyst, because it is to concentrate on theology in all its manifold aspects, from exegesis to doctrine, including worship and evangelisation, ethics and pastoral practice. with emphasis on the thoughts and feelings of Melanesians as they struggle to map out the intellectual structure of a theology for their unique situation. It is taken for granted that these efforts will draw on the already existing oral sources of indigenous theology in Melanesia, whether in Pidgin or in local languages: the stories and songs, the adaptations of myths, the solutions to practical problems found by prayer and consensus. The only new thing, really, will be that these rich resources will be transposed into the literary medium. thus enabling Pacific-wide discussion by the spokespersons of the Christian community, its theologians. This, of course, entails the use of English, which is both a barrier and a medium: it hinders by its foreignness, but it facilitates by its universality. This dilemma is faced by all Third World theologians.

This first issue of MJT contains papers and discussions from the Sixth Study Institute of MATS held at Lae on March 19-24, 1984, on the theme: "Melanesian Theology: Melanesian Theologians at Work". Dr Yeow Choo Lak of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology in Singapore, who participated in the last round of MATS accreditation visits, gives a gracious introduction to the sister organisation of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia. There follows some initial attempts to sketch the method of a Melanesian theology (Miria, Hagesi, Tavoa), some examples of what it might look like, both in prospect and in reality (Tuza), and a masterly exposition of some of the inter-cultural and linguistic problems involved (Pech). Also included is a symposium in which the whole problem of the contextualisation of indigenous theologies is raised (Richardson, May, Tuza).

Vigorous responses to these, and all subsequent, contributions to MJT are heartily encouraged by the editors! The journal is intended primarily as a forum for the discussion of new ideas rather than a repository for academic set pieces or an official organ of the churches, though we also hope that it will provide a medium for publishing excerpts from theses and essays written at MATS member schools, and significant documents emanating from churches, institutes or faculties. We welcome shorter contributions and letters as well as reports on conferences in the Pacific region. We intend to publish regular book reviews, with special relevance to Melanesia, particularly on Third World theological themes.

With generous support from Melanesian writers and readers, whose numbers are admittedly still relatively few, supplemented by expatriates resident in these islands, and interested scholars overseas, MJT could become an indispensable tool for theological discussion and research in the Pacific. We are still a long way from realising this vision. But the need for a community of theological discourse, a forum for critical collaboration in Melanesia is becoming urgent. The full responsibility – and loneliness – of national independence and church autonomy is beginning to dawn on Melanesians, just as the problems confronting them from within and without become daunting. Expatriate experts cannot provide answers to the questions Melanesian Christians are asking deep in their hearts as they face these challenges. Only Melanesians can formulate these questions; only they can identify those elements in scripture and their various traditions which contribute towards answering them.

Can our fledgling journal bear the weight of responsibility thus foisted upon it? Time will tell. I count it a great privilege to be asked to provide some initial help in carrying out MATS' purpose. May the Creator Spirit, among whose names are Wisdom and Understanding, be with us in our collaborative effort!

John D'Arcy May Executive Editor.

GUEST INTRODUCTION:

A Visit With MATS

- Yeow Choo Lak

I FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Upon invitation from the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS) through Dr Theodoor Aerts, and financially supported by the Programme on Theological Education, whose Director, Dr Samuel Amirtham, suggested some liaison between MATS and the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, following his visit to Papua New Guinea in 1981, I landed in Port Moresby at the crack of dawn on May 28, 1984. It was my first visit to Papua New Guinea, but I was pleasantly surprised to feel that I was quite at home. I did not feel that I had left Asia.

My mind quickly did some homework. It was trying to put two and two together, and two things seemed to register, viz., (a) the people looked very familiar, and (b) I understood Pidgin. No wonder I felt at home.

Having worked closely with Iban friends in Sarawak and Rungus Christians in Sabah (both in East Malaysia), and knowing the Sengoi work in Kampar (West Malaysia), I am acquainted with a race of people that reminds me of Papua New Guineans, who have their "double" among the tribal people in certain parts of Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and, as mentioned, Malaysia. Two friends in Newton College, Popondetta, Papua New Guinea, reminded me of an Iban friend and a colleague from Ambon. I felt I was moving among friends, more so when I understood their Pidgin.

There is a simple reason for being able to understand Pidgin, so I found out. Pidgin or Pisin (an adaptation of the word

"business") originated from the trade and business language between Malay and Chinese traders, and it gradually became Anglicised in its vocabulary, but not its grammar. Anyone familiar with Malay, Chinese, and English is able to understand what is being said in Pidgin. Incidentally, anyone familiar with Singlish (Singapore-English, which also reflects the influence of Chinese, Malay, and English) can pick up Pidgin in a jiffy, and conversely my Papua New Guinean friends understood me when I broke out in Singlish. Maybe, this part of the world should use Pidgin more extensively.

As a Chinese, I guess I cannot resist food (God made food for people, and Chinese for food). So, it looks logical to make a brief statement on it. The traditional food in Papua New Guinea reminded me of the pleasant meals eaten with Iban and Rungus friends – plenty of greens and a right amount of meat. Along with food is a simple life-style that has its own attractions. To begin with, it recalls days not of wine and roses during the Japanese occupation. Then, it is nice to travel around in slippers, Bermuda shorts, and a T-shirt. No starched shirts! How nice! It can rain cats and dogs (and it did just that when I was in Lae and Finschhafen), but who cares? Wet feet do dry up! That goes for shirts and shorts, too.

II DOWN MEMORY LANE

I am grateful that friends greeted me in Port Moresby. The first missionaries were not that fortunate. They faced disaster, partly because of hostility by the indigenous people, and more often than not because of tropical diseases, especially malaria. Even today, malaria is widespread. Two friends in the teams had a touch of malaria, and they assured me that I could easily be the next victim, particularly since I did not have any medication prior to touching down at Port Moresby. Praise God, the mosquitoes spared me. Praise God, too, for the brave souls that pioneered missionary work in that part of the world. For obvious reasons, I kept on praising God for their dedicated and committed work.

Papua New Guinea is the nearest I have got to the Pacific Islands, but it was not difficult to see in my mind quite clearly the work of the first missionaries in that part of the world. I have

reviewed John Garrett's **To Live Among the Stars** for the **East Asia Journal of Theology**, and during my two-week stay in Papua New Guinea I saw for the first time, at first hand, the results of the labours of missionaries and local leaders. It was appropriate to recall:

For all the saints, who from their labours rest Who thee by faith before the world confessed Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blest Alleluia, Alleluia.

Let us now praise famous men and women . . . All these were honoured in their generations, And were the glory of their times . . . Peoples will declare their wisdom And the congregation proclaims their praise.

I also praised God for the mission boards that had sent out these gallant women and men of God. I thank God for their vision and zeal in sending people with enthusiasm to share the gospel with the Pacific Islanders.

III SOME POINTERS

MATS is surely making steady progress. This is seen in the fact that, for the first time, all the Executive Committee members are Melanesians. Surely, this is a good cause for praising God, more so when it is quite obvious that they are 100% enthusiastic about their work. I met a few of them, and was truly impressed by their enthusiasm

I was equally impressed by the fact that our Roman Catholic friends are fully involved in MATS. For someone not used to this type of blessing, I can only say "Praise the Lord". I wonder how long it will take the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia to enjoy the same blessing.

It is a fact that member schools in MATS are trying to practise self-reliance. I was touched by the fact that many of the faculty and

students grow their own vegetables as a way of putting food on the table for the family. For example, Newton College requires that both faculty and students grow their own vegetables by taking care of their own garden patch. This is a good way to practise self-reliance, and should be encouraged. I was also impressed by family worship in Newton College. My soul was lifted up when I saw and heard the seminarians with their wives and children in both morning and evening worship.

I wonder how many Protestants attend the Roman Catholic Mass occasionally, let alone regularly? I was pleasantly impressed by the revised Roman Catholic Mass celebrated in the Holy Spirit Seminary near Port Moresby. Admittedly, being a modern version, it has many familiar elements. Albeit, it was inspiring to participate in that meaningful service, made more inspiring by the warm fellowship in the Seminary.

The Martin Luther Seminary in Lae has a high standard comparable to the better (in terms of academic standards) seminaries in this part of the world. The resources, both human and physical, are impressive. The school would gain much by having the presence and contributions of other denominations. Being used to interdenominational/ecumenical institutions, I guess I can see quite clearly some built-in defects in a denominational school.

The Senior Flierl Seminary exists to train pastors and church workers to minister in Pidgin in rural areas. The campus has a commanding view of the Huon Peninsula, when it is not raining cats and dogs, and serves the community very well. The life-style is not pretentious, as fitting the seminary's claim to train people for the rural ministry.

The schools visited have degree and/or non-degree programmes. On the whole, I can safely say that they compare favourably with member-institutions in the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia. All things going well, I can envisage MATS mapping out courses, as their member schools continue to make steady progress. Let me mention a few.

It is quite obvious that Melanesian theology is attempting to break out of its shell. The all-Melanesian Executive Committee of MATS is raring to make a break-through. Naturally, they will discover that it takes more than enthusiasm to make break-throughs, but the very fact that they are truly enthused speaks very well for the emerging Melanesian theology. Not surprisingly, as Melanesians share many things in common with the tribal people in South-East Asia, MATS and our Association should have much in common. Thus, Melanesian theology and Asian theology have much to dialogue about. In this process, mutual benefits will emerge. If I read the situation rightly, such mutual sharing will expedite breakthroughs in Melanesian theology and enrich Asian theology.

As Melanesian theology matures it will need a support system that will have to emerge. Without it, Melanesian theology is bound to experience a stunted growth. A support system within Melanesian contexts would have the following features. To begin with, MATS should be "full time". At present, it does not have a full-time Executive Director, which means that, at best, all its activities are ad hoc in emphasis, if not in nature and operation. Without a mind to project into the future, let alone taking care of the present, MATS is bound to end up at the wrong end of the stick. As a start, the newly-elected Executive Secretary can serve MATS half-time, i.e., MATS "buys" half of his time from his seminary. In this way, he can begin to serve MATS on a regular basis, which is better than giving time to MATS if and when he has time or energy.

As a mind begins to map out courses for MATS, I can easily imagine workshops/seminars are in the offing to upgrade the skills of theological educators in MATS. In this connection, MATS has access to the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools and the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia. As Third World theological associations, these three sister-associations can pool their resources together and help each other in more ways than one. For example, the sharing of theological literature, written with third-world contexts in mind, is a concrete way of spreading the wealth (what we have of it) around. The workshops/seminars to be organised by MATS can then be occasions when Melanesian theologians can challenge each other, as well as others in this part of the world. Surely, this is a good way to grow.

Sooner than later, MATS will have to think of operating a Master of Theology degree programme. (As the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is already embarking on this, and as the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia has been running such a program since 1966, again some form of trans-Oceanic cooperation seems desirable.) A few MATS memberschools have a sufficiently impressive Bachelor's programme. As Melanesia continues to make progress, the Melanesian churches will begin to ask for more educated pastors. Also, more indigenous seminary teachers will be needed to man the seminaries. Many of them are already asking for further training, as they feel "handicapped" without a proper Master's degree, more so when the expatriate teachers have a doctorate. The students themselves have felt the need for their national teachers to upgrade their skills and qualifications. So, it is quite obvious that the writing is already on the wall

Melanesian hospitality overwhelmed me. Melanesian aspirations give me the impression that Melanesian theological educators are serious about making quality theological education programmes a living reality. They seem to have the trump cards. Where else do you find Roman Catholics, mainline churches, and even the Salvation Army, coming together to do theology? Humanly speaking, all that is needed is a little help now and then from friends who care

Christian Faith in Melanesia

- Peter Miria

I want to share with you briefly some ideas on the Christian faith in Melanesia, in its historical context. When we look at the history of Christianity in Melanesia, and, in particular, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, we see that Christianity has been here a little over a hundred years, and in most areas, less than that. I will outline in a sketchy way the stages of the growth of that Christianity over this period.

1. STAGES OF THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY

Within this length of time, we can roughly indicate two stages of that growth up to now, with a third stage in the process of emerging, or yet to emerge.

The first stage in evangelisation is one of "translation". Here, Christianity came into contact with the Melanesian people and their culture. The Christian message and life was presented in the forms of a European culture: English, French, German, Dutch, Irish, American, Spanish, Australian, and New Zealand. . . . In this period, translations were made, a few adaptations were made, but, in the main, Christianity, or the Christian mission, had a foreign outlook, and becoming a Christian often implied leaving behind one's culture.

The next stage in the growth of Christianity was the expansion of missionary activity, through which more and more territory was gained, and more people were brought under the influence of Christianity, or were baptised. In this period, a large majority of the population is Christian. It is in this period that we have the emergence of the local pastors or clergy, who are small in number at first, and fit well into the missionary or mission structure. Gradually

their numbers grow, and they form a distinct group within the missionary structure, but are in a minority. In this situation, the minority group gets the impression that they are opposed by the missionaries, who are in the majority, and that they are prevented from developing themselves. They may be expected to react to this sooner or later in a more-or-less outspoken way.

There is an emergence of a current of indigenous church mentality, which is articulated by them, and they see themselves as champions of the cause of the indigenous local church. This is a period of tension, because we seem to have a rivalry of two views or positions: one, the established position, and the other, just emerging, and seeking to assert itself and establish its identity. It is here that we have a transition period in which the missionary structure, with its established attitudes and mentality, is asked to give way to the emergence of the local church, with its emerging new structure. We are in this transition period in Melanesia.

The third stage in the growth of Christianity, or of the local church, is reached when we have a situation in which the young church has all leadership in the hands of its local agents. Here, the young church plays a more active role in the transformation of its own culture. Here, the tension of the second stage is resolved. The local church leaders holding the key positions now in the local church see that there are certain areas where the services of the missionary are still needed, and so assign these roles to them in the continuing work of building up the local church.

2. A SHORT EVALUATION OF THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY

After giving the sketchy outline of the stages of growth of Christianity, I give a brief evaluation of this period.

When the missionaries evangelised the Melanesians in the 19th century, they preached the word of God or the gospel as it had been developed within 18th- and 19th-century Europe. It was the 19th-century European form of Christianity that they presented,

while the people heard the message within the traditional worldviews of their culture.

When the missions started here, the science of cultural anthropology was hardly in existence. The reports of travellers, colonial officers, and missionaries were, with a few exceptions, amateur works, which, however well-intentioned, often conveyed a misleading and partial picture of the people. "Missionary activity was strongly animated by the will to save souls, that is, literally to snatch them from hell by baptism." Immediate conversion was sought, treating the natives as sinners, or better, as children, so their worldviews and culture were not seriously considered in their evangelisation.

As Harold Turner has noted, it has been a general tendency of Christianity to play down the pagan culture that it addresses. But it is these pagan cultures, or the primal societies, which have given Christianity its numbers and expansion in the two thousand years of the history of Christianity. This has never occurred in an extensive way in the so-called great, universal, or higher religions. "It could be said that primal religions have understood Christianity better than Christianity has understood the primals. It has hardly ever shown a deep understanding of the religious authenticity, content, or spirituality of primal religions, especially when it interpreted these as superstition, mere animism, devil worship, or the product of human sin or folly."²

Despite the missionary's zeal to eradicate the practices of Satan within the pagan cultures in Melanesia, and to supplant them with those of Christianity, the religious values and practices have persisted, and are still present today. For the deciding factor in this encounter between Christ and the people, through the medium of the preaching of the missionary, was what actually went on in the people who came into contact with Christianity. For this encounter happened at the level of inner being, which remained hidden. Its truth will be brought to light only in its proper time. The seed of the Word of God, which fell on the rich religious soil of the people, will spring, grow, and bear fruit in its own time. Christ, thus encountered, was there not to destroy but to bring to fulfilment.

The preaching of the Word of God has catalysed the inner yearning and desire for salvation, and made the encounter possible. This encounter is the act of faith. It is a "recognition", an "acknowledgment", a "naming", of what they had felt all along in their history, through their experience of life, and the ever-present and ever-permeating presence of the spirit forces, and the spirits of the ancestors. They were now able to recognise Him, and name Him as the Father, who loves them, and gives them life through His Son, Jesus Christ

Through this faith, a new relationship was brought into being, a Father-son relationship, which grew and developed, and expressed itself in their lives, which is the history of Christianity in Melanesia. Through this relationship in the community of faith, which is the church, the loving and saving presence of God in Melanesia is experienced today.

3. FAITH AS THE RESPONSE OF THE MELANESIAN BELIEVERS TO THE WORD OF GOD

When we talk about the Christian faith in Melanesia, we have to keep in mind that this faith is grounded in the concrete flesh and blood of the Melanesians. It is Melanesian men and women who believe, and these believers are again grounded in their culture, which has reared them, formed them, and given them their beliefs, customs, language, worldview, and identity.

God, in His goodness and wisdom, has called the Melanesians, through His Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to share in the divine life. In faith, the Melanesians have responded to this call of God through His Word, and have entered into fellowship with the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Hearing the word of God, and responding to it in faith, forms the believers into a community of believers, who become the people who belong to God, and therefore are the people of God, the Body of Christ, the church. In this commitment of the individual and the community to God in faith, God engages man, who experiences this engagement as a kind of struggle with God, a struggle to surrender to Him in trust and confidence in the concrete human relationships of everyday life, the difficulties, hardships, sufferings, joys, conflicts, contrariness, . . . etc., through which growth and maturity in the Christian faith is achieved. In our context, God engages the Melanesian believer and his culture. On the side of the Melanesian man, this engaging struggle is salvific, it is a conversion, it is a transformation

4. MELANESIAN THEOLOGY: MELANESIAN BELIEVERS TALK ABOUT GOD

Theology is faith which seeks to understand itself. Since faith in Melanesia is grounded in the concrete flesh and blood of the Melanesians, Melanesian theology is Melanesian believers seeking to understand the meaning of their faith. Thus, doing theology in the Melanesian context, is the reflection and the articulation of the faith experience of the Melanesian community of believers. Theology thus arises out of the community of faith, which is the local church, and so is at the service of that church.

5. THE TASK OF MELANESIAN THEOLOGIANS

The task facing Melanesian Christians, churchmen, and theologians, at this point of time, is that of incarnating Christ in Melanesian cultures. This task has been described by A. R. Crollius as "the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients, and innovates this culture, so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment to the church universal". The principal agents of this process of enculturation are those who belong to the local culture.

