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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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# Contents

# Editorial: Christian Responsibility in an Independent Nation

The tenth anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence on 16 September, 1985, has come and gone. But this is no reason to cease reflecting on the lessons to be learned from the achievements and failures of this period for the even more difficult years which would seem to lie ahead. The Evangelical Alliance of the South Pacific Islands (commonly known as EA) chose as the theme of its 1984 General Meeting "What is God Saying to Us as a Church and Nation Today?", and the papers given by Joshua Daimoi and Ossie Fountain, in their attempts to answer this crucial question in the light of scripture, are perhaps even more relevant now that the din of the independence celebrations has died down.

Running through both papers is a vein of criticism directed at those Christian groups and churches, which self-righteously lay claim to exclusive truth, thus causing dissension, and disrupting the work of evangelism. Criticism from a slightly different angle, this time of the major churches, for their lack of commitment to the ecumenical movement, is evident in a paper read by John May at another Annual General Meeting, that of the Melanesian Council of Churches in February, 1985. In a report prepared for the same meeting, Fr Robert Lak gives a very personal statement of the reasons why the Roman Catholic church should take ecumenism seriously. The Catholic Bishops' Conference, for its part, made a valuable contribution to ecumenical understanding in Melanesia with its official statement on the charismatic renewal movement, which should be of interest to other churches as well.

In this, the second issue of our journal, we introduce a new section called "Discussion". In it we hope to present short contributions which will stimulate further reflection in areas that are on the "cutting edge" of theology in Melanesia. We are familiar with themes, such as the churches' role in development, and the need for ecumenical cooperation, but have we yet faced the challenge of

liberation theology, or thought through the full implications of dialogue, not just among churches, but between religions and ideologies? A comment on the Vatican's response to liberation theology by Laurenti Magesa, an African priest, and a working paper presented by Archbishop Albert Bundervoet of Rabaul to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, explore the possible relevance of this theology from Latin America for Africa and Melanesia. The widely-known "Dialogue Decalogue" of Leonard Swidler, editor of the **Journal of Ecumenical Studies**, will provide those who are either over-enthusiastic or over-suspicious about "dialogue" with food for thought.

Most of these issues belong to the "public forum" of church policy and decision-making. But these remain up in the air if the equally difficult task of truly indigenous theological reflection is not pursued. We are glad to be able to present a further example of this. The work of Bishop Leslie Boseto of the United church in the Solomon Islands shows that "base ecclesial communities" and "theology by the people" are not just slogans from Latin America, but have been realities in Melanesia for quite some time. His address, in the conversational style of oral delivery, shows how care of the environment is part of pastoral concern, and thus of theology in Melanesia.

Reports from Northern Australia and Tanzania, book reviews, and two very welcome letters to the editor round off this issue of **MJT**. Discerning readers will notice some changes of format as we try to "get it right". In these, I have been helped by the new editor of Melanesian Institute publications, Paul Roche, and our indefatigable typesetter, Jerry Hebale. The patience and professionalism of both are much appreciated.

"Christian responsibility": the articles and other contributions collected here would seem to suggest that we are only just beginning to discover what this might mean in the newly-independent nations of Melanesia. Some of our churches have grown complacent as they have become established in the decades since first missionary contact; others, more recently arrived, seem to be cocksure to the point of offensiveness in their evangelistic zeal. Both groups need to

learn to understand one another, and work together in tackling the real problems of these nations – not imagined ones, imported from outside! It is our hope that the theology represented in these pages will be both ecumenical and indigenous enough to help bring this about.

Our next issue will contain papers from the VIIth MATS Study Institute, held at Malmaluan near Rabaul in October, 1985, on the theme "Towards a Theology of Religious Experience for Melanesia".

John D'Arcy May
Executive Editor

# WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US AS CHURCH AND NATION TODAY?

## Our Position Before God as His Servants (Rev. 1-3)

**Joshua Daimoi**

*This, and the following paper, were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Alliance, September 1984, in Banz.*

### INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation presents the Lord as standing or walking in the midst of the churches. As Lord of the church, He is deeply concerned with the state of His church. The church is His instrument for the spreading of the Good News. The church, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, is Christ's representative on earth. The Lord is in the midst of His church not only to rebuke the church, but also to give new life and direction.

Papua New Guinea is experiencing a great deal of renewal or revival at present. At the same time in many parts of our country the church is very nominal. As a newly-independent nation, we stand at the crossroads of many thoughts, influences, and ways of life. For these and many other reasons the church in Papua New Guinea needs to listen carefully to what the Lord is saying, first to the church as His chosen people, and secondly to the nation. Because the people of God, in a special way, belong to Him, He must deal with them before He can deal with the nation/s.

> For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17).

I will now direct our thoughts to the first three chapters of Revelation, on which this paper is based. The areas I wish to speak on are:

1. The One who stands in the midst of the churches.

2. Lessons we need to learn from the seven churches.

3. Ways to practise these lessons in Papua New Guinea.

## 1. THE ONE WHO STANDS IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCHES

John makes it very clear that the one who stands in the midst of the church is Christ, the risen Lord. The message we have in the book of Revelation comes to us from the One who died and rose again for our salvation. He is called **the faithful witness** (1:5). This means that the message we have before us is a trustworthy testimony of the One who is altogether true. What He says cannot be false, or said to be false. He knows what He is talking about. Our responsibility is to take note of what He says, line ourselves up with what He says, and obey His Words. He is also called **the first-born from the dead** (1:5). He died and rose again from the dead. He had power to lay down His life and to take it up again. He is the only one to whom God has given physical or bodily resurrection. He is therefore the first-born from the dead. To Him, God has given all authority in heaven and on earth. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a Cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every Name" (Phil 2:9-10). **He is the ruler of the Kings of the Earth** (1:5).

Here we come to the central focus of our theme. As the ruler of the Kings of the earth, Jesus Christ has a message for the kings and rulers of the earth. He is the ruler, therefore He has the absolute

right to speak to the rulers of all the nations. He is interested in what takes place in the national parliament as much as in what takes place in the church synods or conferences. The One who walks or stands in the midst of the churches is also interested in the affairs of all the nations. Jesus Christ is the source of our political, economic, social and religious life. All history is under His control. He rules from one end of the earth to the other end. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory . . . sustaining all things by His powerful Word" (Heb 1:3). One day, His rule will become clear when everyone will say He is Lord (Phil 2:10-11). Because He is the ruler of the kings of the earth, the church and the nation must listen to Him and obey Him. There is more in this first chapter of Revelation concerning the power and authority of Jesus Christ – He is the **coming one** (1:17), His authority as our Judge; **dressed up in a robe** (1:13), His authority as the all-sufficient High Priest; **His eyes like blazing fire** (1:14), His authority to judge and to renew; **in His right hand He held seven stars** (1:16), His authority to command and care for His workers; **Out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword** (1:16), His authority to speak and the authority of His spoken and written Word.

As the only One who knows and sees all that is going on in His church, He sends out messages to the different congregations. He lays bare the lives of each congregation, calls His people to respond to Him, or be cut off from Him. This is what we will now look at briefly in the next part of this paper.

## 2. LESSONS WE NEED TO LEARN FROM THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The messages sent to the seven churches contain timeless lessons. Although the seven churches are no longer in existence, the lessons contained in the messages cannot be overlooked. They are meaningful for the churches in Papua New Guinea, in this twentieth century. I will now direct our thoughts to seven different lessons found in chapters two and three of Revelation.

### (a) Love Not Doctrine (2:1-7)

This message is directed to the church in Ephesus. The Ephesian church is the most-conservative evangelical church, deeply committed to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith. The Lord sums all these up when He says, "I know your deeds, your **hard work**, and your **Perseverance**. . . . You cannot tolerate wicked men . . . have **found them false**" (2:2). In spite of their conservatism, their well-organised evangelistic and social concern programmes, their zeal for sound doctrines and experiences, the believers in Ephesus failed in what is foremost in the mind of the risen Lord – a love relationship: "You have forsaken your first love" (2:4). We do not know what kind of love is spoken of in this verse. Leon Morris suggests that it is love for God, love for fellow Christian, and love for all humankind. So, while the Ephesian church put all its emphasis on sound teachings, or the right kind of experiences, it lost that central ingredient that holds all things together – love. Without love, nothing else matters.

The church of Ephesus, to which the Lord directed these words, does not exist any more, and yet there are many present-day churches that are like the Ephesian churches. Many churches in Papua New Guinea come under this category. This problem exists amongst our member churches. This is why we don't appear to trust each other. This is why we pull people of other churches into our churches. We want our particular churches to grow, so we can say our church is the fastest growing church. If our desire to grow means dividing villages into different church groups, I wonder whether our motives are right. When we compete against each other, this clearly shows our lack of love for the Lord, for our fellow Christians, and other people. We confuse the people, we dishonour our Lord, and we divide the people of God.