Here, the Melanesian theologians must engage God, who comes to meet them in the experience of faith. They must be able to articulate that experience as Melanesian believers.

Theology is an exercise of faith, and the theologian is, therefore, engaged in an exercise that is salvific. This message of salvation, lived and experienced in faith, then highlights the truth about the believers that they are sinners in need of conversion. It is also in this light of the gospel that they interpret the situation at large in Melanesia. Faith then exercises a critical function on culture, which means the believers are able to judge themselves and their culture in the light of the gospel, and courageously point out its evils as well as its good, precisely for conversion to the offer of salvation.

One does theology, then, with one's eye fixed on the needs and aspirations of one's people, i.e., on the signs of the times, so that one is being relevant to one's situation, and speaks the word of God in the language that they can understand. In this task, one has to be versed, both in the cultural heritage of one's people, and also be attuned to the reality of the present situation.

Let me throw in a few questions here: If faith is grounded in the concrete flesh and blood of Melanesians, how can we interpret our past cultural heritage and experience? Can we interpret the past life and experience of the ancestors as salvation in the light of faith? Melanesian believers have to carry on the dialogue between Christianity and their own culture.

We conclude with a kind of statement of faith:

By our faith, we believe that God has claimed us for Himself in His Son Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, by accepting us as we are, Melanesians. And so, we, too, have now joined in the fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are able now to call God our Father in our own language, because we, too, have been endowed with the Spirit of sonship which cries out "Abba, Father", and thus share the experience of being sons in the Son, Jesus Christ. And so we also dare to talk about Him in our own language, so that

others may come to believe, and may have life in Him, and so glorify Him for the wondrous deeds He has done for us.

NOTES:

- 1. Congar, Y., **Un Peuple Messianique** (Paris: Ceuf. 1975) p. 147.
- 2. Turner, H. W., "Old and New Religions in Melanesia", **Point 2** (Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1978) p. 14.
- 3. Crollius, A. R., "What is so New about Enculturation". **Gregorianum** 58 (1978) p. 735.

Towards a Melanesian Christian Theology

- Robert Hagesi

INTRODUCTION

The quest for contextualising Christian theology is a common concern for, and an inevitable task to be fulfilled by, theologians in the churches of Third World countries. The fact is that they have to undertake this task because the theologies, which the missionaries imported from the Western world, or First World, are not relevant and intelligible to, or not even functional in, the various situations, cultures, and issues in the Third World. The fruits of their labours have come back to us in the form of Liberation Theology, Yellow Theology, Black Theology, etc., and I would like to take these attempts as great and wonderful contributions to Christian theology.

The quest for a Melanesian theology is not new for us in Melanesia. We have expressed the desire and need for such a theology in the last ten years or so, but there seems to be no genuine interest, and so we have not put our heart and minds, and our best efforts, into its making. It is time that we take it more seriously. Perhaps our difficulty has been that we were not quite sure as to where we should start, and how we should go about it. We should appreciate and praise our missionaries for the interest and encouragement they have shown in their attempt to guide us, but we Melanesian theologians must be involved in the task. And the task is not simply "buying and selling" of modern theologies.

This short paper is intended not to give answers, but to raise issues, and to suggest possible guidelines for theologising in Melanesia. I think the questions of terminology, methodology, and the nature of Melanesian theology, should be raised, and possibly be resolved, in a Study Institute such as this. However, I hope the paper will stimulate your minds and thinking and help to facilitate a fruitful discussion in this Study Institute.

1. WHAT TERMINOLOGY?

The first issue I would like to raise with you is the question of terminology. I have raised and discussed this question with my theology class, and, as a result of our discussion, we have agreed to believe that the term or phrase we employ to name our Melanesian theology should help us to define what it is that we are trying to do. That goes without saying: that whatever term, or phrase, or words, we use must be related to, or be known and important in our Melanesian context. And I would like to put before you three suggestions for your careful consideration.

a) Melanesian Christian Theology:

This is our first choice. I am inclined to agree to this choice because the term Melanesian theology, which we seem to accept without due consideration, will create misunderstanding or raise suspicious, or even sceptical questions, in the minds of our sophisticated men and women of today, as well as our readers and critics. The term Melanesian Christian Theology would suggest a Christian theology or knowledge of God as experienced, expressed, and understood in a Melanesian context. This term is a real possibility when we consider the significance of the Christian mythos, which has become part of our worldview, as opposed to the term Melanesian theology. The latter may suggest a theology which deals solely and strictly with our Melanesian traditional religious experience, without relating that experience to our Christian faith and interpretation.

b) Betel-nut Theology:

Our second choice is a funny one. However, this term Betelnut Theology would suggest a theology or talk about God in Melanesia, where betel-nut chewing is a common feature and practice. I don't want to argue to defend or tell the whole story of the chewing process to justify this choice. All Melanesian people who enjoy betel-nut chewing should know that it has social, religious, and medical functions in a Melanesian society. Briefly, it

involves the use of three elements – betel-nut, leaf, and lime. The mixture of all three elements affects the result = red colour. Some preachers have used this analogy to illustrate or teach the unity and work of the Triune God in His divine acts of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Is that not betel-nut theology? I have personally witnessed several occasions when such an illustration was used – it rang many bells, and opened many windows, and was deeply appreciated.

c) Coconut Theology:

Finally, this is the class's third choice. This term Coconut Theology would suggest a theology or study about God, which should be relevant to people whose ultimate concern is food, and who depend entirely on coconut as a sole means of livelihood. Needless to say, how vitally important and useful coconut is to many people in Melanesia, and in the whole of the South Pacific. For some, coconut is the sole means of livelihood. For others, it is the main or only source of economy. Coconut gives people money, food, drink, shelter, etc., etc. It helps people achieve better life, better living; it fulfils hopes and aspirations, and it gives confidence. I'm quite aware of the fact that people who live in the mountains and valleys of Papua New Guinea may not even have seen a coconut fruit before, and so, what I have said, may not be true for them. For them a pig is good example. However, for those who depend on and owe their lives to coconut, does it not represent God, the source of all things, the Lord and disposer of all creation? Kosuke Koyama entitled one of his books Waterbuffalo Theology for the similar simple fact that his Thai people depend on that animal for farming.

2. WHAT IS A MELANESIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY?

Perhaps this question is not quite relevant for us at this stage, for we cannot question what is not actually there. However, we can share thoughts and ideas for thinking and for enlightenment. We cannot understand what we mean by a Melanesian Christian Theology unless we define what it is that we are trying to do. Let me attempt to provide a definition. By Melanesian Christian

Theology, I mean the reflective expression and understanding of the Christian faith in the cultural, social, and religious experiences of the Melanesian Christian people within the Melanesian context as decisive for the existence of the Melanesian Christian communities. Divine revelation and faith, religious experience and theological reflection do not occur or take place in a vacuum, but always in a cultural context of the Christian communities. It is equally true and important to say that theologising should be a Christian community involvement. John Macquarrie implies the same point when he says, "Theology may be defined as a study, which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available."

We need to clarify and relate to our own context two points in this definition for our purpose. a) Theology proceeds through believers' participation in, and reflection upon, Christian faith. This presupposes a Christian community, because participation and reflection are community events or actions. b) Theology should express the content of our Christian faith in the clearest language we have. It means that theology has not only the task to reflect upon faith, but also to express its reflection in the clearest language and thought forms of the community involved.

When you consider the importance of language, and the fact that, in Melanesia, we have so many languages, with different versions of Pidgin English as a second language, and English as third, it seems an impossible task. Language is the most important medium of communication, without which theologising can never be done. But, at the same time, there is no harm in having oral theology, which can be communicated in the form of story-telling. Melanesian custom stories, myths, and legends have been preserved and passed on from one generation to another in this way. Why not Melanesian Christian theology?

A Melanesian Christian theology should be genuinely Melanesian in forms of reflection, but truly Christian in meaning. It should arise, or evolve, out of the Christian communities, characterised by elements of faith and hope in Jesus Christ, in whom the people of God in Melanesia have a new faith that has awakened them to a new life. At the same time, it must be in constant dialogue

with the rest of the Christian church in the world. The question now is: What is the criterion for developing such a theology? Or what determines such a theology? If it is to be Christian in meaning, and Melanesian in form, then the criterion by which we articulate it is that it should be based on biblical faith, and what really concerns us in our Christian communities. To put it in Paul Tillich's terms: "The object of theology is what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object insofar as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us." In other words, we must take seriously the questions of hermeneutics, as well as anthropology.

A Melanesian Christian theology should take seriously the cultural and religious context, be grounded on what concerns us ultimately, and reflect our faith in God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Without this, there can be no theology. It should take into account the patterns of meanings and valuations, which have been projected in the Christian traditions and religious wisdom of Melanesian communities, so as to exemplify and relate fully that **mythos** to Christian experience in Melanesia. Then we dare not overlook the non-Christian sector of the community, as well as those new sects that are invading Melanesian countries.

There is more to be said, but we shall touch on the rest when we come to deal with the last section of this paper. So far, I have touched on many issues and raised many questions. That should give you enough to play with in your discussion.

3. WHAT METHODOLOGY?

May I give a word of warning? What I will be saying in this section will overlap with some of the things we have touched on in the previous sections. One is tempted to do that when he is dealing with mere ideas. I would like to introduce this section with a quotation from Bernard Lonergan:

For if the gospel is to be preached to all nations (Matt. 28:19) still it is not to be preached in the same manner to all. If one is to communicate with persons of another culture, one must

use the resources of their culture. To use simply the resources of one's own culture is not to communicate with others, but to remain locked up in one's own. At the same time, it is not enough simply to employ the resources of the other culture. One must do so creatively. One has to discover the manner in which the Christian message can be expressed effectively and accurately in the other culture.³

This is a very important principle. As Melanesian teachers and theologians, we are called to interpret and reflect the Christian message within our religious and cultural ethos. But the fact is, this is indigenisation of theology, or to use a more dynamic contemporary term, a contextualisation of theology in process. It begins by applying this principle as a method. And, in our attempts to formulate a Melanesian Christian Theology, I would like to suggest the following propositions for a methodology. We must be sure that,

It must be formulated in the language of our people, not merely in terms of the words used, but in the people's terms of reference in their culture.

It must use a methodology that is a logic, and set of procedures, which make sense in that cultural context, and be inclusive; and it should leave no gap between different sectors of the communities in Melanesia.

It must address itself to issues and questions that are real to the people and should ignore those that are not relevant to our people.

It must use appropriate literary forms and genres that are relevant for the purpose, such as poetry, wise words, or religious terms of Melanesia.

It must be evolved from the Christian community, and all the members of that community must be involved in the task. It must be open and free to invite the Christian community to suggest, and to make constructive verbal expressions.

It must avoid syncretism, and the tendency to confuse, or make the gospel become culture-bound. It must allow the gospel to transcend and transform our Melanesian cultures.

It must be Christocentric, biblical, prophetic, and use hermeneutical methods, and should avoid simple buying and selling of existing theologies.

It must be open-ended, and subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so as to be free to be renewed and be functional in the developing countries in Melanesia.⁴

For discussion: What would be more useful for our purpose in Melanesia that must be included in the above list?

CONCLUSION

I have simply tried to share some of my ideas and concerns with you in our Study Institute, and I am not laying down rules and regulations for the contextualisation of theology in Melanesia. That task belongs to the whole church in Melanesia, not a self-appointed person, let alone an individual. If our aim and intention for a Melanesian Christian theology is to be genuinely Melanesian in form, then it must use the method which requires that, whatever religious phenomena are examined, it must seek to explicate the essence of faith and relate it to our Christian faith and experience in Melanesia. If, on the other hand, our aim and intention is to be truly Christian in meaning, then we must understand, interpret, and express in our reflection the revelation of God in the Old Testament, and the fullness of that revelation in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

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Some Thoughts on Possible Challenges for a Melanesian Theology

- Michael Tayoa

The question of Melanesian theology has been in the minds of many Melanesians for a good number of years. Many Melanesians have tried to deal with this issue themselves. One of the Conferences of MATS, held at Martin Luther Seminary in July 1976, dwelt, among other things, on the theme of "Indigenisation of Theology", in other words, a theology that would speak meaningfully to Melanesians. This search has led many Melanesian thinkers to produce books, pamphlets, theses, and papers to present the point that the gospel must be understood in the Melanesian context, and that many Melanesian concepts may very well cast some new light, and subsequently enrich our common faith in Christ. They have argued favouring the Melanesian position in this respect. But none of these works bears the official title Melanesian Theology, although some sound theological views have been expressed.

These materials that have been produced so far, and many others that will probably be produced, do indeed have some ground upon which a Melanesian theology can be done. However, before this can be done, many important obstacles must be clarified so as to avoid any stereotype theology that will appear Melanesian in its approach and outlook, yet does not speak the Melanesian language. One of these important problems is that Melanesians are racially one people, but differ greatly from one society to another. This can be seen right across the spectrum of the so-called "Melanesian Region", which extends from Fiji in the East to Papua New Guinea in the West, from New Caledonia in the South to the Solomons and Vanuatu in the centre. These Melanesian countries do represent a vast diversity of beliefs and ideologies. This is reflected in, and characterised by, their differing societies and cultures. However, one could say that there are some basic similarities that tend to hold together many of these views. On the other hand, there are also some great underlying differences that identify each particular society and culture, as such within the Melanesian Region. Therefore, in that context, such a general approach will not be a good enough basis for Melanesian theology, as such, because it will not fully express Melanesian thoughts.

Melanesians are the product of the diverse and rich cultures of varying societies. These cultures were the backbone of Melanesian identity and uniqueness. Therefore, philosophy, ideology, and theological beliefs were drawn from this vast and rich background. But, at the same time, without discarding all these aspects of Melanesianness, one has also to take into account the second most important problem, that is, Melanesians of today no longer live as their forefathers did in days past. In other words, Melanesians have, over the centuries, developed – mentally, spiritually, politically, and economically – very fast. These developments have changed and shaped the mentality of modern Melanesians to think as Melanesians, yet, at the same time, differently from their forefathers. This does not mean deviation from the norms, but rather the application of their Melanesianness in the light of their environment.

Melanesian theology in this context has to be able to answer. as well as to give meaning to life, where Melanesians struggle and search for meaningfulness within the traditional and the presentchanging societies. Melanesian theology has to speak and express its thoughts meaningfully in order to maintain the link between the two most important dimensions of the Melanesian way of life, which are reflected in the term "Old and Modern"; whether or not to do away with such things as traditional beliefs, etc., and dwell entirely on contemporary issues that are directly affecting Melanesians here and now. The other extreme, of course, is to go back to the many traditional concepts. The question one would ask then is whether or not either direction is better without the other, or whether both could be taken into account. Whatever the solution is, it is obvious that this is one of the very important issues that must be considered, so as to avoid the proposed Melanesian theology being branded as the "Theology of the Gap" that speaks to no one and thus becomes outdated theology.

What Theology Would a Melanesian Theology Be?

The deciding principle for a Melanesian theology has to be **Christian** in its perspective. This would differentiate if from being entirely traditional, as well as from being absorbed into what may seem to be a philosophical assumption, thus becoming abstract. However, it must be a Melanesian theological reflection on what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do, as Melanesians develop in this competitive and changing world. Traditions are important so as to maintain the uniqueness of Melanesianness, but they must not be a hindrance to the dynamic perspective of the changing Melanesian in his or her application of the traditions in the light of his or her new environment.

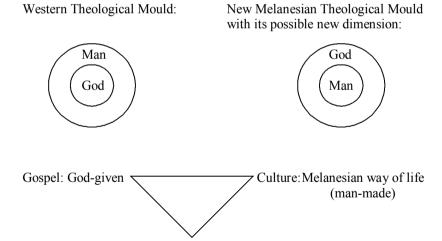
In saying this, the question still remains as to what particular direction should this proposed Melanesian theology pursue. In view of the many outstanding differences that challenge the formulation of a Melanesian theology, the questions one would ask are as follows:

- a. Will a Melanesian theology be a compromise theology, where it will take into account the varying views among the Melanesian societies within the Melanesian region and systematise them and call this work a Melanesian theology?
- b. Will a Melanesian theology be a regional theology, that is, a theology that will be produced within our different regions of Melanesia, and refer to that as a Melanesian theology?
- c. What particular perspective should a proposed Melanesian theology pursue:
 - i. Traditional concepts, ideologies, and beliefs, or
 - ii. Reflecting the growth of Melanesians today; or should both be considered?
- d. Will this proposed Melanesian theology be done by individual Melanesians?

Whatever the answer is to these questions, and the many other likely questions, it is obvious that these are among some underlying issues that must be considered in our search for a possible honest Melanesian theology.

Food For Thought

The Christian gospel has been in Melanesia for over a century. The concern now is to find a way in which the gospel of Jesus Christ may be understood within the Melanesian context. Much of our theological understanding has been shaped in the Western theological mould, and further shaped by our denominational mould. However, one cannot, as yet, argue otherwise, for the issue now is the Melanesian theological mould, with its possible new theological dimension that will be conducive to our understanding of the Christian gospel as Melanesians.



Incarnation

Will it be a compromise?

The Name of God in Melanesia

- Rufus Pech

1. An Historical Sample

In a letter of 14 March 1881, missionary G. Bergmann of Siar, a few miles north of Madang, tells how he used his "magic lantern" to illustrate his telling of the Creation, and of Adam and Eve in Paradise, to the villagers. When he had finished his presentation the villagers responded with a tactful "You are quite right, but the Creator is not called Jehovah, but Kiliwob." The missionary commented in his letter that the name Jehovah had already been introduced at the Rhenish Mission's first station at Bogadjim, and in the interests of unity the Siars would have to get used to calling the Creator, Jehovah.

Meanwhile Bergmann's colleague, Kunze, who had settled on the rim of Kulubob Bay on Karkar in July 1890, was told by his Takian-language informants on Karkar and Bagabag islands that three **tiwud** of truly gigantic stature, Kelibob, Manubbe, and Anute, had shared the creation of the world between them.

The arguments among the Lutheran missionaries of Madang regarding the relative merits of **Tibud Kilibob** or **Tibud Anute**, as compared with **Tibud Jehovah** to designate the God of the Old Testament, continued for many years. A few months before his death in Sydney in mid-1904, Bergmann announced at the missionaries' language conference that he had long had doubts regarding the use of Kilibob for the divine NAME, as had been done at Siar ever since that "magic lantern" evening in 1891, and that from now on he would only use the name Anut. His successor, Helmich, announced in 1907 that this matter had been formalised, but it is clear that the decision in favour of Anut was not made without inner reservations, and had been swayed in part by the fact that the Neuendettelsau Lutherans in the Morobe province had

decided for Anutu in both their coastal and mountain missions. He expresses the continuing problem thus:

The word "Anute" is not quite unknown to our people, but is never used in their legends. Here we hear constant references only to Kilibob. He made their dwelling-places, sun, moon, and stars, etc., and also the people, and gave them all their customs and usages. Since the Kilibob legends contain much that is impure, we have shied away from using this word for the true and holy God. (p. 77 f)

This decision, right or wrong, has had a powerful influence on the course of events in church and society in Madang Province to the present day. Because the majority agreed that **Tibud Anut** was of marginal significance only, a later generation of Christians concluded that their prayers were unheard because they were delivered to the wrong address – the missionaries had fooled them into **praying to the wrong god**. So many of them switched to either God-Manub, or Jesus-Kilibob, respectively – but with inconclusive results.

Meanwhile the Kate- and Jabem-speaking Christians of Morobe had the same economic frustrations, but stuck with Anutu as the highest God.

Along the Sepik coasts, and their offshore islands, it would seem that Wunekau (and other variants of the same name: Ongkai, Wonka, Wanakau, etc.) would have been a natural choice for the Creator's NAME. The people of the Aitape area had assured their pioneer SVD missionary Meyer: "The same one whom you call God (Gott) we call Wunekau." Meyer agreed that Wunekau did indeed have the right attributes for the role.

He hears and sees all, and knows the languages of all the peoples whose areas he traverses. He is of great wisdom and might. The people fear him more than they love him. (p. 128)

Nonetheless Wunekau was no distant skybound deity. He was invoked by builders, musicians, and craftsmen; for protection on the journey, and before battle; for prosperity in the garden, and on the

hunt; in particular, before the felling of a forest giant, for healing in sickness, and to slow down the body's decay after death.

But, no doubt, there were other considerations which induced the missionaries to stick with the imported designation Gott/God. Wunekau's chief representation was the sun, in its two-fold aspect: the rising sun (light), and the setting sun (dark). He was also the deity around whose name the men's cult **parak**, in its two-fold aspect, revolved. And so on.

The SVD missionaries were not alone in this decision to play it safe. The Wedau Pentateuch, published by the Anglicans in 1947, abounds in unassimilated English loan words and biblical proper names in their English form. Thus Deut 10:17 reads: "BADA ami God, tauna gods ai God, ma babada ai Bada" (The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords).

A trenchant critic comments on the unassimilated use of God/gods:

We have here a word with zero meaning, which must be explained, not only inasmuch as it designates God, but also as it is used to convey the pagan conception of "god", respectively, "gods" (cp. Ex 12:12 Egypt ana gods). In which way, however, can it be explained, if not by the aid of the Wedauan vocabulary, and of already existing religious notions, i.e., by the aid of words, one of which might possibly have served as a rendering of **elohim** if one had earnestly sought for it.²

2. A Regional Sample, 1950

Rosin summarises the situation in the New Guinean Bible translations and New Testament translations available in 1950, regarding terms used for translation of **elohim** in the Old Testament, and **theos** in the New Testament.

1. In Dutch New Guinea: the Malay-Arabic (Alla(h) was used throughout.

- 2. In the Lutheran area: **Anutu** (Kate), **Anute** (Regatta), and **Anoto** (Jabem).
- 3. In the Anglican area: Wedau, Mukawa, Binandere, Notu: **God** used throughout.
- 4. In extreme S-E Papua, Anglicans, Methodists, and LMS had agreed to use **Eaubada** ("I am great") in the Suau and Dobu scriptures.
- 5. Elsewhere variety abounded in the Papuan region:
 - a. God used in Kiwai and Kunini (LMS), with Iehovah for theos in the New Testament. Iehovah was also used for theos in the New Testament of neighbouring Goaribari, and of the Panaieti of far-distant Deboyne Island, and by the Liebenzell Mission on Manus from 1921. Eloi was used to translate el/elohim by the LMS for the Namau language of Papua.
 - b. Elsewhere, the LMS used indigenous generic or proper names: **Harihu** (Orokolo), **Atute** (Toaripi), **Dirava** (Motu), **Palagu** (Keapora, Hula), **Oeva** (Mailu).

Rosin comments:

What we must deplore in view of this multiplicity is not the diversity of the renderings itself, but rather the diversity of the principles, or their absence. **Eloi, Iehovah** (for **theos**) and **God** ought to be eliminated altogether.³

3. An Aside: Concerning titles, proper names and nicknames

Before we go on to discover some of these principles, a few words are in place concerning:

a. Generic names or titles – unusually translatable.

- b. Proper names normally untranslatable, but can be transliterated.
- c. Cognomens i.e., surnames, descriptive nicknames, family names, "last names".

A couple of examples to illustrate:

Title: Proper Name:

Cognomen:

Local PNG: Sir John Guise Historical: Pharaoh Raamses "the

Great"

Biblical: Elohim YHWH Tsebaoth

(in the order: YHWH Elohim Tsebaoth)

4. Generic names for God

The Bible opens with the majestic words: "In the beginning God . . ." = **Elohim**, and this title is used in place of the NAME with liturgical regularity to describe the creation of the heavens and of the earth, ending 2:4a. Then, from 2:4b the term **YHWH Elohim** is used consistently (a total of 20 times) till the story of the making of Adam and of their fall into disobedience is complete in 3:24. In this narrative, it is only the serpent who avoids the use of the NAME in 3:1, 3, 5, and speaks only of **Elohim**, using it again as an independent designation of God, as we might do in talking about someone merely as "Sir".

From this, one could already form the suspicion that **Elohim** and **YHWH** are not synonyms, which can just be traced back to the preferences of the "Elohist" and "Yahwist" traditions within Israel, and which the translator, teacher, or communicator of the Word can interchange at will.

Since it is the Jewish scriptures we are discussing, we would do well to listen to their rabbis' insights into the differences between **Elohim** and **YHWH**:

For the rabbinical exegetes, it seems to be a fixed principle that the word **elohim** designates God as the Righteous, Judging One, but that **YHWH** designates him as the Loving, Merciful One (Ex 34:6f). . . . According to Hertz, a modern Jewish expositor, **Adonay (YHWH)** is always used when God is spoken of in close relation to men or peoples, whereas **Elohim** designates God as creator and ruler of the universe. Thus, in the first chapter of Genesis, where the universe is seen as a whole, **Elohim** is used, but in the second chapter, which tells of the beginning of the history of mankind, this divine name is no longer used alone, but coupled with **Adonay (YHWH)**.

While **Elohim** is often used like a proper name, its function is more like that of a pronoun, which points to the proper NAME, which it designates.

The stem from which the Hebrew word **elohim** comes is used in the following forms: **el, eloah, elohim,** and with personal suffixes meaning "my god", "your god", "his god", etc.; also with the definite article "ha **elohim",** the god.

All of these may refer equally to Israel's god (whom we honour with capital G), the heathen gods, and the representations of such gods – the idols. Further, they may refer to indefinite spirit powers, thought of as single, or (polytheistically) as plural, or as a composite "godhead", or as an abstract quality – "godhood" or divinity.

Principles:

- 1. The designation **el**, etc., should always be translated by the nearest equivalent in the language the Bible is being translated into. This will be the word that most nearly covers the whole range of meanings indicated above.
- 2. Wherever the term is used objectively/neutrally, either for the God of Abraham, etc., or for a heathen god or gods, the same term should be used. That is why the term chosen in the language of translation must be

capable of bearing all the meanings mentioned above for **el**, **elohim**, **eloah**.

3. The capital G should be used in English (or any translation which reflects English capitalisation usage) only when it is quite clear that only the God of revelation is meant by the writer or speaker. Thus, RSV correctly renders Jonah 1:6b, when the captain says to Jonah: "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give some thought to us, that we do not perish." Though Jonah's god is "YHWH, the God of heaven", the captain cannot know this until it is revealed in verse 9.

Thus YHWH, the God of revelation, lowers Himself to the level of the other spirit beings, whether real or imaginary, for the purpose of demonstrating His superiority over them, or so that men on earth, themselves, must decide which is the true **elohim**, purely on the merits of the case, as in 1 Kings 18:20 ff. Here it is clear that in vv. 21 and 24 the LORD and Baal are put on the same level for the moment, as **elohim**. The English translation, therefore, should not use a capital G until the final "He is God", because the outcome of the contest is to show who is the true **elohim** – YHWH or Baal. We are not to prejudge it!

4. Finally, while a simple bible history or children's bible may simplify the matter of the divine name(s) by simply using "God" wherever the NAME is indicated, any Bible translation worthy of the name should reflect faithfully the constant interplay of divine NAME, title, and cognomina, or designations, and do so consistently, so that the translation faithfully mirrors the original. To do less than this is to dishonour the NAME and glory of God.

I am distressed and perplexed to see a modern translation like the Takia (Karkar) Genesis, "Mel Fidian san Fun", 1979, using Tubud throughout for

both **elohim** and **YHWH**, in referring to the God of revelation, while employing a variety of terms for the other **elohim** in a passage like Gen 31:19-35 (admittedly this is a tough one to do consistently!). The effect is to eliminate the divine NAME entirely from the Book of Genesis, and to elevate the generic **Tubud** to the position of a proper name, which will almost inevitably be understood polytheistically, as a plural. Also, the usage of the languages of the area is ignored, which consistently use **tubud** as a singular proper noun, with the particular name of the "culture hero" designated whenever the sense of an indefinite composite entry is to be avoided.

At this point I should like to add a final, rather lengthy comment on **tibud**, and its cognates, in the Austronesian languages of the NG Mainland North Coast area, since these provide the best choice for **elohim** in the Old Testament and **theos** in the New.

Throughout this essay I have had in my sights only this Austronesian language family, since my competence in no way extends beyond it. This family extends, as is well known, from Madagascar (Malagasy) in the west, via the Indian offshore islands through Indonesia and the Philippines, and on through Micronesia and Polynesia, leaving behind numerous representatives throughout coastal and island Melanesia. In all major matters relating to language, including kinship terms, cultural and religious terms, each member of this far-flung family should be studied in the context of that family. It is no longer excusable for the translator or communicator of the gospel to concentrate solely on the single language of his choice. Surely, no one would deliberately choose tunnel vision to the 180 degree sweep of vision provided to normal eyesight!

The matter of **tibud** and its cognates, as far as I am aware of it, is: all stem from the ancient Sanskrit (Hindu) **dewata**, meaning god, godhead, and gods in a general way, just as does **el/elohim** for Hebrew, as a member of the Semitic language family. Thus we may find the following in the island groups to the west of us:

Sumatra (Batak) **debata**; North Celebes **duata**; S-W Central Celebes **deata**, all referring to god, gods, higher spirits of the air, as well as spirit understood dynamistically as vital energy, soul, etc.

Thus, in Malay and Indonesian **dewata/dewa** are used in translation for god/gods, as are **dewa** in Javanese and in Dyak (Borneo) and **deata/doeata**, which are the corresponding forms elsewhere in the archipelago.

In Sangirese **elohim/theos** are consistently rendered by **duata/ruata**; in the dialects of Batak, **Debata** (Toba), **Dibata** (Karo), **Leibata/Naibata** (Sumalungun) are used for God and gods.

In the Philippines **divata/davata/dinata** denote the spirits/souls of the deceased.

For a full discussion I refer you to Rosin's Appendix B, "On Translating the Divine Names in the Indonesian Archipelago", pp. 199-211.

In light of the above, we can confidently append the Madang North Coast Austronesian languages to this list, where we have, just for starters: Bel-Nobonob-Amele **tibud**; Ziwo-Takia **tibud**, with the same spread of meanings from spirits, souls of the dead, and ancestors, to demigods and gods. When the white man appeared, he, too, was referred to as **tibud**. For Christians, it also means: the deity, godhead, God. To **tibud**, the Lutheran have attached the traditional name **Anut**, and the cognomina **Ujanzen** and **Zen** – of which, more later.

Having become aware also of the Motuan **dirava**, I would tentatively fit it in under **dewata** by a simple transposition of the second and third consonants – a common device in Austronesian languages – which would yield **divara** as a recognisable cognate of the parent Sanskrit **dewata**. And so one could go on. . . .

5. The Proper Name of God in the Old Testament

We have already met the Tetragrammaton (= Four-letter NAME) in Genesis 2. In the course of the history of the People of God in the years of Exile it became the **unspoken** NAME honoured only in the heart of the faithful Jew, and so came to be forever the **unpronounceable NAME**.

Furthermore, since we know only its consonants, and must guess at its vowels, we cannot even know what its exact meaning may have been, if indeed it had such a meaning. Certainly, what has often been taken as its meaning – the words in Ex 3:14, translated by RSV as "I AM WHO I AM", or, in brief, "I AM", or perhaps the same cryptic sentence put into the future tense – this can suggest to us no more than that YHWH is the living, consistent, faithful One who was/is/will be Abraham's God, and is, and remains the same, forever, and so should be known and honoured by the designation YHWH "throughout all generations".

Besides this, there is no other proper name of God in the Old Testament. All the rest are titles, cognomina, descriptive ascriptions. Ex 15:3 reads **YHWH shemo!** YHWH is His Name! Ex 6:3 does not contradict this, as we have often been taught. It also states **shemi YHWH** = by My Name (YHWH) I was not known (to the fathers) but as **el shaddai**, "God Almighty". This is a descriptive cognomen, not a Name proper.

Principles:

1. This NAME is basically untranslatable, and should not be translated into other languages. Even such admirable attempts as to write "I AM" for the Name, or to substitute for it the pronoun "HE" are unwise. Worst of all, is to substitute for it a basically philosophical term like "the Eternal", as Moffat has done, following some French versions. The only substitution for it should follow that introduced in the Hebrew synagogue and first written in the LXX translation: Adonai (Heb) and Kurios (Gk).

2. Since the NAME is unpronounceable (because we are not sure which vowel sounds it should have), it is not wise to try to transliterate it into other languages. That is to say, it should not be re-supplied with vowels to fit the sound patterns of a given language, so that it can again be spoken, whether as Jehovah, Yahweh, Iehofa, or what have you. This is to make like any other name what is not a name like other names, whether of gods or of men.

It is no longer necessary for us to know His NAME, for it is the name of the God who has revealed Himself in His Word, and in His mighty acts, but chooses to remain hidden and mysterious in His NAME.

The NAME, and that mysterious repository of Israel's sacred objects, the Covenant Box, by their mystery and lack of concrete symbolism, always seek to discourage attempts to make Israel's Covenant God (El Berith) into a conventional idol. The God of Israel truly reveals Himself, but remains the God who cannot be manipulated by His creatures.

So the NAME has fallen silent, and its meaning remains a mystery until it is revealed at the beginning of a new age, in the Name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, "in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell".

The message, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" points to the reality of the coming Saviour's ministry, but cannot be said to explain it. Only the life and works, death and rising again, of Jesus of Nazareth can, and do, do this.

During the "Great Missionary Century", and in its afterglow in the first half of this century, this aspect was widely overlooked, or consciously rejected, particularly in the USA, and idiosyncratic missionaries, eager to spread abroad the NAME of the God of Israel, propagated first **Jehovah**, and then **Yahweh**, as the

name of the One True God in their teaching and their vernacular Bible translations throughout the Third World. It was not until the RSV appeared, that the traditional principle and usage were restored, write official attempts to or pronounce Tetragrammaton YHWH in English Bible translation were given up. This holds good for the GNB and NIV also. All have agreed to follow the precedent first established in the reading of the Hebrew Old Testament in the synagogues, and confirmed in all major translations beginning with the LXX.

3. That is, the principle is to substitute for the unpronounceable YHWH the Hebrew title Adonai. and its equivalents in the various translations Consequently, when we use the proper name of God in the Old Testament, we should let Yahweh and Jehovah return to the classrooms from which they came, and use these approved substitutes in all translation and communication wherever possible. But let Hallelujahs and Hosannas of worship continue to ring in praise around the earth, along with the "Abba Father" and **Kurie Eleison** of the New Testament

Note that while the New Guinea Pidgin Jenesis (1973) still uses **Yawe** consistently wherever **YHWH** appears in the original, the **Eksodas** (1979) has quietly reverted to **Bikpela**. There remains just the further step of capitalising this in full to distinguish it from the not-infrequent cases where the Hebrew itself has **Adonai**. Thus, the continuing presence of the mysterious NAME would everywhere be indicated visibly, as in the original scriptures.

Similarly, in due course, I expect that the older Lutheran vernacular translations will drop **Anutu**, **Anoto**, **Anut**, as locally-acceptable substitutes for YHWH. Being also proper names of the genus **elohim**, their retention can only memorialise the fact that we missionaries have "revealed" to Melanesian converts what YHWH Himself denied the Israelites in their extremity, viz., a clear answer to their question (which is everyman's question), What is His name?

How problematical the results of that missionary experiment could be we have noted on page 1.

6. The titles "Adonai" in the Old Testament and "Kurios" in the New

So far from deprecating the rabbinic "superstition", which discontinued the pronunciation of the NAME, and substituted for it the non-religious title of honour, **Adonai**, we Christians can see in this development a happy aspect of the Father's preparation for His Son, the coming Messiah. For He, JESUS Christ is the Lord (Adonai) of the individual disciple, and of the whole church. He is also the One in whom the hidden name YHWH becomes the revealed name JESUS. Not the name of a "god", but the name of our brother, who is at the same time God's Own Son, thus opening up the way for us to be restored as the adopted children of God.

The Jews' substitution of **Adonai** for **YHWH** may be parallel to the use of the "secret language" of the Melanesian seafarers. Fear and respect of the **masalai** of the deep, combined to make them lay aside their ordinary everyday language and substitute for it the language of the deep, which is not a "real" language, but in which every word parallels one in everyday use.