The way to straighten our wrongs is by doing what the Lord told the Ephesian church to do – remember our mistakes, repent of them and get sorted out. We must not take pride in Biblically-based constitutions, laws and regulations that are not controlled and motivated by Christian love. The Lord summed up this truth when He said:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself (Mt 22:37,39).

Doctrines don't save people, love does. It was love that sent Jesus to the Cross, not doctrine. Right doctrines are important to have, but they must not be substituted for love of God or our fellow human being.

**(b) Suffering Not Surrender (2:8-11)**

The message to Smyrna is a message of encouragement. The Lord calls them to remain faithful in the face of opposition. The opposition came from Jewish leaders, who influenced government authorities to go against the believers. Whatever happens to them, the Lord assures His people that He knows their circumstances. He knows the seriousness of the trouble they are under. He also knows how poor they are. The Lord encourages them by telling them how rich they are because of Him.

Persecution and opposition are bound to come. The church of Jesus Christ, like her Master, must be prepared to face them. Christians should be prepared to face the fact that what they have may have to be taken away from them. When this happens, they should know that they have great riches in Jesus Christ. The Lord will give them the crown of life as their reward, should they remain faithful to Him.

The message of this passage for the church in Papua New Guinea is quite clear. First of all, we need to be clear that the way to the crown is over-shadowed by the Cross. Suffering is part of God's design to bring us into deeper experience of His riches. Secondly, Christianity promises no free cargo, no air-conditioned vehicles, no supernatural supply of food but a person who will stick with us to the end. We should be prepared to suffer for our faith instead of surrendering it at the first opportunity.

### (c) The Lord Not Satan (2:12-17)

The church of Pergamum is a compromising church. The people have a real difficulty in choosing between faith in Jesus Christ and their formal religion or way of live. Many people in this church really believe in Jesus Christ. They really seek to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. But there are many others who have great difficulty in believing in Jesus only. They attend church service, but have no real loyalty to Jesus Christ. They continue to hold on to spirit worship, sexual immorality, and false teachings. The reason for their compromise or nominal way of life is because of the location where they live. The Lord says "I know where you live – where Satan has his throne" (2:13).

Pergamum is an important religious centre. People come from all over the world to be healed by the god Asclepius. The city has temples to such gods as Zeus, Dionysos, and Athene. It is the centre of Caesar-worship also. It has three temples dedicated to Rome and Augustus. The city also has a great number of heathen temples. This is the centre of important sorcerers, magicians, and wonder workers. Here, there are many heathen priests, cult observers, and possibly religious prostitutes. No wonder the place is called the throne of Satan. It is important to note that here in Pergamum we have God's faithful witnesses, people like Antipas, men and women who keep their faith, and remain true to the name of Jesus.

Pergamum is like many villages in Papua New Guinea, where Satan still has strong hold on our people. The people will not give up their heathen practices and evil way of life, because Satan has made them his prisoners. The heathen are making it very difficult for the few faithful Christians to remain true to their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The heathen make if difficult for these Christians to believe in the truth of God's Word.

God's message for this kind of people comes in two parts. First, there is the call to repentance. God wants all heathen worshippers to repent before He brings judgment on them. Secondly, there is a message of encouragement for the faithful ones. God will give them the hidden manna to eat and receive a new name.

God is fully responsible for their future, so they should not worry or give up their faith.

### (d) Purity of Life Not Freedom (2:18-29)

I would like to call the church of Thyatira a "second-mile" church. Another way of calling this church would be "freedom church" or "liberated church". This church is doing more now than it did at first; more faithful, more missionary minded, more enduring in its service for the Lord.

The problem this church has is centred in a woman called Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and therefore sees herself to be a religious woman. She probably set herself up as an authority on religious matters. She freely tells the Christians that sexual activities and eating food offered to idols are quite alright. She probably emphasises the freedom that Christians have in Christ without too much concern for purity of life. She and her followers conform themselves to the practices of their heathen neighbours. Satan is using her to teach his deep secrets to others (2:24).

The Lord warns her and sets time for her to repent. The Lord is concerned for His church. If she refuses to repent, she and her children will be put to death.

Here we have a clear lesson on Christian discipline. Whatever our churches are, we must not be frightened to discipline immoral and false teachers. We must not use our freedom in Christ to do what we like or let others go astray. We are free to care for and protect each other.

### (e) Commitment Not Reputation (3:1-6)

Sardis is an active commercial city and very wealthy. It is built on a very steep hill, difficult for the enemy to attack. Because of their wealthy and secure position, the people are overconfident, careless, and lazy. This is true of the Christians, too. They have given their lives to Jesus Christ, but there is no commitment on their

part to grow in their spiritual lives. They have the reputation of being alive, but are dead. Here we have a very nominal church, more nominal than Pergamum and Thyatira. The churches of Pergamum and Thyatira have mixed memberships, but the church of Sardis has more nominals than the other two. This is the reason why the Lord refers to it as a dead church.

Recent studies done on Papua New Guinea, show that as high as 96 per cent of the population claim to be Christian. The same study shows that in a ten-year period (1970-1980), the yearly conversion rate that stood at 2.74 per cent is almost equal to the number that turned into nominalism. Papua New Guinea is therefore a very nominal Christian country. The nation has a reputation for being alive, while in reality we are dead. This means we have an urgent task to fulfil. That task is to call our nation to obey what it has heard, to repent, and to turn to the Lord. Our mission to the nation will best be accomplished when, first of all, we who profess to be Christians, obey what we hear, repent, and turn to the Lord first.

### (f) Action Not Resting (3:7-13)

The passage before us introduces us to the kind of church or fellowship that brings joy to the heart of God. The church of Philadelphia, together with that of Smyrna, are praised for their faithfulness, and encouraged by the Lord to keep on being faithful. These two churches are free from internal heresies. Their enemies are from outside not inside.

The name Philadelphia means brotherly love. What a lovely name this is for a Christian church or fellowship. From what we read in this passage, it appears as if the Christians in this city practise what the name of their city stands for. Philadelphia is situated in such a position that it is known as the "gateway to the East". Christians in this city make it their business to befriend strangers and share the gospel out of brotherly love and concern. This church, though small, is a church with real quality. This church has accepted its missionary responsibility for the Hellenistic people.

The church in Philadelphia has been so faithful to its missionary task that the Lord now sets an open door before its congregation for more missionary work. "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My Name" (3:8).

Although the church in Philadelphia is small and weak, the Lord sets before it an open door for effective missionary service and witness. The Lord gives us more to do when we have proved faithful to Him in what He gives us to do.

I believe the time is now for the church in Papua New Guinea to reach out with missionary activities. The Lord is calling us to get deeply involved in the life of our nation, and the nations around us. We may be weak and small, but our God is great and mighty. With Him, and through Him, we are more than enough for the task he sets before us. God is ready to do the work; are we?

### (g) Neither Cold Nor Hot (3:14-22)

The Laodicean church spoken of in this passage has become useless for the Lord. It is neither cold nor hot; therefore the Lord cannot use it. However, let us see how gracious the Lord is toward this church. He draws near to it and says:

> I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.
>
> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me (Rev 3:18, 20).

Instead of spitting this church out of His mouth, the Lord draws near to make a new start. The Lord sets out to help the church by seeking its cooperation. He knocks on the door, waiting if the door will be opened. The Lord is knocking on the door of many

churches and congregations, patiently waiting for the doors to be opened to Him.

In this second part of the paper, we have very briefly walked in the midst of the seven churches in first-century Christianity. In the last part of the paper, I want to suggest some ways to practise the lessons outlined in this part of the paper.

## 3. WAYS TO PRACTISE THESE LESSONS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

So far, we have seen that the One who stands in the midst of the church is Christ, the risen Lord, the ruler of all the kings of the earth. We have also seen that different churches emphasise different things and follow different ways of life. Many of these churches do not clearly follow the will and the thinking of the Lord. Some of these churches are at the point of death. The Lord is concerned for His church, so He stands ready to offer His grace and strength to all. The churches or congregations described in the first three chapters of Revelation are very much like many of the churches in Papua New Guinea. In this part of the paper, we will look at some of the ways for us to practise the truths or lessons found in these three chapters in Papua New Guinea today. I will now outline several lessons for us to think about.

### (a) The Lord is in the middle of His Church

When John, the writer of Revelation, turned in the direction of the voice he heard, he saw the Lord of the church standing among the churches, holding the seven stars in His right hand.

John tells us that he was under the control of the Holy Spirit when he heard the voice (1:10). Was John concerned about these churches in Asia Minor? Was he thinking how these churches will get on without someone like John?

If this is what John was concerned about, then he can rejoice, because what he cannot do, the Lord is there to do. The Lord made

Himself visible to John to assure him that the welfare of the church is His personal responsibility. The Lord has been with His church right from the start. As High Priest, the Lord is fully dressed up to serve His church. If John does not know this, he had better get this truth deep into his heart.