The word **Adonai** is not the title, must less the name, of a "god" as such. Its use suggests, and points to, what is hidden and reverenced, the sacred NAME, YHWH. In itself, **Adonai** is a term of honour given to a social superior: to a king by his subjects, to a master by his slaves, to an employer by his workers, to the patriarchal father by his children and domestics.

In principle, it is therefore translatable and to be translated. In some members of the Austronesian language family cognates of the Hindu words **tuhan/tuan** and **rajah/raj** appear to be available for use here. Thus the Bel (Graged) language of Madang has, whether knowingly or not, long used a compound made up of these two root words, to express the power and lordship of the Risen Lord Christ.

This is the compound **ujan-zen**, of which the first part is inflectable. The components are: **ujan (tuhan)** meaning: great, tall, big, grand, large, exalted, excellent; **zen (Raja)** meaning: very/exceedingly, large/many; great, renowned, mighty, noble, powerful; a title of respect and honour: lord!⁵ Examples of inflected forms: **Uj a-zen!** = O my Lord!; **Nga Ujagzen** = I am the Lord/the Almighty.

7. The Divine Cognomen in the Old Testament and New, in Relation to the One Name

As noted, the cognomina are not themselves proper names, but are set in apposition to the NAME, or alternatively to the title **El**, in one of its forms. There is only the one name of God in the Old Testament, YHWH – now superseded for us Christians who live in the new age of the New Testament. And there is only one NAME in the New Testament: JESUS; the name at which every knee must bow, whether of heavenly beings (**elohim**), earthly beings (humankind), or under-earthly beings (demonic powers) (Phil 2:9-11, cf. Is 45:23).

Like YHWH, the New Testament NAME (JESUS) is basically untranslatable. In every Christian society, it, too, gains its meaning and content from the believer's study and personal appropriation of the holy life, the saving death and resurrection of Him to whom the NAME is given. He, too, is the "I AM" of the New Testament (as John never tires of reminding us), parallel to YHWH in the Old Testament. In his case, too, the phrase "I AM" does not explain the mystery and reality of the Saving NAME, but, rather, deepens that mystery, and draws the disciple out to worship and adoration.

In principle, since the divine cognomina of the Old Testament are not proper names, though some may function as substitutes for the NAME, they are translatable, and should be translated consistently, even to the **bethel** of **El bethel**.

Basically, then, the New Testament descriptive cognomen **Christ** also should be translatable, since it, itself, is a translation of

the Hebrew **Messiah**. This translation should be attempted, despite the fact that this step was not taken in European Bible translations. For, without translation, it must start out as a zero term in any given language. The result in New Guinea is that, so far, "Christ" is little more than another name for Jesus. But is should not be seen as that.

To avoid being misunderstood, I will add something about the most mysterious cognomen of all in both the Old and New Testaments, that of **ruach/pneuma**: the Spirit. From Genesis 1:2 to Revelation 22:17, this focus of divine influence, though basically indescribable to humankind, has been experienced also as a person. This is because here the Almighty not only speaks to, and touches, but renews, empowers, and indwells the human beings whom He has chosen.

The "Spirit", and the expanded terms, "the Spirit of YHWH" (OT), and "the Holy Spirit" (NT) is **not a third name** alongside YHWH and JESUS. This "third person of the Trinity", as we describe him theologically, is not just the unpronounceable, but basically also the unnameable One.

As we began this enquiry with **El** and **Elohim** meeting and confronting the **el** and **elohim** of primal religions, so we end it with "the Spirit", and "the spirits", and the "spirit of man" on the common ground where all are at home. Here again God's self-disclosure reaches down to meet man's gropings. His aim is that the unity, which primal man feels between himself and the "spirits", may be reborn in an experience of unity, or fellowship, between the Holy Spirit the life-giver and the human spirit of a "new creature", who is "in Christ" in the bonds of faith and love and hope.

This most-mysterious cognomen, too, must be translated – but the question is: in what terms? It was not by chance that the third aspect of Christ's ministry was the casting out of evil spirits (diamones), so that they might give place to the Holy Spirit in the person thus delivered. But, for me, it remains an open question whether the precedent of the translation and use of el/elohim should be followed here, and that a neutral term be sought, which will show the generic link between the diamones and the "good Spirit" of God.

It appears that, by New Testament times, dualistic thinking had progressed to the point where a common term could no longer be used to cover the (demonic) spirits of the universe and the (holy) Spirit of God. But, since this antagonistic dualism is not commonly present in Melanesian belief systems, the dilemma remains: Do we follow the Melanesian and Old Testament patterns and emphasise the generic likeness between the nature spirits⁶ and the creative "Spirit of God that moved over the face of the water", Gen 1:2? Or are we justified in underlining the difference, and even carrying the New Testament trend one step further by **consistently** adding the adjectivals "evil, etc.", to the one side, and "holy, etc.", to the other side in our translations and communication?

Conclusion

Let me wind up with a few provocative suggestions, which may be of interest of communicators who use the New Guinea Pidgin Bible:

I would like to debate the proposition that, for New Guinea Pidgin, it is not yet too late, and still desirable, that a Melanesian substitute for the zero loan word **God** be found to translate **elohim** of the Old Testament and **theos** of the New. For this, the word **tambaran** alone suggests itself as suitable, provided we Christians can lay aside certain prejudices. It does not matter whether its etymology is traced through Kuanua back to Sanskrit **dewata** or to PMP **(t)umpu**, which signifies: ancestor, lord.⁷

Also, I would propose for debate that the word **masalai** be used in the Pidgin New Testament as a satisfactory equivalent for the Hellenistic Greek **daimon**, in place of the present unsatisfactory, and "loaded, alternatives of **spirit nogut** or **spirit doti**. For, like **elohim**, the **daimon** may have a neutral, and even a positive, aspect, just as is the case with Pidgin **masalai**, and its vernacular equivalents. (See footnote 6.)

These final proposals may sound naïve, and even fatuous, but, behind them, lies a plea to both expatriates and Melanesians

involved in rendering and communication of the gospel and of the Word

- that we open our eyes wider, and attempt to get rid of inherited tribal and linguistic tunnel vision;
- that we not emphasise mankind's, or Melanesia's, social and linguistic disunity and particularism;
- that we remind ourselves that HE (YHWH) has made of one all the nations of the earth, and given to each its own place in time and space, but that He has also placed us into racial and linguistic families (of which I have only touched on one);
- that we gratefully acknowledge that, through these racial and linguistic families, we have unsuspected relatives far and wide upon the face of the Earth, which is YHWH's in all its fulness

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- 3. Ibid, p. 88.
- 4. Ibid, p. 21, referring to J. H. Hertz, **Pentateuch and Haftoras, Vol. 1, Genesis**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926-1935.
- 5. Taken from John F. Mager, **Gedaged-English Dictionary** (Columbus OH: Board of Foreign Missions of the American Lutheran Church, 1952) pp.301-355.
- 6. NG Pidgin: **masalai bilong graun**; Bel (Madang): **buga** linguistically akin to Slavic **Boh** = god, God?
- 7. Mager, p. 322.

Instances of "God-talks" In Melanesia

- Esau Tuza

INTRODUCTION

"Theology" is God's word and verdict in human situations of real life. This understanding of theology makes the context from which "theology" is spoken, a priority in determining theological reflections. The writer speaks of "theological reflections", in the sense that theology, at least in Melanesia at this point of time, can only be deduced from attempts by people to state and speak of what God is saying and doing in their contexts. It follows, therefore, that there is yet time for some systematic accounting to be done in Melanesia. In the meantime, however, we think of people and areas in Melanesia where we locate how people see and recognise how God becomes meaningful (God-talk?) in their contexts of speech, religious witness, and work.

For purposes of identification, instances of "God-talks" in Melanesia can be assessed from three general broad categories. They are as follows:

- A. Class-room attempts This includes theological teachings in theological Colleges, seminars by people in theological contexts, and students' writings, mainly their theses.
- B. Personal reflections and involvements This refers to individuals, whose voices are written or heard in Melanesia.
- C. Communal reflections This refers to new religious movements in Melanesia

Having stated some brief surveys on each of the three categories outlined above, a short section (D) on a possible theology of mission in Melanesia presents the writer's own critique of churches in Melanesia.

The paper's real purpose is simply to highlight some issues on theological questions, and help readers to begin to assess their own theological evaluations of their own contexts.

A. CLASS-ROOM ATTEMPTS

All the theological schools in Melanesia have attempted, in one way of another, to interpret European theological thinking with that of Melanesian thought-forms. A quick glance at our various library collections of books will help us to guess that each denomination puts special emphasis on its founder's theological So much has been imparted in Melanesian minds that names such as Luther for the Lutherans, Thomas Aguinas for the Catholics, John Wesley for the Methodists, and John Calvin for the Presbyterians, etc., have become almost as traditional as the names of our ancestors. We inherit, as Melanesians, the "end-product" of Western theological thinking, so that it is, at times, difficult to venture into new areas ourselves to speak about new truths in theological matters. Western theological thinking is reinforced by Western biblical-exegetical developments in such a way that even interpreting the scriptures is not easy for Melanesians to plunge themselves into.

Missionaries, for the last ten years or so, have made attempts to assimilate theological thinking in Melanesia. The late Revd Dr Ronald G. Williams attempted to interpret the theology of atonement in his little book **The Meaning of the Cross**.² Students at Rarongo Theological College, during the initial development of the College, were taught to assimilate Christ's work of redemption through Melanesian sacrificial offerings.

A later development of the College was the concern to cater for the experiences of students entering the College in theological matters. From 1972 to 1982, Rarongo College developed a thematic

approach to theological learning, picking out themes relevant to Melanesian scenes and bringing about areas of teaching in history, theology, pastoral care, etc., to play on themes as such as gods, spirits, cargo cults, nation-building, etc. While much is yet to be determined on how much indigenous this teaching could be, it helped students to develop their own ways of thinking, as they focused their minds on the Melanesian "scenes".³

To assess real issues in Melanesian Christian contexts, and to help people to recognise and "baptise" Christian values into their contexts, has been the thrust of seminars led by Dr Cliff Wright, a Christian educationist, around the Pacific in recent years. 4 Cliff Wright believes, like the social Darwinists, that Melanesians come out of "primal worldviews", and that their thinking could be developed progressively into the Christian way. What theological insights people receive out of these seminars, and what practical implications they have for people are yet to be determined.

A more academic exercise in the attempt to contextualise theology in Melanesia was made by William Burrows. Burrows' "method of theologising" in Melanesia has much to be commended when Melanesian theologians begin to identify their theological issues and enter into systematisation, so long as it is remembered they are not removed from real life.

Theological reflections by students need some recognition in writing. Besides other attempts by Rarongo Theological College students,⁶ there are two attempts that need some careful thought for they both focus on traditional culture, as exemplified by the Christian Fellowship Church in the Solomon Islands,⁷ and some comparative analysis of Independent Church Movements in Africa. One is by the late Revd Joe Gaqurae.⁸ Joe takes incarnation as the crucial basis for contextualisation and indigenisation of theology in Melanesia. Speaking from a cultural area where people believed that Christ is a "fat", "clever", and "white", superior person, an identity exemplified by missionary colonialism, Joe calls on Melanesians to think of Christ as a "Melanesian Christ":

What do we mean by the phrase "Melanesian Christ"? First, we do not intend to water down the fact that, historically, He

was a Jew. He would still remain as a historical figure for reference. A point that we may want to affirm is that He was a Jew, but, in humanity, He shared certain characteristics, which a Melanesian also shares with the Jewish race. As far as common human characteristics are concerned. Christ was both a Jew and a Melanesian. A Melanesian is not a Jew, but he is also not entirely different from him. They are both human beings created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Both are sinners, and in need of salvation (Rom 3:23). Second, we do not attempt to **make** Christ **become** a Melanesian. cannot make Him a Melanesian. He is already a Melanesian. The incarnation affirms the fact that He is already a Melanesian. He has been indigenised, or localised, by God Himself. We cannot do what already has been done. We only have to recognise the fact. . . . Third, it is not pigmentation of skin that we are concerned with, but Melanesian humanness. As far as pigmentation is concerned, He was a Jew. concern is that, in the Melanesian eve of faith. Christ must be Melanesian. If it was possible for Christ to become a Jew, what can stop Him from becoming a Melanesian to me? If this is impossible and blasphemous, then the incarnation is a false story, and has no meaning for a Melanesian.⁹

It is only through the idea of a Melanesian Christ taking its basis on the doctrine of incarnation that beliefs in the resurrection of Christ, Christ as neighbour, and Christ as creator, can be made meaningful in Melanesian contexts.

Joe's assessment of incarnation would seem to reflect belief in the Christian Fellowship Church, an offshoot of Methodism since 1960, that the founder, the so-called Holy Mama (Silas Eto), was God. While Joe mainly read excerpts from Dr Tippett's work, ¹⁰ and the writer's thesis, ¹¹ Atabani Tahu, through reading and research, attempts to rationalise the concept of "Holy Mama", as the basis upon which belief in a Christian God can be made more meaningful in Melanesia. ¹² This study should be fruitful, when one assesses traditional beliefs about God/Spirits, the processes leading to the exaltation of Holy Mama as God, the uses of dreams, visions, and trances as forms of revelations from the divine realm, and how one could reflect these in relation to Christian beliefs about God. It

could prove to be a starting point from which the theology of God and the "Holy Spirit" could be made.

B. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND INVOLVEMENTS

Individual Melanesians have made their contributions in theological writings. These writings came out either through study and reflections on theological issues in Melanesia, or as part and parcel of their social and religious involvements with societies in Melanesian contexts. While the scope of this paper may not permit us to do justice to all, a selection of such individuals should serve our purpose. 13 Bernard Narokobi, a lawyer by profession, could be considered a lay "theologian". He, I believe, has initiated a theology of the revelation of God through the Melanesian worldviews. 14 Contrary to so-called traditional "neo-orthodox theologians", who over-stressed God's special revelation within the history of the Jewish people as the negation, as well as at the expense, of other worldviews and cultures. Narokobi asserts that Melanesian animism is a potential area where God, in the concept of the "spirits", can be seen mightily at work in the Melanesian context. The Melanesian world is full of the dvnamis of God, and we, as Melanesian, experience the "total vision" of Him within our secular world. Within a world, where science and modern technology have tried to push God to the peripheries, animistic worldviews could become a potential area for Christian apologetics of our time.

While Narokobi should be given the credit for speaking of God manifesting His works within our world, Silas Eto, the Holy Mama of the Christian Fellowship Church, Solomon Islands, claims that God in Christ can be reincarnated in the lives of men and women who follow His footsteps. He speaks of "chewing" or eating the biblical insights (only after he read the whole bible from Genesis to Revelation more than 10 times), and swallowing them; the making of human limbs – arms, hands, feet, nose, eyes, ears, mouths, head, heart, etc., into the limbs of Jesus Christ; and his own exposition of John 14:8-11, which suggests that, if Christ the man can be God's Son, we, too, who resemble something of Christ, should be called sons of God. According to Holy Mama, when man's life resembles the life of God, his life becomes a daily worship to God, and there is

no need for Christians to go to church everyday to worship God.¹⁵ During his own search for religious authenticity and meaning, Holy Mama could remind us of Bonhoeffer's phrases of "religionless Christianity", and man "come of age". His ideas could also be stimulating for people who study the inner meanings of the world's religions' temples, ¹⁶ where the temples are seen, or meant to represent, ideals of the inner man. When man inherits what is desired from the temple rituals, he no longer needs the rituals, for his life is already a temple of God.

On a more social and religious level, Fr John Momis and Revd Bishop Leslie Boseto have already spoken loud and clear to us. Fr John, a Catholic priest, considers his role as a priest to be involved with issues relating to social justice. For him, it is within the political arena of Papua New Guinea that people's liberation must be determined. By entering into politics to exercise his "priestly role", Fr John has "de-sacralised" his "traditional priestly role", which would not allow him to be involved with the state. Today's pope would certainly not have encouraged it!

The church/state relationship has always been a cold point of dialogue as far as churches in Melanesia are concerned, but for Fr John – and one could also consider Fr Walter Lini (Anglican) and the Revd Fred Timakata (Presbyterian) of Vanuatu, who struggled to lead their people to Independence in 1980 – a new theology of the relationship between the church and the state has been developing. Such theology would take national unity and independence as the arena within which the people of God demonstrate their Christian witness and service.

National unity and independence are recognised as very vital by the Revd Leslie Boseto, former Moderator of the United Church, and now Bishop of Solomon Islands Region of the United Church. According to Bishop Boseto, the church is the people who make up the unity and the independence of the country. This provides an arena for an ecumenical witness rather than a stress on denominational differences. Let him speak his own words:

In Melanesia, we really need to emphasise that people who participate in God's love are the church. The time of looking

at the Bishop, or the minister, or the general secretary, as **the church** must be continually discouraged. We need to encourage more lay members to actively participate. . . . It is my strong hope that when all Christians in Melanesia are caught up by the activity of God's Spirit, then we will rise above our denominational boxes to see each other as brothers and sisters. Our relationships with our denominations are not so important; relationship with the Lord of the church is very important.¹⁸

Couldn't we consider Leslie as a "father" of ecumenical theology for Melanesia? Certainly his involvements with the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC), the Pacific Conference of Churches, Solomon Islands Christian Association, the Melanesian Institute, Commission for World Mission of the Uniting Church in Australia, Council for World Mission, and the World Council of Churches speak for themselves. This is not to overlook his grassroots conferences on the theme of "The whole gospel for the whole man of the whole world", which are basically inter-denominational and communally-oriented in the Solomon Islands societies.

C. COMMUNAL REFLECTIONS

i) What does God require of us? Let us do justly, and walk humbly with our God. This seemed to be the tone of the message of two church leaders' ecumenical meetings held in Lae, January 1979, and Port Moresby, 1980. These meetings were convened in preparation for the WCC's Melbourne Consultation on "Your Kingdom Come". These seminars, whatever they speak for, point to one direction. Common efforts by Christians, united witness to bring about justice in development, must be the direction towards which all churches in Melanesia Injustice is seen as unlimited freedom by the exploiting few, as are laziness, dishonesty, deception, and Christians are called to serve the cause of the under-privileged, the poor, and the oppressed.¹⁹ Here, we may visualise a theology of liberation based on Christian community solidarity.

- ii) Can Christ's incarnation be reenacted? Mention was already made of Silas Eto, the Holy Mama of the CFC, believing that man can resemble God in some way. From his point of view, this is true also from a religious biblical point of view. The concept of Holy Mama as God, however, came from the community of believers of the CFC. To them Holy Mama is God, because he forgives sins, heals the sick, raises the dead and is seen in visions together with Elijah, Moses, and Jesus. He is, therefore, to them, a spirit, for God is spirit.
- Is there a theology of the Holy Spirit? For the CFC, the iii) Holy Spirit is identical with Jesus Christ, God, and Holy Mama. Some people of Misima (Papuan Islands, Milne Bay Province) associated the great spirit Yabuwaine with God's Holy Spirit.²⁰ The spirits, particularly in reference to new religious movements in Melanesia, is a potential area where some theologies of the Holy Spirit can be deduced. Thanks to the efforts of the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, in publishing three series of POINT, edited by Wendy Flannery, on Religious Movements in Melanesia. 21 Melanesians now have a wealth of materials and resources, at least from the grass-roots of the churches, as far as religious experience is concerned, to think theologically about the movement of the Holy Spirit within and amongst their own people. The writer believes that it is from the point of view of the leading and intervention of the "Holy Spirit" (in Melanesian terms) that both a theology of God, and the hope of an eschaton, can be given their meanings, particularly on issues related to liberation ²²

D. THEOLOGY OF MISSION?

While Melanesian churches speak on relevant issues relating to their churches and nations, they lack a forward and outward looking into the world to enable them to conceptualise a theology of mission outside of their cocoons.²³ A very close friend of mine, in a

personal letter to me, expressed this concern in general, as he visualised the nature of relationships existing between the United Church, the churches in Melanesia, MCC, and PCC. He stated that, while the United Church was committed to the idea of renewal from within itself, he

If we, as Christian churches, are locked within our own cells, we can never be true to Christ's great commission (Matt 28:18-20) to make Christ's disciples in the world. Perhaps we, as churches in Melanesia, need to look closely at a number of issues which might help our churches to be a little bit more "missionary-minded".

First, and perhaps foremost, we need to free ourselves from a great sense of dependency on money channelled through our churches in the name of "mission work" by our overseas partner churches. As far as the writer is concerned, there are two things which are quite alarming about our dependency on overseas aid. First, for the United Church, the Anglicans, the Church of Melanesia (and Catholics also?) between 70 per cent and 95 per cent of their annual income comes from overseas. Closely connected to this, from the United Church's point of view, when people talked of "Partnership in Mission and Development", 25 they often asserted that we as Melanesians are poor in monetary terms, but are rich in people as resources. When we have people to do things, but have no money resources to act upon our Christian calling, we have no power to implement our sense of mission within our society and the world. The writer believes that this is an issue which MCC, SICA, PCC, and other world bodies in relation to church and society issues, need to look into carefully, and envisage some practical planning for awareness towards some practical ends.

Second, and perhaps equally important, is the present attitude of our overseas partner churches (the co-called First World countries), who hang on to their financial "powers" in the name of "missionary work", at the neglect and expense of our work as churches for mission (even to their own doorsteps). Instead of listening to lively theological reflections now at work with Third World countries, ²⁶ and enabling them, with monetary resources, to implement their work theologically, the Western churches are treating the Melanesian churches like children who beg for money mainly for their domestic affairs. While transnational companies and foreign investors teach us that money can be extracted from our natural resources and used elsewhere, our partner churches overseas still think of our countries as poor countries which can only be given money from their own "capitals". This goes to prove that, while we think theologically, our brothers and sisters overseas still think of us as recipient churches. From a United Church point of view this situation needs to be looked into very carefully within the infrastructure of the Council for World Mission, the Commission of World Mission of the Uniting Church in Australia, and the Council for Mission and Ecumenical Co-operation of the Methodists and Presbyterians in New Zealand. Unless and until we are sharing some "equal resources", in terms of people and money, there is no such thing as equal partners in mission and development.

Finally, it seems to the writer that, while the world, as far as churches are concerned, is entering on an area for "equal sharing" in the mission of the church, the churches in Melanesia are still suffering from the shock of neo-colonialism. Words like "nationalism", "localisation", "indigenisation", "the local contexts", even "incarnation", if not properly looked into in a wider church context, can kill any lively sense of missionary endeavour. Let us hope these words give way to ecumenical ventures, which may lead to a creative sense of mission for the church.

CONCLUSION SUMMARY

This paper does **not** present a general survey of theological issues in Melanesia, rather, it is a presentation of some theological reflections in Melanesia, particularly by Melanesians. These

reflections need to be properly recorded, further analysed, and, if need be, systemised to signify some authentic (if not homegrown and syncretistic) theological contributions by the people of Melanesia. Particularly important in this respect are theological reflections by individuals and communities, which may look quite "heretical" from a traditional Christian point of view, but quite authentic and cultural, from Melanesian points of view. To ignore these is simply to ignore theological issues, which are based on authentic religious expressions. These are lively local theological contributions that need to be vocalised.

While local theological contributions seek identity and relevancy within the natures of local churches and religious movements, both the local churches and overseas partner churches need to work together, carefully, to discern some Melanesian theologies of the church's mission to wider societies in Melanesia and the world. If we believe the catholicity of the church, then we must strike a careful balance between the church within the local contexts and the church as universal. This is not only the responsibility of Melanesian churches, but it is also a responsibility towards our partner churches overseas.

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SYMPOSIUM:

Theologies in Contexts

SEEING WESTERN THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT

- Paul Richardson

All round the world, at the present time, new approaches to the study of theology are making their appearance. Black Theology, African Theology, Asian Theology, the Theology of Liberation, and now Melanesian Theology, are all giving the universal church fresh insights into the meaning of Christian faith. In the past, missionaries from the West tried to present the gospel to people from different cultures in concepts that were meaningful to them. The result was what some Africans have called "stepping-stone" theology, a useful but transitional stage on the road to the development of indigenous theology. Now Christians from the Third World are producing their own interpretations of the Christian message in terms of their own cultures and worldviews.

Actually, this is not a new development in the history of the church. Theology has always been contextual, although the term itself has only been used in the past 15 years or so. Unfortunately, theologians of a previous age were not always aware of the way in which cultural factors shaped their thinking. As a result, there were bitter disputes between, for example, Latin and Greek theologians, in which both sides failed to understand the contribution to their disagreement made by differences in language and philosophical background.

In modern times, awareness of what Richard Niebuhr termed "the social sources of denominationalism", has been a big spur to the ecumenical movement. As pluralism in theology continues to develop, acknowledgment of the fact that theology always has been, and always will be, contextual could be a powerful factor influencing Christians to look with sympathy at different expressions

of the faith around the world. It might also prevent us trying to set up any one form of theology as a norm or a standard, by which all the rest must be judged. This is a trap, into which people from the West sometimes fall. They assume that their own theology is somehow neutral and objective, a scholarly enterprise relatively free of cultural bias. There are even Third-World theologians who encourage these Western illusions. Gustavo Gutierrez, for example, claims that Liberation Theology offers a new way to do theology, far removed from the remote, academic Western approach. Gutierrez has a point, in that Liberation Theology is far more self-conscious about its relationship to everyday struggles than is most Western theology; but even European theology can be seen as a response to the pressures of society.

A good example of this is provided by perhaps the greatest Western theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth. Barth has described how the key moment in his own theological development was the day he opened the newspaper to read a letter in support of the German Kaiser's war policy signed by almost all his old teachers of theology. This shattered Barth's faith in liberal theology, and launched him on the path that led to his great commentary on Romans, with its affirmation that all we know of God is what He chooses to tell us in His Word. The rise of Hitler and the Second World War only confirmed Barth's negative assessment of liberalism, and of the ability of human beings to discover the truth about God through religious experience, or with the aid of their reason. Neo-orthodoxy has its roots in the crisis Western Europe passed through in the first half of this century. Ironically, those theologians who claimed to be critical of human culture, in fact, shaped their theological outlook in response to political events.

Neo-orthodoxy was succeeded in the West by various forms of "secular Christianity". Again this represented an attempt to respond to developments in European culture. In the 1960s, the major challenge came from the dominance of empirical philosophy, and the scientific worldview, to which this is so closely linked. Science has undermined religious belief in a number of ways. Undoubtedly, it has given people confidence in the ability of human beings to solve any problem by technological innovation. As John Robinson put it in **Honest to God**, quoting Bonhoeffer, man has

"come of age", and he no longer needs God to hold his hand. The American theologian, William Hamilton, provides a personal anecdote, which helps to show what this means. Hamilton tells how he stood with his young son looking up at the sky at night. He tried to excite his son's wonder at the beauty of the stars, but the boy was a true child of modern America: "Which one did we put up there?", he asked.

Perhaps the most important way in which science has challenged religion lies in the method that science has adopted. The scientist bases his conclusion on evidence he can observe, quantify, and evaluate. He always looks for a rational explanation of what he can see. He recognises no **ples tambu**, and refuses to accept that any event should be outside the scope of his investigation. He cannot afford to put things down to "acts of God", or explain phenomena in terms of divine causation. If he did, he would be expressing defeat. The words of Laplace to Napoleon are well known: "God – I have no need of that hypothesis."

All this has made Western theologians reluctant to see God as the explanation for events in the world, in case they be accused of advocating belief in a "God of the gaps". At the same time, empirical philosophers, heavily influenced by the scientific method I have tried briefly to outline, have pressed theologians to give evidence for their beliefs. As a result, the dialogue with science and empirical philosophy has come at the top of the agenda for many theologians in Anglo-Saxon countries.

Other examples could be given of the way in which Western theology is culture-bound. A major problem for the church in Western Europe is the alienation of a large section of the working class from organised religion, and this has led to a growing interest in Marxism, as can be seen from the **Theology of Hope** of Jürgen Moltmann, or the political theology associated with J. B. Metz. With the growth of the women's movement, particularly in the US, Feminist Theology has moved to the centre of the stage. Conservative evangelicals often claim to be an exception to this pattern, on the grounds that their theology is shaped solely by scripture. Their attitude to scripture, however, which leads them to treat it as an inerrant authority in matters of faith, can be seen as the

result of many people having to live in a constant state of flux, without meaning or purpose. Peter Berger has written about the "homeless mind" of the 20th century. Confronted by the complexities and uncertainties of life today, men and women look for security and certainty, for a fixed point by which they can take their bearings in life. Contemporary evangelicalism has been able to tailor its message to meet this need.

Where does all this lead us? In one important aspect, the knowledge that all theological reflection is, to some degree, culturebound can be a source of relief and liberation. It should set us free from the subconscious assumption that Western theology is somehow the norm by which we are to judge every other type of theology. In other words, it spells the end of theological At the same time, an understanding of the ethnocentrism. relationship between theology and culture, along the lines I have indicated, is bound to call into question the possibility of any talk about God at all. We seem to have arrived at the conclusion that all views are the products of cultural determinants. All theologies are equal, but all are equally wrong. Time precludes a full response to this problem, but I would like to plead for **interaction** as the best model for understanding the relationship between religion and culture. In this brief paper, I have been chiefly concerned with the impact of culture on religion, but a complete account of the relationship between them would have to look at religion's influence on culture. Some historians, for example, have argued that scientific progress occurred in the West because Christianity provided a worldview that made this possible.

There is no trans-cultural essence of Christianity, at least not one to which we have access. There is no way in which we can come to know God, and speak of him except in terms of our own culture. Even the New Testament presents the gospel message clothed in the cultural dress of its time, and, as J. D. C. Dunn and others have pointed out, it contains a variety of theological viewpoints. We have no privileged road to truth that by-passes culture. This makes pluralism inevitable. The universal church is bound to be the home of different theologies. Let us hope they will live together on good terms! However, let us not conclude from this that discrimination is impossible. The question must be faced as to

whether a particular theological position is Christian or not. There is no trans-cultural norm by which we can judge, but, since all our theologies are meant to be **Christian** theologies, I think we are entitled to look for some family resemblances between them. In seeking to decide whether a certain form of theological expression is acceptable or not, we should ask, not whether it corresponds to a given standard, but whether it belongs to the family. In its own idiom, does the theology we are discussing show signs of kinship with other theological forms in different cultures? Pluralism in theology does not mean there will be no need for judgment and discrimination, only that the task of evaluation must be performed with enormous sympathy and empathy.

THEOLOGIES OF THE "THIRD CHURCH"

- John D'Arcy May

Walbert Buehlmann, the director of Franciscan missions, was sitting in his office in Rome one day, when he realised something was wrong with the map of the world on his wall. After pondering it for some time, he reached for the scissors, cut the map in half, and transposed the two halves. Now it looked right: the Pacific was in the centre! He has been thinking how, long ago, the Mediterranean (lit,: "the sea at the centre of the earth") had ceased being a barrier to the peoples living around its shores and had become a high road of travel, a medium of communication between them, thus giving rise to the civilisations of North Africa, the Middle East, Greece, and Rome, and later Europe. Today, the Pacific is becoming the new Mediterranean, our true central sea: jet travel shrinks distance, and a hitherto unimagined community of diverse peoples is gradually taking shape.

In his book, **The Coming of the Third Church**, Buehlmann shows how the continents of "the South" will be the Christian continents of the future. By the year 2000, perhaps two-thirds of all Christians will live in the countries of the so-called Third World, and the church's centre of gravity – meaning power and resources, teaching authority, and theological creativity – will slowly but surely

be shifting south. This process is already evident in the significance of the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the Liberation Theology that is their voice, and the consequent weight of the joint statements of the Latin American Bishops' Conference, as it responds to these new developments.

I would venture to say that all the very diverse theologies emerging from the Third Church have one basic theme in common: liberation. To many church people in Melanesia, including some seminary lecturers, the very term Liberation Theology is a provocation, conjuring up pictures of Marxists and socialists undermining the authority of the gospel. This question deserves serious discussion, which it is getting, e.g., in Germany, as Rome confronts the Latin Americans on this very issue. Yet a great deal of ignorance of the situation of dependency and oppression, out of which these theologians are speaking, misunderstandings of what they are actually saying, and a certain "evangelical" prejudice are at work here. It is my personal conviction that the theme of liberation is deeply biblical in its preferential option for the poor and oppressed, and that it takes its place alongside other central themes of Christian tradition, such as sanctification, at the time of the Desert Fathers, and the shaping of the Orthodox churches of the East, or justification, at the time of the Reformation. From denoting the struggle to be free of the alien influences of the Western missions on church life and indigenous cultures, the theme of liberation has been radicalised to call into question the whole expansionist, aggressive. acquisitive identity of the – white Christian! – West.

A Buddhist temple I visited in Sri Lanka was decorated with murals and frescoes depicting the life of the Buddha and the coming of his teaching to Sri Lanka. Only one of the paintings had been disfigured. It showed Portuguese soldiers destroying a Buddhist shrine, and towards this the people had showed their resentment. The soldiers and merchants who plundered the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were mainly European Christians (though some were Arab Muslims); the ships on which their cannon were mounted had the cross painted on their sails. Memories such as these die hard. The peoples of the Pacific, though their encounter with Christianity was not always peaceful, did not have to endure shocks anything like as severe as these. Great theologies, as a rule,

formulate answers to great problems, and in our relatively placid corner of the world we must try to realise how deep was the alienation which led to the sometimes strident tones of Liberation Theology.

Though liberation may be the dominant theme of the new theologies emanating from the Third Church, it is understood in markedly different ways in different contexts, partly because of the very different cultural backgrounds of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some - mainly the Asian Christians - mean it in the spiritual sense of inner, psychological freedom from the sinfulness and transitoriness of human nature; others - mainly the Latin Americans, and those of the Africans, who are still struggling against racist oppression – mean it in the political sense of freedom from the unjust and sinful structures of society, with their consequent poverty and oppression. Common to both approaches, however, is the centrality of what has come to be called **praxis** (a term unabashedly borrowed from Marx), whether spiritual or political. This, whether rightly or wrongly, is the key point of opposition to the theologies of the West. These are seen as being too academic, too beholden to the laws of logic, and the ideals of science, to be relevant for those who are struggling for their very survival in their dependence on Western economies, and their helplessness in the face of Western technologies. Of course, there is considerable tension between the spiritual and the political senses of liberation, which is faintly reflected in the attitudes of evangelicals and charismatics, on the one hand, and those who are committed to the ecumenical movement, on the other, in the South Pacific. The fascinating thing, however, is that these differences of emphasis and apparent contradictions are being worked out in a "South-South" discussion among the more-farsighted theologians on each side, for example, in the forum of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and its periodical Voices of the Third World. We may look forward to the day when Melanesians, too, will make their distinctive contribution to these discussions.

Theologies, like any other expressions of meaning, assume their full significance only in relation to contexts. I should like to identify two very broad and fundamental contexts, which we might call both "geo-political" and "geo-cultural", in which the debates

sketched above are taking place, before going on to give examples of the contributions being made in them. The first context I call the "Mediterranean-Atlantic", including, as it does, in its area of common culture and the presuppositions of its discourse the highly-diverse traditions of Christian Europe, and their derivatives in both North America and such Latin American countries as Brazil, Peru, and Nicaragua. Even if Karl Marx is turning both Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther on their heads, so that their lofty thoughts finally touch the firm ground of social reality, the sometimes heated discussion can take place in a language shared in common.

The second context, I call the "Indian-Pacific", including therein the highly-spiritual traditions of Asia, and the triballyoriented cultures of Africa, Oceania, and Australasia. Here, too, there is certainly no lack of variety, but the basic terms of reference are communal rather than individualistic, and whether the medium of expression is oral or literary, experience and narrative generally take precedence over conceptual analysis and formal logic. In each of these two broad contexts, and in many of the sub-contexts which they embrace, "liberation" means the struggle to be free of the Western Christian identity imposed from without, and to regain the cultural identities that have been submerged in it. In both, praxis has priority as the means of achieving this end. Christians, and Marxists could each use these two key terms within their own traditions, though, of course, in widely differing senses. Here we see in outline the basic ecumenical problem faced by the Third Church, and some approaches to solving it.