When John turned around, He saw the Lord standing among the seven golden lamp stands, which represent the seven churches. The Lord is seen standing among all the seven churches, not just one or two churches. The Lord has all the churches in His hands. He has them all under His control.

Because this is true, we need to be very careful how we treat each other. It is not right for us to pull down or condemn other churches. It is not right for us to pull people away from the church they belong to and give them our church names. We must stop playing the wrong kind of number games, because it does not honour the Lord Jesus.

The Lord is in the midst of His church. He is far more concerned with the growth of His people than you and I are. He is at work in every congregation, whether it is Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic, or Lutheran. We need to believe this and practise it in our relationships with each other. The Lord has all the ministers and congregations in His hands. Let us be more patient and loving with each other as He is with us.

**(b) The Lord has a message for each congregation**

What John wrote to each of the seven churches is a particular message the Lord had for a particular congregation. John wrote down the messages that he heard from the Lord. When John turned around, instead of hearing the voice, he saw the voice. "I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me" (1:12). It is important for us not just to hear the voice, but to see the speaker as well. The authority of the message is hidden in the greatness of the person who speaks. The greater the person, the greater the message, the more powerful and authoritative are his words. This is true of

John when he turned around and saw the voice: "When I saw him, I fell at His feet as though dead" (1:17).

The person who speaks to John the first time is our risen and glorified Lord. However, as John closes each message, he says: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Now, there is no difference between the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Let us get this truth deep into our hearts. Let us not make the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit to look to be different from each other when they are not. Our teaching must line up clearly with the truth of the scriptures.

The Lord Jesus is working in the church and the world today through the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit says is what the Lord Jesus wants us to hear. The Holy Spirit takes what belongs to the Lord Jesus and makes it known to us. The Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus don't disagree with each other.

The messages that are recorded in the first three chapters of Revelation are Christ's messages to us through the Holy Spirit. This is what the Holy Spirit is saying to all churches: "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". The messages that are directed to each individual church are for all the churches. Let us examine our lives, and the lives of our congregations, in the light of the truth found in these passages as well as the rest of the Bible.

John says: ". . . and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" (1:16). This statement brings us face to face with the power and authority of God's word. The Lord who spoke to John is still speaking today. He does this primarily through His written word.

> The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account (Heb 4:12-13).

### (c) We Need to know what God's Word says

The greatest need of our churches today is for careful teaching of God's Word. At this Conference, we have spoken about evangelism. I am keen for it. True evangelism must be deeply rooted in the truth of God's Word. When the Word of God and its truth penetrates into the soul and spirit of a person, it will do its own work. When that Word is watered by the Spirit of God, it will bring forth an abundance of fruit.

We need full-time evangelists, we also need full-time Bible teachers. We need to ask God to give us these kinds of people – men and women! Let our Bible teachers move around with our evangelists. Let the Bible teachers teach those who respond to Christ in evangelistic meetings. We must not only talk about EA evangelist, we must talk about EA Bible teacher as well. We need both, we must pray for both. For the word of God to come alive to our people, we need Spirit-anointed Bible teachers.

### (d) We need to be Honest with Each Other

The words from Hebrews, that I have quoted above, call us to do this: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account" (Heb 4:13).

We need to be honest with each other when we move among each other's churches. Let us help the people to grow into Christ inside the churches they belong to. God wants them to stay there and grow there. The Lord Jesus did not say to John, "Now, tell all the members of the church in Sardis, the 'dead' church, to join the congregation of Philadelphia". Not at all. The Lord sent some more teaching to them to get them back on the right track, and to keep moving.

We need to be honest with the truths that we teach. One of the questions raised in this Annual General Meeting is about baptism. Inside our EA member churches, we have different ideas about the way, and the reasons, for baptism. However, we baptise a person,

and for whatever reason, one thing is practised by all of us. When we baptise a person we baptise that person into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Supposing the same person comes to be baptised again, whose name should be baptise him or her into? Who says that the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit he or she was baptised into before does not count? Can we say that the God into whose name that person was baptised earlier has not been at work in his life bringing him to the experience of conversion? I want to say that the baptism given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot be repeated. When we repeat, we make mockery of the name of God. Whether a person is saved at the time of his baptism, to me is a different question altogether. I believe I am saved, not because I was baptised, but because I have faith in Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord.

We need to be honest with each other in relation to the experiences that God gives us. To say that everyone must experience my experience is to say that God works only in this way and no other way. God is bigger than all our experiences put together.

### (e) We Need to Present the Gospel Meaningfully

There are two areas to consider under this section. These two areas are related to method and meaning. There is a large percentage of nominalism in Papua New Guinea today because the method we use to bring people to Jesus Christ is foreign to them. In Papua New Guinea, important matters are almost always community affairs. Marriage is very important in Papua New Guinea. It is a community affair. Everyone participates in it, older people, young people, men and women, pigs, dogs, birds, food, money, and the spirits. Becoming a Christian is like getting married. How many people participate in this act of marriage called conversion or becoming Christian? When two people are to be married, everybody in the community talks about it. When a person wants to become a Christian, how many people talk about it?

The other point to consider here is that of meaning. What does it mean to be a Christian in Papua New Guinea? Does it mean one wife, going to church twice every Sunday, singing Western songs,

dressing up like the missionaries, and talking and behaving like them? True conversion in any culture is conversion at world-view level. To be converted, or to become Christian, involves change of loyalty. It involved turning away from whatever was important to me, and letting Jesus Christ take that place in my life. The "whatever" may represent "spirit beings", "material wealth", or "accumulation of knowledge".

To present the gospel meaningfully, the communicators need to be culturally relevant and meaningful. The Lord spoke in relevant terms to the seven churches. We need to do the same for our churches today.

### (f) We Need to make Good Use of our Open Doors

To the church in Philadelphia, our risen Lord said:

> "See I have placed before you an open door that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you." (Rev 3:8-9)

Here we have words of challenge, encouragement, and promise. Our Lord challenges and encourages us to take hold of the open doors and possess this nation for the Lord. The door to preach and witness for Jesus Christ in Papua New Guinea today is wide open. No restrictions are put on any of us to propagate our faith. Our national constitution encourages us to freely believe and teach our faith. While this is so, we need to watch against the misuse of the freedom the constitution allows us. We need to watch that what we preach is Christ and not denominationalism. Our calling is to disciple people for Christ, not to make followers of our denominations. The gospel has penetrated into all corners of Papua New Guinea. In every village, the church buildings stand prominent. There is a nucleus of believing people. Instead of converting them to our particular brand of Christianity, let us help them to grow in the

church they belong to, and become effective witnesses for the Lord there. When we try to separate burning sticks, the fire will die. When we keep the sticks burning together, the fire will get stronger, will generate more heat, and do its work effectively. Let us, once and for all, in the name of Jesus and for His sake, stop confusing and dividing the body of Christ. The warning is already on the wall. If we fail to take note of it, we will regret it deeply.

> In future, it may be necessary for aggrieved Christian individuals or churches to have legal recourse to the courts, in order to protect religious freedom when it is threatened or violated by behaviour wrongfully done, and causing a wrong in the name of religious liberty (Church-Government Policy and Programme Integration Planning Workshop, Goroka, 20-29 Feb. 1984).

The other open door we have in this country is to witness to people from other faiths and nationalities. People from countries that are closed or semi-closed to foreign missionaries are entering Papua New Guinea in great numbers. It is as if the Holy Spirit is bringing them into this so-called "Christian" nation so that we can witness to them. How can we reach them for Christ? Should we ask the government to close doors on them? Is that really religious freedom?

The doors are open to us to reach out into cells of our corrective institutions, the lonely city dwellers, the troubled youth, and broken homes with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are we training people to reach into these areas?

Finally, the door to go beyond the shores of Papua New Guinea is also open to us. The students at the Christian Leaders' Training College are excited about it. Within the next two or three years, we will have the first missionaries from EA member churches go out to other countries. Are we ready to step out into the deep?

### (g) We Need to Recognise that the Lord's Hand is on our Nation and His Church

The One whom John saw standing among the lamp stands is in charge of our nation, and the nations of the world. This is His world. He is in control. The trouble is we are not willing to turn to Him, to see Him in all His glory, and be drawn to Him.

The church of Jesus Christ is commissioned by Him to call our nation to face God's standards of righteousness, justice, and integrity. Christ the risen Lord is ruler of all the kings of the earth.

Further to this, we need to recognise that the Lord's hands are also on us His servants. Just as He held the seven stars in His hands, so He is holding you and me. Let us open the doors of our hearts to Him. Let us hear Him speak to us. Let us see Him as He is in all His glory and majesty.

### (h) We must Begin where John Began

John says, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead" (1:17). This is where all of us must begin. We need to fall on our faces at the feet of the Master. We must die to ourselves. We must die to our denominational goals and ambitions. We must die to our limited views and concepts.