Hugo Assmann, one of the more radical Latin American theologians, and thus working within the Mediterranean-Atlantic context, makes no concessions to the traditional **loci theologici**: "The original 'text' has become our reality and our practice", i.e., analysis of, and response to, the situation of oppression, in which these Christians find themselves has precedence even over the New Testament, because "In the Bible, no message is valid unless it is 'made true' in practice", and "faith must be understood as basically its practice". By contrast, Raimundo Panikkar, also a Catholic theologian, but this time from India, maintains that whoever would "translate" Hindu spirituality and doctrine for fellow-Christians "has to be, to a certain extent . . . converted to the tradition from which he

translates" if he is to participate fully in the "intra-religious dialogue", i.e., the dialogue which must take place at the heart of one's own religious convictions. In Assman's case, context is placed above text; in Panikkar's, the plurality of texts is taken seriously, without giving pre-eminence to any one of them; in both, Christian identity, as it has been defined by the West, is laid open to radical reinterpretation.

The more-reflective theologians of the Third Church do not hesitate to claim that they are developing a whole new epistemology. i.e., a new approach to theological knowledge. In Latin America, Juan Luis Segundo shows how theological understanding that is truly liberating is circular; it begins in **praxis**, which is identification with the struggle of the poor, and, after opening up for us the meaning of the inspired texts, it ends in renewed and more enlightened **praxis**. There are very few theologians, however, who actually complete this circle; for many, the abstractions, which are merely instruments of understanding, become an end in themselves. In Sri Lanka, Segundo's fellow-Jesuit Aloysius Pieris says that, for the Asian mind, understanding that does not change anything, whether in the spiritual or the political realm, disqualifies itself as understanding. Even the elaborate conceptual analyses of Buddhist philosophy and psychology, of which Pieris is a recognised master, in both theory and practice, are pursued towards the sole end of clarifying and facilitating the practice of meditation, which, for the Buddhist, is the way of liberation.

The best of the liberation theologians bring about a synthesis of the spiritual and political emphases, which, at first sight, seem to be so opposed. Echoing the conviction, which has grown out of listening to the poor, as they search the scriptures for signs of hope in a hopeless situation, the Brazilian Leonardo Boff insists: "The 'poor' is not just one theme among many in the gospel; it is a constitutive element, without which the message of the kingdom as good news cannot be understood"; indeed, "we can say (and hopefully our German theologians hear us) that the bias of liberation is the only hermeneutically-correct stance from which to start the reading of the sacred texts, a bias that does not violate the nature of Revelation". Yet, whereas Boff, working in a country that is still largely Christian, is able to say that "The action of the church should

be able to contribute to the process of liberation, because of its very identity", Pieris, aware that Christians in Asia are a tiny, but overprivileged, minority, sees in both the destitution, which characterises the staggering poverty of the Asian masses, and the serene and self-sufficient spiritual authority of the Buddha, a challenge to this Christian identity. His language is forceful because the task is urgent: only when the church has been baptised in the Jordan of Asian religiosity, and crucified on the cross of Asian poverty, can it begin to assume the new Christian identity of a truly Asian church.

And what of Melanesia? While there is undoubtedly much still to be learned from the Western traditions in which you were formed, and while it is only possible to adapt successfully what you have securely mastered, it is also apparent even from this schematic survey of some theologies of the Third Church that these will probably be mch more helpful to you. In them, you hear the voices of brothers and sisters who have emerged from a crueller experience of colonialism than yours, and who are much more aware of the exploitative economic forces still bearing on you. The sooner you join in the many-sided South-South dialogue that is already in progress, the better for all concerned.

It is the purpose of the discussion which follows to reflect on the possibilities opened up for Melanesian theologians by the theologies being developed elsewhere in the Third World (assuming that Melanesians are happy about being included in the Third World!). I do not wish to anticipate this discussion, but perhaps I can suggest in conclusion some possible starting points. writings of Bernard Narokobi, and others, have left us in no doubt that there is an urgent need to forge a "Melanesian identity", which will help the peoples of these islands find a secure place in a complex and threatening world. As these countries regard themselves as Christian, this will also be a Christian identity. It is the task of Melanesian theologians to explore ways in which these two streams of tradition, the "noble traditions" and "Christian principles" mentioned explicitly in the preamble to the Constitution of Papua New Guinea, can flow together into a synthesis that is both culturally and ecumenically viable. It follows that the peoples of Melanesia experience "liberation" primarily as the struggle for cultural liberation, the need to feel that they are defining their own

identity. Under the influence of the economic, social, and political pressures that are becoming apparent, however, this may be regarded as only the first stage of a more far-reaching process.

Perhaps the most significant question for us is how Melanesians will interpret the **praxis** of liberation. The concept of **praxis** seems to suggest that the means of achieving one's goals are important in themselves as the seedbed of reflection, whereas Melanesians are often said to be oriented towards results, no matter how they are reached. Will this introduce a more-pragmatic note to liberation theology? The answer to this and many other questions lies in the hands of Melanesians themselves.

SILAS ETO, THE "HOLY MAMA", AND THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH*

– Esau Tuza

In case you are not familiar with the Christian Fellowship Church, I would like to give you a short historical account of Silas Eto, the man, and how his movement became a church; this, I think, may help us to raise some of the issues that are important in the Melanesian religious movements. This will help us to think about theology in Melanesia.

First, then, a portrait of the man. He was born about 1905, and he died last year (1983). This is the man who is called "Holy Mama". Holy Mama means Holy Father; or, some would say, God. He went to college about 1928, and he came back to the village where he was born, called Dive in the Kolobagea area of the Western Solomons. He went to a Pastors' College, which was run by the Methodist mission, and he graduated in 1932. When he went back to his village, he started to build a very big church at Kolobagea, a huge church, which was to be the Church of the Trinity. On its front door, he had a cross, with biblical words underneath it, a text from John 3:16. Inside this church building, he had a crucifix with a human figure at the foot of the cross, holding a shield and spears (this symbolises Solomon Islanders during the

headhunting days, who are now coming under the cross of Jesus Christ). And then he wrote a text underneath, saying that we are no longer under the Law of Moses, but under the grace of Jesus Christ. This was attached to a post in the middle of the church; everyone could see it. The Methodist people, particularly the leaders, were very curious about this crucifix. They did not like a crucifix in the church, because they considered it idolatrous; they liked to see an empty cross. So they criticised Silas Eto (some even accusing him of being a follower of Roman Catholicism). Apparently, when Eto did this, the church became alive. Methodist worship, as you know, consists of a hymn, a scripture reading, then another hymn, a sermon, a prayer, and a benediction; it was a one-man show, with no participation by the community. He was quite different; he encouraged people to sing and clap their hands, and when he went to the church, he would say: "Good morning, Jesus". By 1932, revival began to take place in his church, a revival rather like a Holy Spirit There, people fell unconscious; some of them sang praises and raised their hands, some cried, and some felt a shooting pain in their hearts. This continued on for a number of years under the supervision of a particular person, whose name was Revd J. F. Goldie. He was a unique character. He accepted criticism from expatriates, but he looked after this movement in such a way that the leader of it could see himself closely allied with Goldie, the chairman of the district

Eto's church thus spread to about three-quarters of the Methodists in the area. After the "descent of the Holy Spirit", as they called it, Eto went about and built villages in orderly fashion. The houses would be in rows, very straight, the sleeping houses on one side, and the cooking houses behind them; and the church would be either in front of the rows of houses, or in the middle. Then he would have one area, which he said belonged to those who were yet to be born. Nobody was allowed to make any gardens around there. Gardens and other forms of development took place at the rear, at the very back of the village. After he had done that, he also encouraged people to work on their plantations. Gradually, he established villages with 15 plantations. If any church is localised financially in Melanesia, it is the Christian Fellowship Church. It is financially independent, as well as liturgically independent.

By about 1950, this movement swept into the Methodist churches under the direction of other church leaders. The person most concerned about this was the one who took the place of Goldie. the Revd George Carter. He became chairman in the late 1950s, and he was actually witnessing the kind of worship which started in Paradise, as Eto's settlement was called, and was now spreading around other village areas of the church. Partly because people didn't like the kind of worship Eto did, but partly because people thought he was being fêted with prestige from the people, the church leaders, particularly the catechists and the ordained ministers, were very curious about Silas Eto. And so they tried to crush his movement in his own particular area. Unfortunately, the people of other areas also requested Eto, but the leaders said to him: "We do not want you to come here", and they asked him to go away. But he said: "Stop! You didn't ask me to come, but the people asked me; do you think the Holy Spirit would ask me to go?" That was his kind of logic.

This movement was so great, and so catching on the people, that, by 1969, there was a clash between the Methodist Church and the CFC. At that time, they were not yet called CFC, but "The Way". There was a confrontation between these church leaders of "The Way" and George Carter, in which it was said that the CFC church was the church of the evil spirit. They replied: "No, we are the church of the Holy Spirit!" And so a schism began to take place, and, by 1960, the CFC broke away. They recognised themselves as a church, and, between 1960 and 196, they worked on their own constitution. By 1965, they were established and recognised as the Christian Fellowship Church. They wanted to call it the Methodist Fellowship Church, but the Methodist people resented that. This, briefly, is the history of the movement.

Now, Silas Eto is called the Holy Mama; and with that we are entering theology. Holy Mama means Holy Father, and for many it would also mean God. They would say: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and of the Holy Mama"; it's not complete until the Holy Mama is mentioned with the triune God. In other words, we have a Quaternity rather than a Trinity. This is a coinage which the Methodists did not like, because they said: "We cannot worship man; we can only worship God in the Trinity." We

can debate whether this is heretical or not. But history shows that the concept of Holy Mama contains a profound sense of liberation – "liberation" in inverted commas, if you like! First, you have witnessed how the followers were manipulated by Methodism. They could say: "In the Methodist mission, we never had experienced the Holy Spirit; we never experienced ourselves as people in the church; we didn't feel indigenous. Only when we experience the Holy Spirit do we know who we are in the face of God." In my research, I have made some record of people, who feel liberated from the Methodist mission, and are now part of the United Church.

Some people experience forgiveness through contacting Holy Mama, and there are references in my thesis where people said: "In the Methodist church, we felt as if we were nothing but inferior, selfish people, and we were never treated as equals. But, with Holy Mama, we forget our sins, we feel our burdens have gone; we feel as if we are free" (I say "liberation" in inverted commas!). Holy Mama also performed a lot of healing. He healed the sick, the lepers, he prayed for women who were barren, and they gave birth, and he healed people who were **longlong** (mentally deranged). I have seen him, in 1978, healing a woman who was said to be trapped by a vinaroro (erotic) magic. (In Melanesia, there are certain men who want women, and they perform certain rituals for this purpose.) This woman would call the name of the man, and she would run off into the bush every day, and people would try to calm her down. Holy Mama visited the village, and they brought this woman – I shall call her Mary – and he asked the people who were holding her back to release her. So they released her, and he provided a little chair, on which she sat, and then he asked the people to tell their stories about how this **longlong** came about. They told the story, and then he put his hands around the woman, and he said: "God in the front, the Holy Spirit on my right, Jesus Christ on my left, Holy Mama on your back; go and be cured!" And she stood up. I haven't heard of any further occurrences of the **longlong**. He also healed two children, who were affected by charms; he went and prayed over them and they were healed.

They also saw Holy Mama with the Spirit. He was encountered in worship. (I'm not sure whether this is the Wesleyan jargon of the "warmed heart".) When their heart "grew hot", they

would see Moses, Jesus Christ, and Holy Mama. This happened, either in Eto's presence, or when he was not present; and it is mainly because of these things that people began to call him Holy Father. Holy Mama did not invent the title, and he seldom used it in the first person singular. He would say, "The Holy Mama"; he would not say "I am the Holy Mama", because the Holy Mama is simply the same as saying the Holy Father. He would say "the Holy Mama did this" rather than "I did this". The unique observation I made in 1981 was that, for him, the Holy Mama is still alive, but is no longer in the body of Holy Mama: he is outside of Holy Mama, so that, in their worship, they no longer focus the worship onto the Holy Mama, but mainly onto a string between two poles. Holy Mama and the people would be worshipping, and they would want the vision of Holy Mama there – not the Holy Mama "inside" Silas Eto. It is peculiar, and hard to grasp.

In an article, which I wrote in 1981, called "The Demolition of Church Buildings by the Ancestors", presented at a seminar in Brisbane (to be published this year in The Gospel is not Western, Orbis Books, edited by Garry Trompf), I spoke about this kind of worship. No longer was worship in the church building; if it was in the church building, it is a community meeting with the people, and the Holy Mama sits in the middle of the church. But now it is worship outside the church building, and the Holy Mama is worshipped in the body, not in the churches. I do not know what we can say to that. It reminds me of a book written by Vincent van Nuffel, The Theology of the Temple, published in 1975 by UPNG, in which he talks about the temples, and says the churches or temples are living images of what people should be, and that what we expected out of the churches should be internalised in the body of man; and that would be considered true worship. fascinating book, with a fascinating collection of art, various buildings, and structures of world religions, where you can see how they have tried to put into the church buildings the mirror image of moral man, the inner feeling of man, the inner heart of man. I can see pictures like this in this particular kind of worship. Holy Mama used to build a huge, wide church building, bigger than any Methodist mission ever built; not simply as a meeting place – there are a lot of other places for that - but Holy Mama said: "The worship is in the body".

So much for the demands of the theology of liberation. I would like to repeat again the theology of incarnation. I think that is the greatest thing that can be said about the way in which we think about Jesus Christ. I have explained to you that the qualification people give to the Holy Mama shows the way in which they see themselves as being forgiven, as being liberated, as being healed by him; and to them, Holy Mama is talked of as God, or Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Now if you think if it from a systematic theological point of view you'll probably query this. But if you think of if mainly from the experience of people about Holy Mama, you'll see a different kind of story – but I'll leave that to theologians to think about. It is a controversial issue on which Methodists and the CFC never got together, and I hope that, one of these days, they will be able to come to terms with it.

The other aspect of the Holy Mama, which I think is very important, is the emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is immediately in the lives of people at worship. I think you would probably agree with me that in a lot of new religious movements today, the Holy Spirit is the main factor. One thing we have to look into is whether the "spirit" can be considered as the Holy Spirit, in the sense we take it to mean: the Christian Holy Spirit, theologically; or have we to do with some ancestral worship? It's up to us to work on this; but my own reflection seems to suggest that we are scrutinising **both** in these movements. Certain features of the spirit movements will tell you that the kind of feelings that people have had from the Spirit, they have gone through in the traditional ancestral worship. I asked them: "What do you feel when the Holy Spirit comes upon you?" They would say: "We begin to feel some weight over us; then gradually it moves down; and then all our body is cool; and then our spirit listens; and then we are in a different world." Now, if you consider that this is the Holy Spirit, a person who knows about traditional ancestor worship will say, "No: that is an experience of the so-called sabusabukai cult." And whether all Methodists have it, or have other experiences of the old traditional worship, the kind of feeling these people have is the kind of feeling they have experienced in our particular kind of worship, in our traditional worship. So you may say to yourself: "Is this the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ?" Is it the Holy Spirit or our tumbuna (ancestors)? In any case, you must realise that the Holy Spirit liberates, whether it is from ancestors or from "Christianity"; I would like you to think about that. Those who would like to learn more about this should read the three issues of **Point** Nos. 2-4, published by the Melanesian Institute on spirit movements right throughout Melanesia; because they are the ones who can speak to us theologically, and we would do well to listen to them.

NOTE

* Esau Tuza made this contribution to the MATS Study Institute at very short notice, and spoke impromptu. His talk has been transcribed from a tape kindly made available by Kristen Redio, Lae. For a more detailed account of Silas Eto and the CFC, see Tuza's essay, "Silas Eto of New Georgia", in **Prophets of Melanesia: Six Essays**, ed. by Garry Trompf (Port Moresby: IPNGS, 1977) pp. 108-145, new edition 1981, pp. 65-87.

DISCUSSION*

While most agreed that there was no point in rejecting Western theology straight out, it was also felt that it cannot be taken for granted as the norm of Melanesian theology. A Melanesian participant doubted that Melanesian theology had reached the stage where it could claim any universal validity. In the end, however, only "insiders" can judge the authenticity of an indigenous theology. Paul Richardson clarified the point that Western culture, even for Melanesians, is not just something to be read about in books, but is borne into their lives by industrialisation, technology, and new forms of social life. He drew a parallel with the present revival of Islam, which may be seen as a reaction to the forces of Westernisation. In Melanesia, too, there is a danger of constructing an artificial Melanesian culture to preserve a sense of identity in the face of Western influences through TV, etc. Again, in 18th century England, the more people became industrialised and urbanised, the more they idealised the simple life of the countryside, and the beauties of nature. "Man made the town, and God made the country!" Will something similar happen in Melanesia?

Rufus Pech reminded us that Melanesians are already engaged in liberation struggles: in East Timor, in Irian Jaya, in New Caledonia. Atrocities are being perpetrated against them, and it is only to be expected that their response will eventually be formulated as some form of Marxist liberation theology. We do not always have an adequate sense of the true extent of "Melanesia", and of the solidarity to which Melanesians are being called. Kasek Kautil expressed his thankfulness that Melanesians had been able to retain so much of their own cultures. Theologies grow out of people's experience, just as Western theologies did. Take away the different life styles, whether Western or Melanesian, and you are left with people; and people are more important than theologies! It seemed to him that Melanesians are more "existentialist" than most people think: they live in the present. Actual experience plays a dominant part in their lives. On the other hand, it was pointed out that the "Melanesian" traditions, which a Melanesian theology would draw on, as they exist at present, are already largely shaped by modern life. This makes it all the more urgent to treat the problems of liberation and modernisation theologically, and in a Melanesian way.

Paul Richardson, emphasising that he spoke as an outsider, noted that less and less respect seemed to be shown to the "educated élite" in Papua New Guinea. Why is it not possible to respect one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, despite different cultural influences? Is it because the so-called élite is not showing true leadership? Rufus Pech followed this up by outlining the role the myth of the Two Brothers, which is widespread throughout Melanesia, could play in coping with the present situation, and in providing a source of Melanesian theology. In a society, in which poverty is rearing its head, and accusations of corruption are flying, the theme of "betraying one's brother" could take on new meaning. Common mythology also means a common religious background. This myth, which inspired many of the so-called "cargo cults", could once again become an expression of hope in the new context. Realistically, however, we must also reckon with revolutionary movements springing up from the same source at village level against an irresponsible élite.