The message that the Lord sent to the churches was a message to repent, to return, and to be renewed. The risen Lord is in our midst today. In His Name, I call us to repent of everything that is not worthy of Him, to return to Him, and to be renewed by Him. Having done that, we need to return to each other, unite our forces, and go out to serve Him in His strength.

It is important also for us, as members of EA, to renew our commitment to the principles and practices that brought this organisation to birth twenty years ago.

Thus, in this paper, we have seen that the Lord of the church is in the midst of His church, calling to the church to renew her love for

Him, to suffer for Him, to make Him the Lord of her life, and to get into action for Him. We have also seen how we should practise the lessons we have learned in Papua New Guinea today. As He called those churches of long ago, so He calls us to acknowledge that:

- He is in the midst of His church,
- He has a message for each congregation,
- His Word is important for His church,
- we need to be honest with each other,
- the gospel has a very important message that needs to be presented meaningfully,
- He is the One who opens doors for us,
- His hands are on our nation and church,
- the way to renewal is through dying to self.

Let me conclude this paper by letting the Lord ask us the question He asked long ago of Ezekiel:

"Son of man, can these bones live?"
I said, "O Sovereign, Lord, you alone know".

# How God Speaks to Our Church and Nation Today

**Ossie Fountain**

*"In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son. He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with His powerful word. After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, He sat down in heaven at the right hand side of God, the Supreme Power" (Hebrews 1:1-3).*

## I. INTRODUCTION: GOD IS A GOD WHO SPEAKS

Right at the beginning of this EA Annual Meeting, I have read these verses to you. Why? I believe they have some very important meanings for us, which are both central to our evangelical faith and relevant for us today.

### 1. We must believe that God is a God who speaks

Even before we begin to think about the theme of the Conference, let us remind ourselves that we meet in the presence of the Living God – the speaking God. In the beginning, He spoke and the worlds came into being (John 1:3); it was God's Word that was the source of life (John 1:4); our passage tells us that it is the powerful word of God's Son – the Word – that sustains the universe.

Yes, God's Word is powerful and God's Word is present today.

But, even more wonderful to me is the fact that **God has a great desire to speak to us,** human beings – a mere part of His great creation. What did God do to Adam and Eve, our first parents? Immediately He created them, He blessed them in speaking to them – speaking words of guidance and provision (Gen 1:27-30). Then, putting them in the Garden of Eden, He again spoke to them, guiding and warning them (Gen 2:15-17). Later, when our first parents sinned by revelling against His Word, God did not leave them, but reached out to them in words – though they were words of judgment, but linked to the promise of salvation.

Let us not be tempted by Satan to think that God does not speak today. No, He is always speaking. Whether we are ready to listen or not, still He speaks. I believe that many times God is trying to speak to us, but our eyes are blind and our ears are dull.

I say again, this belief in a living and communicating God is central to our faith. He is not an impersonal power or force, or a distant Baal who sleeps, or a fickle spirit who leaps on the unwary and takes sudden and silent revenge.

## 2. God speaks in many ways

The second truth our passage affirms is that **God speaks in many ways** through his mouthpieces, the prophets. But God used the varied gifts of these men and women to share His truth in the most impressive ways He could. Think of the many ways He used in the Old Testament (e.g., in the Book of Judges):

1. God spoke directly as the angel of the Lord to the whole nation (2:1-5).

2. God spoke to them by defeat and oppression (2:14-15).

3. God spoke to them through the leaders He chose (Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar) by giving them victory (2:16).

4. God spoke to them through their enemies (2:20-22).

5. God spoke to them through a prophetess like Deborah encouraging a leader, Barak, to trust God for victory (4:1-24).

6. God spoke to them through Deborah and Barak's song (ch. 5).

7. God spoke through unnamed prophets (6:8-10).

8. God spoke as the angel of the Lord personally to Gideon (6:11-18).

9. God spoke to Gideon in a night vision (6:25).

10. God spoke to Gideon through the sign of the fleece (6:36-40).

11. God spoke to Gideon through another man's dream (7:13-14).

Throughout the Bible we can see that God spoke through His prophets and leaders in many ways. He spoke directly. He used parables. He used songs, drama, dance, and music. He used dreams and visions. He used victories and defeat. He used signs and events. He used natural happenings and miracles.

Indeed, everything He made speaks about Him (Rom 1:20; Psalm 19:1; Job 12:7-9), to those who have "ears to hear": earthquakes, famines, thunder, and floods.

God speaks in many ways. But are we ready to hear? Are our eyes blind, and our ears deaf, and our hearts not tuned to his voice?

**3. The third truth in this passage is that God spoke to our ancestors**

Now, I realise that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians whose ancestors had special revelations, and God spoke in a special

way in the history of Israel. But I believe the scriptures allow us to believe that God spoke to our Melanesian ancestors. Rom 1:20 says:

> Ever since God created the world, His invisible qualities, both His eternal power and His divine nature have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So these people have no excuse at all.

Did God speak to our Melanesian ancestors through creation? Yes!

This passage makes clear what is found in many other passages in the Bible (e.g., Psalm 19:1-4, Isaiah 40:26, Psalm 97:1-9) that the world around us speaks of Him to men – that God has placed the knowledge and fear of Him deep in the heart of all men, including our ancestors. He has made Himself known in the natural world, and the events of the past.

In my first year in Papua New Guinea, an old Sepik man came to me and said, "God was speaking to us before you missionaries came, we were ready to receive this message".

I believe Don Richardson is right in his book, **Eternity In Their Hearts**, when he explains that many people have a knowledge of God, even though that knowledge has been covered up by another layer of beliefs in the spirits. The missionaries, who brought the gospel in a way that makes the vague God of the ancestors clear, have been blessed by their message being warmly received. As Paul declared to the Athenians, "That which you worship, then, even though you to not know it, is what I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23).

The Huli people had a knowledge of God. He was Datagaliwabe, the Guardian of Morality, and the Watching Judge. Pig sacrifices were never made to Him. But He was reverenced as "the High God". I believe the missionaries could have chosen Datagaliwabe as the Huli name for God.

In the revival of the mid-1970s in the Koroba area, some men came to Jenny and me and said, "Please tell us how you Europeans received the gospel". When we had discussed church history for a

while, they said, "We asked because we believe our ancestors knew the gospel, too. There are so many parallels between the legends of our ancestors and the Bible, we think they must have known. Maybe they got the details twisted as they passed it down by word of mouth, but we believe they knew."

Some of our Melanesian ancestors hungered for a greater knowledge of the truth. God will judge them according to the light they had. Let us rejoice in a God who speaks today, and who spoke in the past, and let us remember that the God who "had decided on an even better plan for us" (Heb 11:40) holds us more responsible because we have more light from Him.

**4. Fourthly, we have to remember that God speaks to us in the most appropriate ways; God speaks to Melanesians in Melanesian ways**

God is a very gracious and understanding God. He wants to speak to us, so He speaks to us in ways that we can hear. God will speak to Melanesians in Melanesian ways. He speaks to us in our own cultural outlook. As we look back at the Bible, we see that He chose ways that were suitable to the person or group concerned; it matched their expectations; it matched their knowledge of God and the level of their faith. It was in words they understood (or could discover). Of course, He always wanted to startle, to impress, to emphasise what He was saying, so sometimes He chose unusual ways, but they were always understandable communications.

How does God speak today to Melanesians? The best communicators of God's message will always be people from within the culture. But the best cross-cultural missionaries will be those who study and discover the true meaning of Paul's words:

> I am a free man, nobody's slave, but I make myself everybody's slave in order to win as many people as possible. . . . So I become all things to all men, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible (1 Cor 9:19-22).

I challenge each one of you to discover the freedom we have in Christ to be meaningful and fruitful communicators of God's message in Melanesia.

## II. GOD SPEAKS TO OUR CHURCH AND NATION ABOUT JESUS

If these thoughts then speak of **how** God communicates, now we must think of our central theme: "What is God saying to our church and nation today?"

The passage in Hebrews, we read at the beginning, speaks of the central fact that God speaks to us first and foremost about Jesus. Anything else He says flows out of what God says to us through Jesus Christ.

When God wanted to speak in the most impressive way He possibly could, in the most universal way He could, and about the most important thing in all the world, how did He do it? ". . . but in these last (final) days He has spoken to us through his Son" (Hebrews 1:2).

The amazing fact is that when the Eternal, Almighty God wanted to speak to us as human being, He spoke to us as a human being. He sent His Son, fully God and fully human. It seemed so shocking, so surprising, that God should talk to us men as man to man that many people of His day rejected His claim to be God's Son.

Let us think again of God's communication in Jesus:

1. **He entered a human culture.** The Galilean culture was not a special one, it was a despised one. It was regarded as a poor, mixed-race culture, in an underdeveloped area. The people spoke with a strange accent. Hardly anyone was proud of being a Galilean.