These more general considerations of the contextualisation of theology in Melanesia became much more immediate in the light of Esau Tuza's case study of Silas Eto and the Christian Fellowship Church. Examples were given of the taro and shaker cults of Oro

Province, participants in which are reported to have said: "When we take part in these activities, we're not thinking of the ancestors, but of the Holy Spirit." Can there be such different content under the same outward form? How does one evaluate such phenomena theologically? Does traditional initiation flow through the Pentecostal movement like an underground stream? Esau Tuza was inclined to think that traditional forms can indeed mediate Christian contents, for example, when the Enga spontaneously compose and sing hymns. Rufus Pech pointed out that this process is not new, but goes back to the very early church.

One aspect of the Christian Fellowship Church that led to further reflection was the unique status of Silas Eto. Rufus Pech reminded us that a church leader who is so strongly accentuated is not without parallel in the history of the church; the pope in Roman Catholicism was mentioned as an example. We often overlook that the creed is not simply Trinitarian, but four-fold: in the fourth profession of faith we say that we believe in the church, for in a sense it "implements" all that God has done in His economy of salvation. And, traditionally, the village community has built up the church – including the material building – in Melanesia, often under the leadership of a sort of "paramount luluai" (representative of the community). Looked at in this light, is the idea of a "quaternity" really so outlandish? "Four" is just as much a biblical symbol as "three", and the Holy Spirit always works through people, whether individuals or groups, to mediate salvation. On the other hand. Melanesians generally refuse to limit God to the church; they also respond to the Spirit working outside it. God is invisible, yet He is mediated to us primarily through people.

Some doubted whether Silas Eto actually regarded **himself** as part of the Godhead. Esau Tuza suggested that it is more accurate to say that he saw himself as the temporary embodiment of some aspect of God's power and activity (see below). It was suggested that the rise of independent churches, as in Africa, might be the beginning of a "third stage" in the history of Christianity, which began as a Jewish sect before becoming a church in its own right; and, again, parallel to Africa, this phenomenon is associated with the availability of the scriptures in the vernacular. Many of these African movements were based on the conviction that "It is time for us Africans to bring back

Christianity to the whites!" According to a Melanesian participant, Christian and traditional elements can enter into a synthesis, but the pragmatic and functional Melanesian view of religion will be one of its ruling principles.

One of Silas Eto's main motives for proceeding as he did was the realisation that his people were not independent economically. He believed in hard work, and a sound economic base, and he personally sweated to establish no less than 15 plantations. True independence, whether for the nation or the church, could come only with economic autonomy. Eto's relatives and successors in the movement have become leaders in the Solomons, opposing exploitation by timber companies, and warning against foreign influences in theology (e.g., at Rarongo Seminary!). The Christian Fellowship Church does have a Bible School, but it is based not so much on theology as on the conviction: "God is in our hearts!" Though Eto died, the "Holy Mama" lives forever (Mama in Austronesian language means "Father", as Abba does in Aramaic).

Was Silas Eto a typical cult leader in the sense that the whole movement depended on his personality? While this may be true of some of the cults of Indian origin, with their authoritarian gurus, at present operating in Europe and America, Esau Tuza did not think that Silas Eto had been the object of a personality cult in this sense. He asked: "If Jesus had not died at the age of 33, would He be considered to be the Son of God?" Christ can only be considered to be God in time, namely, the three years in which we see God in Jesus Christ. For Eto, the late 1960s and early 1970s were the only years during which he could be qualified as being within the Godhead. After these years, Silas Eto remained the same, but God the "Holy Mama" had already "risen" by the early 1970s. "Holy Mama" is not regarded as being "in the body" of Silas Eto "Holy Mama" was only conceptualised between 1960 and 1970. By the early 1970s, "Holy Mama" was no longer "in the body" of Eto. At this time, Eto did not declare himself to be "Holy Mama"; rather, he sought the vision of "Holy Mama". When he died, it was as an ordinary barogoso (old man), not as "Holy Mama". This stimulated comparisons with the avatar of Hindu tradition, the **bodhisattva** of Mahayana Buddhism, and the apotheosis, or theophany, of Hellenistic religion. The importance of the Epiphany, or Manifestation of the Lord, in Eastern Orthodoxy was also pointed out. This, rather than "incarnation", would be a more appropriate Christian designation of Silas Eto's "manifestation of glory" in the "Holy Mama". The role of saints, such as Francis of Assisi, could shed further light on this peculiar quality of Eto's claim. Perhaps we should even coin a new word such as "out-", or "excarnation", to capture the characteristic autonomy of "Holy Mama", with regard to Eto, which, in a way, is the opposite of incarnation.

At this point, Theo Aerts shared with us the results of some research he had done into Jesus as the originator of a new religious movement. Most such figures have in common that they emerge when their time has arrived, e.g., when colonialism has become intolerable, and people are yearning for independence. Their vision presupposes a cultural background, that makes their prophecies plausible (in Jesus' case, the coming Kingdom of God; in Melanesia, perhaps, the myth of the Two Brothers). This enables them to find the right words and images for their situation. They are usually preceded by false prophets, against whom they can measure They prove themselves by signs, miracles, and prophecies. Above all, their apparent failure, or even death, does not mean the end of their movements; guite the contrary! movement is adapted to the changed situation, and continues with renewed strength. This suggests unsuspected parallels between Silas Eto and Christ. In the case of Eto, however, Esau Tuza proposed as the most-correct formulation: "The Holy Mama 'rose' before he (Eto) died - and therefore he has life." Is this not reminiscent of the theology of John's Gospel, and of Paul in Rom 6? It is the reality of the Risen One that matters, not the modality of His resurrection. The same Eto, who prayed four or five times daily, and read the entire Bible many times each year, was also very concerned with economic and political development in the present. The string stretched between two poles, which was the locus of Eto's visions of Holy Mama, may seem strange as a religious symbol. Yet this discussion, albeit inconclusive, showed that efforts to interpret indigenous religious phenomena theologically can bear surprisingly rich fruit.

NOTE

* We would like to thank Kristen Redio, Lae, for taping these discussions and making them available for editing on cassettes. –Ed.

Special Report

LUTHERAN IDENTITY IN AFRICA AND MELANESIA

Some Ecumenical Reflections*

From October 25 to November 28, 1982, a Study Seminar for Lutheran Pastors from Tanzania and Papua New Guinea was held at Martin Luther Seminary, Lae. Together with Dr Sutan Hutagalung of Indonesia, I was responsible for planning and directing the seminar. The organiser, the Institute for the Study of World Mission in Bavaria, thought that such a seminar might be helpful in bringing Lutheran theologians from these two indigenous churches together.

In view of the many different confessions and denominations springing up everywhere, many Lutherans are beginning to question the legitimacy of confessional divisions, especially in countries of the Third World.

Accordingly, the Lutheran Churches want to clarify why they are Lutheran. Is there any necessity for the churches of those countries to be confessional? If so, what is the specific confessional identity of Anglicans, Catholics, or others?

Already in 1979, we had invited a group of Papua New Guinean and Tanzanian pastors to come together in Germany. Part of our purpose was to give them an opportunity to look at where the Lutheran church had originated. Their suggestion at the end of their stay was that the seminar in Germany was all well and good, but that it was not their context of theologising. A seminar in Germany was very interesting, because it gives an insight into the history of a confession, and into the development of churches in Europe, but many felt distinctly that the context of their own country was necessary in order to develop their own theology further.

The Institute for the Study of World Mission had therefore planned the next seminar in Papua New Guinea. There, so many missions, churches, and renewal movements, are competing – many claiming exclusively to have the truth. The seminar, therefore, wanted to investigate the interrelatedness of biblical truth and confessional identity. Can the confessional doctrines become meaningful, by providing answers to the social, cultural, and religious challenges of the present time? If Lutheranism has anything to say today to the issues of our time, it just cannot be based only on its historical significance.

If it were only historical, then it would ultimately be an obsolete movement of the past. At some time in the future, the theologians of the Third World countries will have to come to terms with this question. Is Lutheranism – or, for that matter, Anglicanism, Catholicism, or any other confessional form of church - just a part of history, developed in diverse circumstances about four hundred years ago, or are they still relevant today in our societies? Do the past confessional doctrines reflect valid biblical norms for today? This issue is raised among many younger theologians. There is no easy answer. This became quite evident during the discussions of the seminar, and for this reason, I called the report on the seminar: Struggling for Lutheran Identity: The Relevance of Lutheran Theology in an Afro-Melanesian Context. A theological struggle is necessary. Even we Europeans cannot simply be satisfied to be separated by confessions, without struggling for an identity in each new generation.

The first part of our seminar at Lae was an orientation. During this period, we asked each group to introduce their respective church. So, the Papua New Guineans spoke about their church, their views of culture, their pastoral problems, how they have organised themselves administratively, educationally, spiritually, and liturgically. Later the Tanzanians responded.

At the end of this first part, we asked each Papua New Guinean pastor to accompany an African pastor to his village or home area. In this way, the Africans were not only confined to theological discussions, or to an experience of the church on the academic level in the seminary, but they were also able to experience church in the villages at the grass-roots. Here they were accepted as guests. They were exposed to how the people live in villages: what they eat, and what their spiritual life in the

congregations is like. Such an exposure within a church is necessary in order to get to know another church.

The next part of the seminar was devoted to the experiences gained in the congregations. The discussions centred round the pastoral and social issues, which the participants had come across. Where are the areas of confrontation in each society? It was strongly felt that the churches need to be challenged to speak out more pronouncedly on social and political issues, such as law and order, education, marriage, and unemployment. Some of the pastoral issues which needed to be addressed related to the churches' struggle with traditional views, for instance, ancestors, death, and healing.

In the fourth part of the seminar, we used a booklet called **Lutheran Identity**, published by the Lutheran World Federation's Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. Access to Luther's works is very difficult, as there are so many books written by him and about him and his theology. So, the Ecumenical Institute of Strasbourg condensed the basics of Lutheran doctrines into ten convictions. We took this as a working basis. Furthermore we thought it was not right to talk about the Reformation and Luther without reading texts of Luther himself. So, each day, we related one particular conviction to selected portions of a text from Luther. In this way, we were able to read passages of the Heidelberg Disputation, the Lectures on Galatians and The Freedom of a **Christian**. Although these texts sometimes revealed the disparity between Medieval, Reformation thinking and our thinking today, they are a first-hand and valuable insight into the theological thoughts of Luther. In the following discussions, the participants were challenged to relate these theological thoughts to their own situation. To do this, we formed groups, asking each group to give a short report on the discussions. These were then compiled in the final report.

The first Lutheran conviction, as it is formulated in the booklet **Lutheran Identity**, states the following thesis: God's loving condescension is the only way to salvation. God comes down to humankind, to men and women, for their salvation. This stresses that God takes the entire initiative in the saving encounter between

God and human beings. The result of the group discussions did not pretend to give final solutions or final answers. Instead, the pastors were encouraged to speak out and voice their theological difficulties. The reports make evident that traditional religions, both in Tanzania and Melanesia, have a strong anthropocentric approach to salvation, with the human beings initiating action towards gods, or spirits, or ancestors. This is very different from what Luther stresses and sees as the core of the gospel.

Another aspect of the discussion showed that salvation in traditional religion is regarded mainly in a very holistic sense as wellbeing, which expresses itself in blessing, health, offspring, or success. All this is an integral part of an experience of salvation for Christians in Melanesia and Tanzania. The idea of Christians suffering in this world, therefore, is seen as abnormal and in opposition to traditional views, which regard wellbeing as an expression of a faithful relationship to God. Hence, for both Tanzanians and Papua New Guineans, the concept of a suffering Christ, as Luther developed it in his **theologia crucis** (theology of the cross), is very strange, because a suffering person in society is not a successful person, not a blessed person. This was just one of the queries voiced during the discussion.

In the discussion on salvation, the unity and harmony of the living and the dead ancestors was also stressed. This is a very important element of salvation, as it is understood by Melanesians and Tanzanians. For an African, for instance, it is most important that every dying person be reconciled with the ancestors. If such a person is in disharmony with the ancestors, he or she will not be taken up into the community of the dead. This is the worst thing that can happen for an African; to die without being reconciled to the ancestors, and not to know if one will enter the community of the ancestors, is seen as the ultimate damnation.

According to the booklet, **Lutheran Identity**, the second basic conviction of Lutheran identity is witnessing to God's justifying action in Jesus Christ as the essence of the message of salvation, as the criterion of the church's proclamation, and as the foundation of Christian ethics. In the discussions, many Tanzanians thought that justification, as understood by the Reformers was very

individualistic, an event between God and an individual who is saved. This message of justification, they thought, could be enriched by the Melanesian and the African experience. Justification **coram deo** (before God) should not only be viewed individualistically, but it must also take the whole community into account, of which the individual is a part.

This is related to the fact that communal harmony and communally-oriented ethics is the only possible way for an individual to understand his or her life. Only within this context, is justification thinkable. This seems a legitimate challenge for Reformation theology, one that might enrich Lutheran identity, as experienced now in European theology.

Another traditional Lutheran conviction the stresses priesthood of all believers, indicating the equality of all Christians before God, and the apostolic obligation of the whole Christian Discussing this conviction, the Tanzanian and Melanesian pastors felt that, in their traditions, the concept of mediation is very important. Priesthood, in their culture, is a divine office; there the priestly lineages have the knowledge to ensure salvation. The priest is therefore a mediator, and functions as an intercessor on behalf of his people. In the traditional Lutheran view, this is not the case, because all those reconciled in Christ have equal access to God. Such discussions reveal a disparity between a conviction, which originated 450 years ago, and was thought to have a firm biblical basis, and what the cultures affirm now as their experience.

These issues were, of course, not solved, but they were at least voiced, discussed, and referred to the biblical message, which was one of the main objects of the seminar, thereby initiating a process of theological thinking, and indicating further areas of theological discussions

Reviewing the weeks together, I think the seminar has definitely been worthwhile. The advantage of having a seminar like this, oriented according to traditional dogmatic convictions, is that it initiates a dialogue with the traditional theologies of the European churches. This is a necessary step for the sake of the universality of

the church; at the same time, it is the only way to come to terms with the traditional concepts still powerful among Christians in Africa and Melanesia. Could such a seminar also be a model, not only within the Lutheran Church, but also between other churches? Yes, I think it is very important for the churches of Papua New Guinea to get together to clarify and explain their theological positions; to experience what are the specific gifts and contributions of each church. Such a theological reflection is needed in view of the many divisions and split-offs among Christians. Looking at the recent issues of **Point** (Nos. 2-4), this trend can definitely be confirmed. Today, we are experiencing a resurgence of renewal movements. emerging as independent churches in some areas. This suggests that our churches must make more endeavours to search for the truth of the gospel as it relates to the ecumenical cultural and spiritual experience of people, because they are searching for a message that is meaningful to their lives.

I also say this, in view of what we have discussed at this meeting about discernment. Developing a spirit of discernment in Papua New Guinea is vital today, and we need to train this gift in the seminaries and among the pastors. This spirit, however, needs a firm basis of theological convictions, and a confidence in one's own confessional identity. Only then, can it be effective when challenged or confronted. This might also encourage a direct sympathetic dialogue with the leaders of the renewal movements, instead of excommunicating them. Both sides need to be exposed to such encounters, for theological and spiritual reasons.

One further important insight gained during the seminar was that such a meeting opens one's eyes for the gifts which have developed in one's own church, for instance, in liturgy, or in the ministry. On the other hand, meeting different churches or confessions makes one realise what is underdeveloped in one's own church, where gifts are not used. I myself am convinced that for our own development within the Lutheran Church we need the spiritual and theological fellowship of other theologians, be they Catholic, Anglican, United, or Baptist. For instance, in Germany, the Lutheran Church has come to a new awareness and appreciation of Holy Communion, due to the challenge from the Catholic Church. So, today, in many German Lutheran churches, you can fine a

renewed revival of the eucharist. This is definitely an outcome of greater fellowship between the churches.

For this reason, I think that the theological journal in Papua New Guinea proposed by MATS will be a good forum for theological dialogue. I would only encourage you to think further along these lines, because the different churches really do need each other

A further insight of the participants of the seminar was their discovery that Lutheran identity in Papua New Guinea is not the same as in Tanzania. Everybody realised that identity is made up of various aspects. One of these is, of course, the doctrinal heritage introduced by the missionaries. Now, the Lutherans in Papua New Guinea and Tanzania are in the process of relating these doctrines to their specific situations, their culture, their language, and their worldview. This is no small task.

A second aspect, which defines and develops a specific identity, is the historical development of a church. This came out quite clearly when discussing how the different colonial administrations, the different cultural influences, and the different missionary backgrounds had interacted with the spiritual and congregational growth of the churches.

The third factor, which was felt as being very decisive for an identity, is the social and the political context. The Tanzanians have a very different social and political situation. The tribes are very much bigger, and the political influence of the other African nations surrounding Tanzania definitely also affects the theological understanding of the gospel, and the emerging spirituality.

In concluding this report, let me say that I think this kind of seminar can definitely serve as a model for future discussions among churches. To be sure, the structure and the length of the seminar do not permit theological conclusions in depth. Rather, they will often turn out to be preliminary and superficial. Such discussions do, however, induce theological reflections, by relating a specific doctrinal heritage to a particular cultural and historical situation.

Ultimately, Lutheran theology will have to stand the test of such an encounter if it is to be of relevance to people of our time.

- Gernot Fugmann

NOTE

* The more detailed report of the Study Seminar mentioned in the text appeared in condensed form in **Catalyst** 13 (1983) pp. 312-327. The above text is a modified transcription of the theological reflections on the seminar which Revd Gernot Fugmann contributed to the MATS Study Institute (1984), from a tape kindly supplied by Kristen Redio, Lae.