2. **He entered a human family.** He came as a baby to an unmarried girl: He suffered from some who sneered at Him because He was thought to be illegitimate (John

9:24, 29). Women were despised, yet He was born of a woman (Gal 4:4). His family were poor; they brought the cheapest offering to the temple when He was born (Luke 2:24, Lev 12:6-8). And, as we often remind ourselves, He was born in the animal house of Bethlehem.

3. **He lived a human life.** From babyhood through boyhood to manhood He lived a truly human life. He learned obedience through the things he suffered (Heb 5:8). He knew tiredness, hunger, temptation, and pain. All the experiences of life were His.

4. **He died a human death.** It was impossible for many to believe that God could die, but so great was God's identification with us in human existence, so great was His desire to communicate with us and bring us into relationship with Him, Christ died. How great was God's love! God did the impossible in order to speak with us!

I think that, as evangelicals, we are often afraid to emphasise the humanity of Christ, in case we deny His divinity. But the fact of His humanity is so important. Indeed, His divinity has no relevance unless we believe in his humanity. Hebrews holds before us Christ, both human (Heb 2:14-18, 4:15) and divine (Heb 1:2-3).

If we believe in His humanity, we can go on to believe in His divinity too. Hebrews states seven reasons why we should listen to God speaking in Christ:

1) He is the one through whom God created the universe.

2) He is the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end.

3) He reflects the brightness of God's glory.

4) He is the exact expression of God's own being.

5) He sustains the universe by His powerful word.

6) He achieved forgiveness for sins.

7) He sat down at God's right hand in heaven.

God wants to speak to us about Jesus Christ today. He wants us to listen to Him (Luke 9:35); He wants us to be devoted to Him, and to be loyal to Him. Nothing is more important in Melanesia today than that God's people be totally true to Jesus Christ the God-Man they say they serve.

The rest of what I want to say to you today flows out of our struggle to be true to Jesus in our day in Melanesia.

## III. GOD IS SPEAKING TO US ABOUT THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSIONARY TASK.

If God spoke finally to us in His Son in the way we have outlined, then this is the model for us as His church, and as members of it. If Jesus entered fully into the cultural life of a human community and culture, so must we. As our Lord said, "As the Father sent me, so send I you". What does this say to us in Melanesia? I believe there are four issues we must face.

### 1. The structure of our churches

As I look back on the twenty years of my time in Papua New Guinea, several things make me sad. One of these is the continued divisions and divisiveness of our evangelical witness in the country. We have a strong emphasis on our oneness in Christ. We realise the central truths of our evangelical faith should draw us together. We follow the high ideals of those who founded the Evangelical Alliance. But, despite all this, the fact remains, that our differences are precious to us, and the spirit of rivalry motivates much of our service and absorbs much of our energy (Phil 1:15-17).

The weakness of evangelicalism is its failure in allowing the minor differences to become major ones in our proclamation of the gospel. This plagues us even more, perhaps, in the towns and cities than the bush, but it is one of the scars of missionary work in Melanesia.

Alongside our divisions, I believe, by and large, the churches and missions in Melanesia have failed to produce church structures relevant to our Melanesian culture. We have imported foreign, overseas structures, drawn from our denominational traditions, or from our mission bodies. We have not experienced the freedom of the New Testament times in creating church fellowship relevant, flexible, and meaningful to the local cultural setting.

I believe if we look again at the New Testament churches, e.g., Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, we will see that each of them was different in form, worship, leadership patterns, and ministry. They were united in fellowship, based on love for loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. Hardly anything else united them.

Again, as we read through the New Testament, we see the exciting development from synagogue-type churches within the Jewish culture to household-type churches in the Greek world. This was part of the great missionary thrust and experimental approach of Paul and others.

In Melanesia, sadly, we have done far too little in studying Melanesian forms and patterns of living, and applying the gospel freely to these forms. Church life is too often foreign and formal, not local and alive. Let us take up the task of studying again the scriptures, and applying them freely and fully within Melanesian culture, not importing overseas ways of doing things, and so stifling the beauty of Melanesian ways.

## 2. The forms of our worship

The revival movements in Melanesia have done much to help us realise that we can worship God in our own way. I have watched church life come alive under the influence of the life-giving Spirit of

God. I have also seen formality creep in again when leaders become cold in heart, and worship becomes a ritual we have to go through.

I pray that God will give us Melanesian musicians and hymn-writers, and creative leaders, who will, under God's Spirit, awaken us again to the beauty God wants from Melanesian Christians to worship Him in Melanesian ways in all their variety. This is part of capturing our culture for Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

### 3. The mission of the church

I believe the heavy investment of overseas personnel and funds has been vital for the pioneering and establishing of churches in Melanesia. But I also believe we have very largely failed to produce outreaching, missionary churches.

As the missionary task is being taken up by other Third World countries, Papua New Guinea is a long way behind in pushing out and sending missionaries. Why are we one of the world's most Christian countries, yet so little is being done to share the Good News overseas?

Here is another challenge to be taken up by our EA churches.

### 4. The ministry of the Evangelical Alliance

I believe EA has a vital role to play in the life of our churches. Not just as a place of fellowship once a year, but to encourage us to hold the central truths of our faith central so that we don't get side-tracked onto lesser things; to help us discover new ways of meeting the challenges of our changing world and nation; and to prod us into making our message and our church life more relevant within our Melanesian culture.

## IV. GOD IS SPEAKING TO US ABOUT FAMILY LIFE

Not only did Christ enter fully a particular culture, so making every culture special, but He also entered a particular family, making family life especially important, too.

In the rapidly-changing social context of Melanesia, big tasks remain to be done in the area of marriage and family life. The evangelical churches seem to be behind in meeting this community need. I can only list some of the area to which we must pay attention.

1. We must continue to study the scriptures, to apply them meaningfully to Melanesian marriage and family life. I believe we cannot afford to leave this task to others. Our evangelical commitment to the scriptures should lead us into seeing how important this is.

2. We must keep the balance between the scriptural teaching on marriage and the special features of Melanesian cultural patterns of family life. It is not enough to apply the scriptures only to the husband-wife relationship or the parent-child relationship. We must emphasise the role of the extended family, the strength of the brother-brother and sister-sister bond, the importance of the bride wealth or sister exchange system, and many other good aspects of our family life.

3. We must develop healthy pastoral and counselling methods for marriage and family. This is urgent. In fact, every EA church should be setting aside at least one couple for full-time ministry in the area of marriage and family.

4. We must develop materials in the areas of training and discipline of children, sex education, and preparation for marriage. These are topics, which are hardly touched with materials relevant for Melanesia, and usable by evangelical Christians.

5. We must be ready to meet the needs of the different groups in our society for help in marriage and family. Help is needed for people in towns as well as people in the bush, for single people, for young-marrieds, for older couples, and for polygamous Christians.

6. We must realise that, in Melanesia, becoming married is a process, not just an event. Our teaching and counselling programmes must be developed to meet this fact.

Finally, may I make a plea for the EA to consider requesting some church group to set aside someone to work full-time among the EA churches in marriage and family life. I believe also, we should be co-operating closely with the Melanesian Institute in Goroka in their Marriage and Family Life Research Programme. What they are doing can be a great help to us if we work with them.

As Jenny and I leave Papua New Guinea, at least for the present, we echo the words of Paul in Acts 20:32:

And now, I commend you to the care of God, and to the message of His grace, which is able to build you up, and give you the blessings God has for all His people.

May God bless you all.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. How does God speak to Melanesian Christians today? How can we be sure it is God who is speaking to us?

2. What aspects of teaching about Jesus Christ are especially important to Melanesian Christians? Are there gaps in our teaching about Him that should be filled?

3. How can we make Melanesian church life more Melanesian, and still be true to the calling and mission we have?

4. In what ways can we strengthen the missionary outreach of Melanesian churches?

5. How important is marriage and family life ministry in the life of your church? What aspects need more emphasis?

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MELANESIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES?

## A Study in Ecumenical Organisation

**John D'Arcy May**

*This paper was read at the 1985 Annual General Meeting of MCC.*

"How has one of the country's most important institutions sunk so low that it has to take money from development projects to keep its own creaky bureaucracy going – a bureaucracy that isn't even efficient enough to ask for funds for itself?"[1] It is a sad day for the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC) when these, and other equally scathing comments, appear in Papua New Guinea's authoritative weekly newspaper. In this study, I should like to recall the early history of MCC (1), examine the difficulties if encountered in post-independence Papua New Guinea (2), and formulate what I think is its as-yet unrealised potential (3).

### 1. The Founding of MCC

If the birth of organised ecumenism in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands dates from the formation of MCC in 1965, its conception goes back to a Pacific-wide conference of missions and churches on Western Samoa in 1961, held under the auspices of the International Missionary Council.[2] Ever since the Edinburgh Conference of mission organisations in 1910, and the subsequent founding of the International Missionary Council, it became customary in many "foreign mission fields", as they were then called, to form missionary councils, both to counteract the

confusions and divisions arising from the diversity of competing missionary groups, and to facilitate dealings with colonial administrations and, later, independent governments.[3] So it was also in the then Territories of Papua and New Guinea. In both, the stage was reached where the administration and the churches agreed upon "mission zones", or spheres of influence, to which the various missions voluntarily restricted themselves, though the Roman Catholics refused to be a party to any such agreement.[4] It was the administration, ironically, that gave the impetus for closer cooperation: in 1949, the Administrator called a joint conference with the churches and missions, in order to be able to relate to a single Christian body rather than a multitude of competing ones. In 1955, the Lutheran Mission explored the possibility of a missionary council for Eastern New Guinea; in 1959, the Christian Council of Papua and New Guinea was formed to coincide with the regular mission-administration conferences.[5]

These relationships were raised above the level of mere pragmatism by the above-mentioned conference of Pacific churches in 1961.[6] A continuation committee of this Samoan conference was formed, chaired by the Revd S. A. Tuilovoni of Fiji, with the Revd Vavae Toma of Western Samoa as secretary. There was also a New Guinea Continuation Committee of the Samoa Conference, of which Dr Ian Maddocks of the Papua Medical College in Boroko, Port Moresby, served as secretary. This voluntary committee of interested churchmen (I have not found any records of women members!) was the immediate forerunner of MCC.

The work of the Continuation Committee bore fruit in an inter-church study meeting held at Bumayong Lutheran Boys' Boarding School near Lae in January 1963. The chairman, the Anglican Bishop David Hand, justly described it to the press as "the first-ever such ecumenical gathering in the Territory", as the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Papua Ekalesia churches were represented by delegates, who "(w)ith the exception of one in each team . . . were all indigenes".[7] The meeting addressed itself to issues, such as training for the ministry, education, medicine, and political and economic development; properly theological matters were apparently left in the background.

At a meeting of the Continuation Committee, held at the Koki Anglican Mission, Port Moresby, on October 28, 1964, those present (all expatriates), after having consulted the heads of the five churches represented, constituted themselves as the executive of a Melanesian Council of Churches, pending the calling of a general meeting of the same. In the minutes, it is noted that the existing Christian Council of Papua and New Guinea "is not at present an operative body", and that the "Pacific Council (sic) of Churches" has been established, the implication being that neither body was felt to meet the needs of the churches in Melanesia.

It was, thus, no more than the logical development of these initiatives, when representatives of the same five churches, joined later in the meeting by the Salvation Army, came together at Boroko Baptist church, Port Moresby, on June 23-24, 1965, to form the Melanesian Council of Churches. Invitations were also sent out to a number of the smaller, more-evangelical missions, such as Unevangelised Fields, New Tribes, Swiss Evangelical, South Sea Evangelical, and Church of the Nazarene, but, in the event, only the Salvation Army accepted. Had the overseas sending organisations of these evangelical groups seen fit to allow them to participate, it may have been possible to reduce the religious tensions between them and the MCC member churches, which are still rife throughout Melanesia. However, noting that the proposed MCC constitution provides that the Council "will keep in touch with interdenominational or ecumenical agencies . . . but will not be formally affiliated with such agencies", the minutes of the inaugural general meeting of MCC, at least, go on to state: "In particular, the MCC affirmed its desire to maintain a close fraternal relationship with the Evangelical Alliance" (of the South Pacific Islands, founded in 1964).

The draft constitution opens with the conviction "that co-operative study and action in many areas of our activities will be beneficial to our common expression of the Christian faith in this land", which must be a "visible expression" of an "already existing unity".[8] The ecumenical goal of the Council is thus set at a very high theological level. A first test of its ecumenical purpose was already at hand: the founding of MCC coincided with preparations for the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea, and

negotiations were under way with its Interim Council on the role of the churches and the place of theology in the new university. The inaugural meeting of MCC called for "a Department of Religious Studies within the Faculty of Arts", empowered to hold external examinations in theology for students for the ministry, and to be regarded as the forerunner of a Faculty of Theology. Despite correspondence with the Revd James A. Bergquist of the WCC's Theological Education Fund, an impressive memorandum on the right of theology to take its place among the liberal arts by the Revd Frank Engel of the National Missionary Council of Australia, and strong support from the Revd Davis McCaughey, Master of Ormond College in the University of Melbourne, the authorities remained unmoved.[9] The problem of adequate church participation, and a religious studies department appropriate to the rich religious life of Melanesia, remain unsolved to this day.

This was not a very encouraging start to the MCC's role in Territory affairs, though in other areas, such as communications media, youth work, health, education, and pastoral training, it gradually began to animate and coordinate activities. It received a further infusion of strength when, meeting at Nobonob, near Madang, on July 10, 1969, it invited the Roman Catholic church to join the Council. This was approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1970, and Roman Catholic membership was formalised in February 1971.[10] In April of that year, the New Guinea Lutheran Mission – Missouri Synod (now Gutnius Lutheran church, Wabag) also applied for, and was granted, membership. As the Methodist Mission and the Papua Ekalesia had coalesced on January 19, 1968, to form the United church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the MCC now included the seven major churches of Melanesia, representing roughly three-quarters of the Christians in its geographical area.

It is time now to pause and assess these developments. There can be no doubt of their significance. In a remarkably short time, considering the bitterness of post-war rivalry, and the lateness of the Roman Catholic church's repudiation of proselytism, and acceptance of ecumenism, at the II Vatican Council, the churches in Melanesia had erected a promising structure for ecumenical cooperation. This structure, however, had at least one fatal flaw. In contrast to the

Samoan Conference, whose continuation committee for the whole Pacific included a majority of indigenous churchmen (and one woman!), and the Pacific Conference of Churches, to which it gave rise, whose General Secretary was a Fijian woman, Mrs Lorine Tevi, the MCC, in its initial stages, was almost entirely an affair of expatriates. One searches in vain in the minutes of the New Guinea Continuation Committee for evidence of indigenous participation, and during consultations with the Interim Council of UPNG in February 1966, the MCC's Inter-Church Committee was chided for not including one Papuan or New Guinean, which was admitted as being a "tactical error"![11] In a minute dated 22.3.63, and entitled "Submissions to University Commission", the two indigenous participants are conspicuously labelled "a Papuan" and "a New Guinean", as if their presence were something quite exceptional.

The problem goes deeper than this. The whole basis for the differences between the competing churches and missions was rooted in the history of Europe, and, in the wake of the ecumenical movement, these were becoming a matter of burning importance to certain expatriate church people. It would be interesting to know whether Melanesian Christians at that time saw them in the same light, but no one seems to have asked them. Again, the churches themselves were set up as faithful models of their European counterparts. It, thus, seemed natural that a "Council of Churches" should provide the framework for their working and growing together – but it was a framework designed to facilitate the interaction of the church bureaucracies within it, and, through it, with the already burgeoning administrative and educational bureaucracies at national level. "Localisation", of course, proceeded apace. The first indigenous Anglican Bishop, George Ambo, had represented his church with Bishop Hand, the first chairman of MCC, at the Bumayong study meeting; from 1971, the first indigenous Lutheran Bishop, Zurewe Zurenuoc, of the Evangelical Lutheran church, was an active and interested chairman of MCC; and Fr Kingsley Gegeyo, an Anglican priest, became its first indigenous general secretary. But the substitution of brown faces for white did nothing to change the structure of the Council, and its underlying presuppositions. Although dialogues were initiated between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and the Lutheran and United churches, the former reaching a documented conclusion,[12] while the latter was broken off

after producing papers on baptism and eucharist; and, despite the insistence of Bishop Zurewe, in particular, that local churches must make every effort to achieve true autonomy, little provision seems to have been made for serious theological work. The "indigenous theologies" that must have been fermenting in many a village community were not drawn upon to suggest alternative forms of liturgical life and church organisation.

The possibilities opened up by MCC of ecumenical contacts at national and international level compensated to a certain extent for these deficiencies, though, in practice, little use seems to have been made of development loan and scholarship schemes offered by the WCC. The two weaknesses of MCC at its inception, the alien bureaucratic structure, and the lack of theological initiative, lie at the root of its subsequent problems, to which we must now turn.