Documentation

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN MELANESIA*

Say: "People of the Book, let us come to an agreement: that we will worship none but Allah, that we will associate none with Him, and that none of us shall set us mortals as gods besides Him." If they refuse, say: "Bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves to Allah." (Qur'ān, Sura 3:64)

Melanesia is overwhelmingly Christian, thanks to more 1 than a century of intensive mission work by most of the major Christian denominations in this area of the Southwest Pacific There is tenuous contact between Melanesians and Muslims only at the two extremities of the region. Across the only land border in the whole of the South Pacific, which separates Papua New Guinea from Irian Java, Melanesia is contiguous with the largest Muslim nation on earth, Indonesia, with its 150 million people, up to 90% of them nominally Muslim. In the racially and religiously divided island nation of Fiji, far to the east, citizens of Indian origin, who were brought out as indentured labourers around the turn of the century, many of them (about 60,000, mostly Sunni) Muslims, outnumber Melanesians. Otherwise, apart from tiny expatriate minorities (e.g., the 12,000 Muslims from former French colonies in New Caledonia, and the Islamic Society of Papua New Guinea, founded in 1978), Islam is an unknown quantity, although the Bahā'i faith, which derives in part from Islam, is becoming quite widespread in the South Pacific. Both indigenous theology and religious studies are seriously underdeveloped; there is thus scarcely an opportunity for Melanesians to inform themselves about the history, culture, and worldwide resurgence of Islam in an appropriate theological Yet, political developments are forcing context

- Indonesia, the major regional power besides Australia, and, with it, Islam, on the awareness of Melanesians.
- 2. Melanesian and African cultures, though by no means identical, have certain things in common. It may thus be instructive to study more closely the success of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa, the modifications it has undergone there, and the lessons this may hold for the possible future expansion of Islam in Melanesia. At the very least, this is roughly the type of Islamic-animistic syncretism Melanesians are eventually likely encounter. Islam established itself in Africa between the 11th and 16th centuries. It spread largely through the example of Africans themselves. Even in areas to which it came later than Christianity, it has been successful. Since 1800, it has won twice as many converts as the Christian denominations. The reasons for this success are not far to seek: Islam, like Christianity, brought literacy and law, broadening horizons beyond the restricted milieu of the tribe. Like spread coincided with colonial Christianity, its expansion and social upheaval. Although Islam, too, has to cope with fundamentalist movements, it has not always been an obstacle to development. Its theology is straightforward, and its asceticism, though demanding, has proved acceptable to Africans. It would seem to have had some success in correcting social abuses, e.g., alcohol, and in transforming African religion, through the acceptance of monotheism, though it is an open question how deep the encounter of Islam with tribal religion, modernisation, and Christianity, has really been. Nevertheless, the history of Islam in Africa offers much food for thought to Melanesians dissatisfied with their countries' progress under Christian influence.
- 3. A comparison between the course taken by Christianity in Africa and in Melanesia may also help to indicate possible developments in this region. In Africa, the introduction of Christianity generally occurred in the context of colonialism. First, larger mission bodies, and

then smaller groups, worked among tribal peoples, and gradually developed local churches and expressions of Christianity, by and large, modelled on Western parent bodies. However, accompanying this desired goal of mission, there has also occurred an unexpected response: the spontaneous development of numerous new religious movements. Though these are of various types – some nativistic, others syncretic, some Hebraist, and many Christian in intention – they all arose out of a complex interaction between introduced Christianity and traditional African religions and cultures. A range of factors contributed to the development of a climate in which the movements are likely to emerge. One of the most significant of those factors, is the availability of the scriptures in the vernacular. The Old Testament, in particular – with its themes of social renewal, peace, justice, restored relationships, prosperity – has proved a the emergence of African potent stimulus for movements. Many of the names, structures, practices, and emphases in the independent churches highlight the relevance of the Old Testament to this continent's tribal peoples.

The course of Christianity in Melanesia has followed a 4 remarkably similar pattern. Highly-intensive mission activity in a colonial situation was met by the ready acceptance of Christianity, and the growth of local national churches. Here also, these developments were accompanied by the emergence of new religious movements, more or less syncretic in nature. movements, as they are generally known, aspire to the obtainment of a better life in a transformed world. Some movements have developed political and business features, and, recently, a few have become independent These movements indicate the dynamic churches. quality of religion in Melanesia, its readiness to accept and assimilate new features. In comparison with the course of Christianity in Africa, these developments in Melanesia have occurred in a much smaller area, among much smaller groups, and in a much shorter time frame. With the shorter history of Christian contact, they also tend to lag behind developments in Africa. Considering the remarkably similar pattern in Melanesia and Africa, one can only wonder what will occur when the Old Testament is published in the Melanesian **lingua franca**, **Tok Pisin** (Pidgin): one can foresee that this will speak to the tribal people of Melanesia in a powerful way, and stimulate the development of new religious movements. Perhaps it will also provide the basis for a larger identity.

5. On the assumption that the dialogue of Melanesian Christians with Islam, when it takes place, will probably occur in the two contexts mentioned in (1), the Indonesian and the Fijian, the following observations are of interest. Different as they may be in almost every respect, these two contexts have one thing in common: neither is an Islamic state, in the classical sense, which still sets the pattern in the Arab heartland of Islam, e.g., in Saudi Arabia, and whose influence is growing, e.g., in Sudan and Pakistan. In Fiji, Muslims are a religious minority, though their involvement with the Indianbased National Federation Party gives considerable, if indirect, political influence. In Indonesia, though Muslims are nominally in an overwhelming majority, the coalition of Muslimoriented political parties, the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, defers to the de facto ruling party, GOLKAR, in political influence (roughly 30% as against 60%). The PPP has only recently accepted the official ideology of Pancasila, the "five principles", the first of which is belief in a Godhead that is One, with its implications of religious tolerance. Melanesian Christians are thus not immediately confronted by that peculiar identity of religious and political authority, which European Christians have sometimes found so perplexing when dealing with Islam in its more traditional forms.

- 6. The very existence of Islam is a challenge, which strikes at the heart of Christian faith and theology. Whereas Judaism may be regarded as the "Old Covenant", now superseded by the new - although more and more theologians are beginning to realise the inadequacy of this construction - Islam explicitly claims to supersede both Judaism and Christianity. The study and use of the Hebrew Bible, which is about to appear in its entirety in Pidgin translation, are not as advanced in Melanesia as in Africa, and, consequently, the theological basis for dialogue with Islam is still Many evangelicals and fundamentalists, especially among the more-recently-arrived missions and sects, categorically reject as syncretism any attempt to come to terms with the religious elements in Melanesian cultures; suggestions that Islam may be sympathetically understood, with a view to entering into dialogue, are, for them, totally out of the question. The seminaries and theological colleges of the longerestablished churches, which in 1969 formed the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, devote little or no time to informing their students about Islam. or broadening their theological horizons to envisage relationships between the Christian faith and religions other than their own traditional ones.
- 7. Despite these obstacles, we see certain prospects for Muslim-Christian dialogue in Melanesia. Once it becomes better known, Islam, with its uncompromising monotheism, its strict morality, which yet condones polygamy, its clearly-defined asceticism and worship, and its communal structure devoid of clerical hierarchies, may well appeal to succeeding generations on whom Christianity's hold will not be so strong. Political developments in the region point to a growing awareness of the presence and vitality of Islam. As neither contemporary nor historical Judaism play much part in Melanesian Christianity, the impending encounter with Islam would be the first major religious

- challenge to be faced by these fledgling indigenous churches.
- Melanesian Christians will probably see the main 8. obstacle to dialogue with Islam not so much in the nature or characteristics of Islam itself as in the gospel admonition: "And there is salvation in no one else. for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Their own appropriation of this fundamental principal Christianity is still uncertain after a hard-won victory over the powers inherent in their traditional religion. It is beginning to be realised that this "victory" is in fact far from complete, and that the process of missionary interaction with Melanesian cultures should rather have been a dialogue, which would have issued in new indigenous forms of Christianity, even perhaps in a sort of mutual conversion. As this process continues. Islam may come to be seen, not merely as the rival and alien religion of the "enemy", nor yet as a simple alternative to Christianity, but as a powerful spiritual and ethical force in its own right, with which Christians must reckon, even if only in virtue of its "being there", and claiming the allegiance of millions.
- 9. But before this stage is reached in Melanesia, many prejudices between Indonesia and Melanesians on the one hand, and Indians and Melanesians on the other, will have to be overcome. Steps in this direction have already been taken: in Fiji, an inter-faith committee arranges an inter-faith service each Independence Day, though the Council of Religions, envisaged by some, has not yet become a reality. In Indonesia, Asia's third largest Christian community, still a tiny minority in the world's largest Muslim nation, has no choice but to reach a working relationship with Islam, and talks have begun between the Melanesian Council of Churches and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia in the context of increasing trouble along the border with Irian Java. In the field of force between these two poles. peaceful dialogue in Fiji, and tense confrontation with

Indonesia, it would seem inevitable that the present barely-existent relationships of Christian Melanesians with Muslims develop.

* This statement resulted from a request by a World Council of Churches' subunit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths for "a short paper . . . about the form and content of Muslim-Christian dialogue" in Melanesia. The sub-unit plans to hold a meeting on this question, and to produce some Ecumenical Considerations on Muslim-Christian Dialogue for general use.

The Melanesian Institute Goroka, Papua New Guinea November 1984.

Book Reviews

KLEM, Herbert V., **Oral Communication of the Scripture. Insights from African Oral Art** (Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1982) ISBN 0878083324, xxiv + 256 pp., Paperback US\$9.95.

The work under review "addresses the needs of 70 per cent of the world's population", i.e., the immense mass of the non-literates (thus Charles Kraft, in the foreword). It is written by someone who was for eight years teaching Bible and Theology in English to various groups of pastors and students, many of whom were academically qualified to attend university. The field of research was Yorubaland, in Nigeria, and apart from a few references to A. Tippett's **Solomon Islands Christianity**, the whole of Melanesia does not enter into the picture. Yet, some of the problems envisaged in West Africa do have a familiar ring, while some solutions given will meet a wider application than just the communication of the Christian scriptures. They do affect all teaching and learning in so called "oral societies".

Part I of the book (3-43) describes the complexity, social and communicational, in contemporary West Africa. From mission history, it records the great dependency upon Western schooling patterns. There might not have been a formal policy of requiring literacy for church membership, but, in actual fact, the ability to read (the scriptures) often became part of the definition of a mature believer (33). Hence the negative consequences of limited church growth, of defective leadership, etc.; and in a second period (pace D. Barrett's Schism and Renewal) the success of independent churches.

Part II studies the parallel situation in first-century Palestine (47-93), and branches out to the apostolic methods adopted by Jesus, who relied very much upon the oral arts. According to the author, Jesus is to be counted among the **Am-ha-arets** (lit.: people of the land), which at the time represented close to 95 per cent of the total population of Palestine (76-78). Despite the name-dropping in this

section of the book, the evidence adduced is a bit meagre, and does not distinguish enough between the ascertained contribution of Jesus himself – the **ipsissima verba** (78) – and the adaptations and reformulations which occurred for the purpose of writing and authoritative transmission. Still, the point is well made that, e.g., the Gospels are the products of an oral culture, while elsewhere in the book, when commenting upon the situation in Africa (e.g., 119), some of the basic insights of form criticism are adhered to.

Parts III and IV, and also some material from the Appendices, are specifically African, and dwell upon the various means of communication available in a living traditional society; here also one experience is described, which aimed at measuring the level of communication when calling upon modern teaching methods (e.g., books and cassette tapes). Following Donald K. Smith, not less than 11 different signal systems or methods of communication are enumerated. Those which are more explicit – the verbal, written, and pictorial – are more easily capable of being manipulated, whereas the less-detailed and often unconsciously-used signal systems are also less prone to deceive the audience (141).

One will find, in these pages of the book, elements which are comparable to observations made in Papua New Guinea, e.g., in relation to the often-heard complaints of dropping standards in education. Taking a lead from research done with Hawaiian school children, the author notes that the non-productivity of the school system may indicate an evasion of education, because the pupils feel that the accumulation of material resources, or the development of individual skills, "isn't worth it". Instead they do show interest in accumulating a "social capital", i.e., an expanded network of interpersonal commitments, which builds upon the values the students have acquired from their parents. This assessment makes one think of the Melanesian tendency to settle issues in face-to-face encounters, instead of going through all the "red tape". But one is also reminded of the Western slogan that, in order to succeed in life, it does not so much matter what one knows, but whom one knows.

There are many more implications, which reflect the oral background of the culture. The author lists, among others, the pride in verbal skills (105), the reluctance to write simple English (112),

the inclination to indulge in personal praises (114). One may add also the greater importance given to pictorial communication (cf. the number and size of images in local newspapers as compared with papers from overseas). But then, again, there is a growing interest in audio-visual aids all over the world. Even the sample given here of a vernacular text set out in a format to assure maximum readability (194-195) is not wholly unknown elsewhere (cf. recent Bibles; advertisements). In short, some of the insights proposed by the author have a much wider application, because even the most-advanced culture is partly oral, and possesses the specific advantages of this component.

The book ends with some conclusions and recommendations (179-188) addressed to mission and church groups: they should study more the needs of oral societies, who, by definition, do rely on oral means of communication. Let us add that the setting in which this communication occurs (say the liturgical gatherings, their places of worship, the seasons and times of the year, etc.) might have deserved a greater attention, and also that — once the need is recognised to add, at a certain level, the written means of communication — all the necessary means should be used to assure a smooth transition (e.g., by favouring casual reading, 16).

- Theodoor Aerts

BURROWS, William R., **New Ministries: The Global Context** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1980) ISBN 0883443295, 192 pp., Paperback, US\$7.95.

The key experiences on which this book is based were had in Papua New Guinea, where the author was a missionary for five years. The Catholic viewpoint, from which the book is written, only serves to emphasise its ecumenical scope, while many Catholics can learn how many of their problems are shared by other churches, in which things that Catholics still dream about are long since matters of experience.

Burrows tackles head-on a subject that most theologians – with exceptions such as Schillebeeckx in Ministry: A Case for

Change (1981) – tend to skirt with a few equivocating phrases: the "sacerdotalisation" of ministry as "one of the most serious deformations that ever occurred in Christianity" (66). He leaves nothing out: the Jewish and Roman origins of many aspects of ordination to a strictly male priesthood (93 ff.); feudal and Reformation influences (102 ff.); the realism of reactivating deacons (131 ff.), and ordaining women (134 ff.); and, in various contexts, the ever-present problem of celibacy, especially where the need to reinforce it, against overwhelming cultural and civilisational odds, dominates the "spirituality" of pastoral training (120 ff.).

The book's main interest – and its intrinsic strength – lie in the "global context" in which Burrows develops his analysis of ministry, and his proposals for its survival in the church of the future, whose outlines are slowly becoming clearer. These parts of the book are of special value to Melanesian theologians. His observation that "To decontextualise anything is to rob it of what makes it either interesting or important" (4) strikes just the right balance in the face of universalist and uniformist positions masquerading as ecumenism. However, his assertion that "Sin wears a contextual face that differs from one people and culture to another" (4) would require a book of its own to justify it.

The same balanced judgment characterises Burrows' position on the authority now granted to Catholic hierarchies and local bishops, but which they are still too hesitant to exercise (13). He also recognises the potential of "popular religion", which "has largely been passed over, or at most made into a series of footnotes to the 'real' history of theology" (32). Here the convictions born of Burrows' experience in Papua New Guinea shine through, in statements such as the following:

The inarticulateness of these people is often mistaken for a lack of intelligence. In reality, however, they know secrets too precious to tell, and their sullen silence is a very important, if often unrecognised, chapter in north-south dialogue (16).

Christ will be successfully incarnated among such people only when He and His message become the stuff of dreams and visions, and enter into the dilemmas of decision-making in a manner difficult for most Westerners to appreciate. . . . Local theology arises out of such dialogues, and one should not expect it always to remain faithful to the fine dogmatic precisions of the early councils (28).

Burrows confronts the "old wineskins" of traditional institutions, of which even the West is no longer sure, with the invigorating "new wine" of Third Church experiences in liberation and spirituality. His discussion of the political role of the churches with respect to their fundamental role as "sacramental" channels of grace, during which he acknowledges a debt to Fr John Momis and Mr Bernard Narokobi (30), displays, once more, the good judgment that characterises the book as a whole:

There is no way to escape a profound tension at the heart of Jesus' teaching: commitment to righteousness in society, and in one's heart, is mandatory; but we are not thereby justified in judging people by their commitment to such righteousness (44).

In determining, say, the prophetic role of the Melanesian Council of Churches, and its policy in the face of exclusive claims to righteousness by fundamentalist sects, it will be crucial to develop this theme.

The questions Burrows raises are not susceptible of neat text-book answers, so we look in vain for "solutions" in his final section; these will be the fruit of an ongoing and many-sided dialogue at a very deep level, for "The future of the Christian movement is being written in the villages and cities of the Third World" (130). Burrows goes beyond the necessary, but insufficient, condemnations of economic dependency and theological imperialism to map out the new ecclesiological authority of regional bodies such as bishops' conferences (and councils of churches?), and the all-important local communities, which must always be balanced against the tempting, but misleading, ideal of a World Church (138 ff.). Though it makes no concessions to those with insufficient background in the history of theology, Burrows' timely book could well clarify the vision, and strengthen the purpose of Melanesian theologians.

- John D'Arcy May

Contributors

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- Robert Hagesi is Warden, and Michael Tavoa is a lecturer, at Bishop Patteson Theological Centre, Kohimarama, Solomon Islands. Both are Anglican priests. Though neither was able to attend the 1984 MATS Study Institute because of other commitments, their papers were read by colleagues who represented them.
- Rufus Pech was for many years a Lutheran missionary in the Madang area, and was actively involved in the handing over of responsibility from the former Lutheran Mission New Guinea to the present Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. He still lectures at Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, though he is heavily committed to translation work.
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- **Paul Richardson** is an Anglican priest. Before coming to Papua New Guinea he read history at Oxford University. He is principal of Newton College, Popondetta.
- John D'Arcy May did post-graduate work in ecumenical theology and history of religions in Germany, where he taught for eight years at the Catholic Ecumenical Institute, University of Münster, before coming to Papua New Guinea in 1983 as Ecumenical Research Officer for the Melanesian Council of Churches. He is also Research Associate at the Melanesian Institute, Goroka.
- Gernot Fugmann was born in Papua New Guinea at Finschhafen. He is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, and, in 1969, he returned to work as a missionary in Eastern Highlands and Madang. After a period with the Institute for the Study of World Mission in Bavaria, he joined the staff of the Melanesian Institute, Goroka, in 1984. He has done graduate studies in missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.