## 2. The Crisis of MCC

In the 1970s, after it had hit its stride, the MCC began to make its presence felt in the emerging independent nation of Papua New Guinea. In three year, as the Council's agricultural officer, David William, helped to launch the now world-famous *Liklik Buk*,[13] and laid the foundations for the adoption of a WCC "Country Programme" for comprehensive development in 1976, known as the "Long Range Programme", and embracing rural and urban development, evangelisation, and socio-political awareness projects, while remaining completely autonomous in its allocation of funds from an annual block grant. Significant conferences were organised, some in conjunction with the Evangelical Alliance.[14] As the time of independence drew near, some of those involved in drafting the constitution and setting the stage for political activity in a framework of parliamentary democracy, such as Fr John Momis and Mr Bernard Narakobi, had an active interest in MCC.[15] By the end of the 1970s, the MCC secretariat consisted of a general secretary (formerly executive officer, at this time, a very capable United church pastor, the Revd Dick Avi), a social concerns and development secretary, responsible for administering the Long Range Programme with the help of committees on Social Concerns and Development and Finance and Project Screening, an administrative officer, and a

clerk/typist. On the departure of Dick Avi in April, 1981, however, things began to unravel quickly, so that by the time I arrived to take up an appointment as ecumenical research officer in mid-April, 1983, the social concerns and development secretary, Mr Moi Eno, was the only staff member remaining, and the work of the Council was all but paralysed. How could such a thing happen to what had seemed a promising ecumenical body?

Though it is not easy to reconstruct the process which led to this sorry state of affairs, as the MCC archives are in almost total disarray (itself a reflection of the state the Council was in), I suggest that it derives fairly directly from the changing role of the churches in independent Papua New Guinea. No longer responsible to the extent that they had been for the educational, medical, and, in some cases, economic infra-structure of whole areas of the country, and thus with much diminished political influence, they became less certain of their public role, and, hence, less definite in their commitment to MCC. In addition, many of the churches were forcing "localisation" in their own ranks, with its attendant problems of ill-prepared personnel failing to cope with the demands of the alien and abstract administrative structures they had inherited. It is thus little wonder that qualified indigenous staff were jealously kept for the churches' own use, so that the MCC had the greatest difficulty in attracting any staff at all, or even in finding representatives to sit on its executive and committees. In short, each member church became engrossed in its own affairs, which tended to be dominated by administrative concerns. The indigenous leaders, with notable exceptions, such as Bishop Leslie Boseto of the United church, the Catholic Bishop Herman To Paivu, and the Revd Joshua Daimoi, a Baptist minister from Irian Jaya,[16] tended to look on ecumenism as a luxury that could safely be left to a few enthusiasts. Far from its being a source of leadership and inspiration, awareness of the very existence of MCC seemed to have dwindled almost to nothing in the Highlands, and along the New Guinea coast, except perhaps as a political lobby useful for pressing church interests on an increasingly secular government, or as a handy source of extra funding.

One is tempted to ask: if Melanesian Christians had been allowed to be ecumenical in **their** way, would they even have needed

an MCC? What ways would they have found to express their common Christianity, if they had not been taught that denominational differences were so important that they needed to organise – yet again! – to overcome them? Under present circumstances, of course, the question is idle. Though we may hope that one day Christianity in Melanesia will find an ecumenical identity of its own, at present, there seems to be no alternative, but to revitalise existing structures.[17]

In conclusion, I would like to examine the ecumenical potential of MCC in the context of the world-wide development of so-called "conciliar" structures.

## 3. The Potential of MCC

The above analysis of MCC's present distress may seem rather harsh, but we may take comfort from a general observation made about Christian Councils as early as 1972: "Few of them, if any, fully live up to the intentions and potentialities of their constitution. Their weakness, however, is the fault of the churches rather than of themselves."[18] In Melanesia, the ecumenical enthusiasm, so evident in the early 1970s, has waned considerably in the early 1980s, but this is partly due to the realisation of just how serious a business ecumenical dialogue is, requiring complete honesty with oneself and others.[19] MCC has undoubtedly proved useful in the field of practical cooperation, whether in development, or in liaison with government, but for that very reason, in the words of Lukas Vischer, it is in danger of becoming "a structure alongside the churches" rather than "an instrument of unification".[20] "The less the churches focus their joint work on the central spiritual questions, the more inevitable is that sterile vis-à-vis of councils and churches, which cripples the work of so many councils today".[21] A WCC Consultation on Christian Council, held in 1971, recommends "that councils pay more attention to worship and to 'spiritual ecumenism' ", insisting that they should neither "avoid the celebration of the eucharist by a member church within a council programme" nor "hesitate to examine questions of Faith and Order".[22] As Nikos Nissiotis points out in the same context, "one has to grasp the deeper ecclesiological issues, which are inevitably

raised by this very pragmatic basis" on which most councils were founded, because: "No other purpose and activity of local councils should make them lose sight of this, their first and most important service to the ecumenical movement, namely, to realise the fellowship of the church locally."[23]

Just as there are numerous examples of truly ecumenical cooperation at national and regional level within the "space for dialogue" created by MCC,[24] it is equally beyond doubt that, in many cases, excellent and profoundly ecumenical relationships exist between individual pastors and congregations of different denominations at village level in Melanesia. In between these two extremities, however, at the level of parish and diocese or district, and circuit, ecumenical organisation is desultory at best.[25] Yet, if the churches are not animated to go beyond piecemeal pragmatic cooperation at this intermediate level, and engage in serious dialogue, the channel of communication linking church leaders and church members across denominational lines is broken. The Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with characteristic caution, insists: "What really matters is not the creation of new structures, but the collaboration of Christians in prayer, reflection, and action, based on common baptism, and on a faith, which, on many essential points, is also common";[26] yet "base" groups, exploring new ecumenical territory, must remain in touch with "the more organised or formal expressions and structures of the ecumenical movement."[27] There is a tendency here to spiritualise ecumenical innovation, and bind it to ecclesiastical authority,[28] but experience in Melanesia has already shown that, unless there is freedom – and motivation! – to create new ecumenical structures at the intermediate level, linking village communities to national church bodies, well-meant initiatives from either end will never reach the other.

The theological principle underlying these developments has, in recent years, been called "conciliarity" (not to be confused with mediaeval "conciliarism", which tried to set the authority of general councils alongside, and even against, that of the pope). The II Vatican Council served to reawaken a dormant tradition of intermediate conciliar structures in the Roman Catholic church, which, since the Reformation, had been oriented ever more

exclusively to the papacy as the source of all authority, and the solution to all problems. The Council insisted that the church, in the first place, is the whole people of God, and is realised in its fullness in each local eucharistic community. The bond of communion (*koinōnia*) is expressed in the "collegiality", or mutual support and collaboration of the bishops, as the leaders of these communities, among whom the pope retains his traditional pre-eminence. This new emphasis led to the creation of new intermediate structures, such as parish councils, senates, or priests, national episcopal conferences, and regional and general synods of bishops.

At its General Assembly in Uppsala (1968), the WCC took up the theme of "catholicity", seeing in it the key to the working of the Holy Spirit in the church to make it "the sign of the coming unity of mankind" (I, 20; cp. **Lumen gentium**, 1: "By her relationship with Christ, the church is a kind of sacrament or sign of ultimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"). The Assembly urged Christians to "make visible the bonds which unite (them) in universal fellowship" (I, 18), and it unfolded a vision of the ecumenical movement, which was to have considerable influence:

> The ecumenical movement helps to enlarge this experience of universality, and its regional councils, and its World Council, may be regarded as a transitional opportunity for eventually actualising a truly universal, ecumenical, conciliar form of common life and witness. The members of the World Council of Churches, committed to each other, should work for the time, when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians, and lead the way into the future. (I, 19)

In other words, the practical goal of the ecumenical movement is to create the conditions under which a truly "ecumenical" council in something like the traditional sense – and that means: with eucharistic communion as the source and guarantee of its unity – could take place. In order for this to happen, a "conciliar" way of life would have to develop at all levels in all churches. Another way of putting this is to say that the consensus, which lays the foundation for unity in all its dimensions – in common action, in the deepest meaning of our beliefs, in the truth of our confessional statements –

would have to be articulated and institutionalised at all intermediate levels, so that the necessary communication could flow back and forth between the local churches and the church universal: **communicatio e communione**.[29] The WCC's Commission of Faith and Order has now embarked on a study project entitled "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today". In the minutes of preparatory meetings for this project, we read: "The purpose of the whole study project would be to prepare for a kind of 'preliminary plateau' of common confessing that would be necessary and sufficient to convene a universal ecumenical council" (Standing Commission, Crete, 1984, quoting Annecy, 1981).

Many aspects of this bold programme, of course, are highly controversial between WCC-oriented "ecumenicals" and the "evangelicals" organised to confront them in the world-wide Evangelical Alliance. This is true, in particular, of the emphasis on the eucharist as the source and seal of unity, and of the very idea of efforts towards re-expressing the apostolic faith, as opposed to the plain meaning of scripture. Perhaps the greatest stumbling block, however, is the World Council's insistence on the "unity of humankind" as an integral part of the ecumenical goal, one of several positions it has in common with contemporary Roman Catholic theology. These divisions run very deep, much deeper than has yet been realised by the a-theological, pragmatic, "polite ecumenism", hitherto practised in Melanesia. There is thus all the more reason for a strong MCC to enter into serious dialogue with the churches of the Evangelical Alliance and – if feasible – the National Council of Pentecostal Churches (founded in 1979).

Placed in this broader context, the present troubles of MCC seem insignificant, indeed, compared with the process in which the Council is meant to be participating. Emergency repairs to the organisational structure are the least that can be expected; incomparably more important is the growth of the communion and consensus, which that structure is to facilitate and express in a transitional way. "The ecclesial reality is not to be sought in the Christian Councils but in the communion among the churches, in their encounter with one another and with the world. As structures, Christian Councils have only **an instrumental ecclesiological significance** in the promotion of this communion, in bringing it to

birth and helping it to grow."[30] Is this even remotely true of MCC at present? Can it, by any stretch of the imagination, be called "the thorn in the flesh of the churches . . . a constant reminder to the churches of the anomalous situation in which they live"? Is its "concern with the question of unity . . . a continuing matter of priority"?[31] If not, then all the other activities of the Council – the social programmes, the political interventions, the business meetings, workshops, and conferences – remain nothing more than pale imitations of what professionals in all these fields are already doing. The MCC needs to give serious thought to the integration of its various roles, because its "two functions – service and unity – go hand in hand",[31a] though cooperation in service can pave the way for greater unity. The MCC is seldom able to explain the theological basis on which it takes its stands; but is this any wonder, when its members are not engaged in an ongoing theological dialogue? One result of this failure is that **The Times** could editorialise: "Typically disturbing is the MCC's growing involvement with the Indonesian Council of Churches – a council that is forced to echo government policies. . . ."

It would be sad, indeed, if the MCC succumbed to that "non-committal superficiality" which Lukas Vischer sees as a "danger", which is "increasing today in the ecumenical movement".[32] Yet, we must not forget that at the root of such superficiality may well be the inappropriateness of MCC as a Melanesian expression of Christian unity. Not only was it imposed on Melanesians by churchmen, whose missionary forebears had imposed their alien confessional traditions on them, incapable as they then were of simply collaborating in confronting Melanesians with the one gospel;[33] but many elements of the unity the Council envisages – or would envisage, if it were seriously concerned with defining it – are unacceptable to fellow-Christians of the more-recently-arrived evangelically- or charismatically-oriented groups. These include: the recognition of infant baptism, for the widespread practice of re-baptising adult converts destroys the basis for ecumenical dialogue before it has even begun; the growing appreciation of the frequent celebration of the eucharist in the framework of a liturgical spirituality throughout the ecumenical movement; and the vexed questions surrounding office and ministry in the church.[34] Dialogue on these problems, both among themselves, and with evangelicals,

would not only be most fruitful for the MCC member churches, but would strengthen their resolve to provide spiritual and moral leadership in meeting the challenges now confronting Melanesian nations from within and without.[35]

If these issues are not resolved, MCC may be condemned to remain an ecumenical alibi, a front for gaining access to international funding, "a kind of excuse for the local church leaders to do nothing more because 'ecumenism is taken care of by the Council' ".[36] The conviction is growing on me that **MCC is not ecumenical enough, because it is not Melanesian enough**. This may seem to fly in the face of the tendency to blame the localised secretariat staff for failing to cope with the routine business of the Council, but these difficulties are, in fact, the least of our worries. If the member churches, in their worship and theology, their ways of seeking consensus and making decisions, and their engagement with the problems of society and nation, were truly indigenous, **so would their Council be**. Again and again, the onus falls, not on MCC, as such, much less on its secretariat staff, but on the churches themselves to grow together in Christian unity by **being** churches in Melanesia. The MCC, as a "conciliar" rather than a properly "ecclesial" body, is, by its nature, provisional and transitory; but, in the present state of things, its task is by no means completed.

The Venice consultation of the WCC/RCC Joint Working Group on councils of churches in the ecumenical movement (1982) recognised "that councils in many places need to be supported in their efforts to achieve the visible unity of the church". Councils, it asserted, are "servants of the ecumenical movement in its search for the visible unity of Christ's church", "structures of koinonia", with which "the churches . . . have to provide themselves". Once the pre-ecumenical stage of "competition" and mere "coexistence" has been overcome, councils can enable the churches to enter into "cooperation", and even go beyond this, to the stage of mutual "commitment". "At this point, . . . they enter into a general, lasting, and deliberately open-ended agreement, under God, to do much of what they do as if they were limbs of the same body." It is questionable whether MCC has yet reached this point, whereas its counterpart in Indonesia has crossed the threshold of the next stage, "communion", renaming itself the Communion of Churches in

Indonesia (though without the participation of the Roman Catholic church).

One paragraph of the Venice consultation is particularly apposite to the present predicament of MCC: "An indispensable element of ecumenical commitment by the member churches must be the provision of adequate resources to enable the council to carry out its work. . . . It is unhealthy, however, for this outside financial support to continue indefinitely, with the member churches taking little responsibility for financial support of the council structure." The seven member churches of MCC have not succeeded in making the council truly **theirs**, their preferred instrument for working towards greater commitment, let along communion. From this disappointing, but irrefutable fact, all the council's present problems flow. Churches, which are, themselves, dependent on overseas aid, participating in a national economy, which is similarly dependent, cannot expect to be ecumenically independent. Until this dilemma is resolved, the MCC will continue to be a pale shadow of its former self.

**NOTES**

1. "The Times Opinion", **The Times of Papua New Guinea**, January 27, 1985; see also the front page story, "Koroma's Corner", and an interview with the present writer (p. 3) in the same issue.

2. At the New Delhi Assembly of WCC in 1961, the IMC was incorporated into the Council, and is now known as the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The Edinburgh Conference marked the historical beginning of the modern ecumenical movement.

3. For a survey of this process in Africa, see N. J. Maro (former general secretary of the Christian Council of Tanzania), "National Christian Councils as Instruments of Mission and Renewal", **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 167-174, esp. 167-168.

4. Both German and British colonial authorities tried to designate mission areas according to denominations. William Macgregor, Governor of Papua, persuaded the Protestants to acquiesce in this as early as 1880, though the Catholics successfully resisted him. The German administration drew a line separating Catholic and Methodist missions on the Gazelle Peninsular in 1890, which the Catholic Bishop Louis Couppé broke through after a long struggle in 1897, and the Rhenish Mission was directed to start work near Madang, while the Catholic Divine Word Mission was diverted from Astrolabe Bay further north-west to Aitape and the Sepik in 1896,

though it eventually established itself at Alexishafen, just north of Madang. The line of demarcation even took the form of a fence separating Lutherans from Catholics on the island of Riwo, between Alexishafen and Madang! See Brian Schwarz, "The Ecumenical Setting", **Lutheran church in Papua New Guinea: Its First 100 Years 1886-1986,** ed. By H. Wagner and H. Reiner (forthcoming); James Knight, "A New Era? Catholics in the Ecumenical Movement of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands", **Catalyst** 12 (1982) 282-296, esp. 283; Dick Avi, "Ecumenism and the Melanesian Council of Churches", **Catalyst** 10 (1980) 185-194, esp. 186; Reiner Jaspers, "A Brief History of the Catholic church in Papua New Guinea", **Papers Prepared for the Visit of Pope John Paul II to Papua New Guinea, 7-10 May 1984,** 1-6, est. 4, and "Colonialism and Catholic Mission Activity on New Britain between 1890 and 1899: The Problem of the Mission Districts", **ibid**. 48-59.

5. Cf. Joseph A. Knoebel, "Der Aufbruch der ökumenischen Bewegung", **Heisses Land Niugini**, ed. By Rolf Italiaander (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1974) 168-181, esp. 169-172, and Schwarz, "The Ecumenical Setting". The Roman Catholics did not become members of the Christian Council in 1959, though the Seventh-day Adventists did. In the 1930s, according to Schwarz, the SDAs were actively encouraged by the administration (as were the Anglicans, who declined) to move into the Highlands and counteract Lutheran (i.e., German) influence. After the war, Lutheran-Catholic rivalry intensified into a literal race for territory and converts, absurdly reminiscent of the gold rush of former years.

6. Cf. Lorine Jevi, "The Pacific Conference of Churches", **Religious Cooperation in the Pacific Islands**, ed. by E. Afeaki, R. Crocombe, and J. McClaren (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, Univ. of the South Pacific, 1983) 148-156, esp. 149.

7. **South Pacific Post** (Port Moresby), January 15, 1963; see also **New Guinea Times Courier** (Lae), January 16, 1983. Bishop Hand's reference to an "All-Pacific Conference of Churches and Missions" held "**last** year" (my emphasis, J.D.M.) I assume to mean the **1961 Samoa** Conference; this is a common slip of the tongue in the opening days of the New Year.

8. For the text of the Preamble and Basis, as adopted in 1974, and revised in 1979, and the functions of MCC, as contained in the present constitutions, see Avi, "Ecumenism, 189-190.

9. The idea of establishing "Residential Colleges on an Ecumenical Basis" was also mooted, "in the hope that the Roman Catholic church might agree to unite also in this matter", and provision was made for directing "priority spending" towards a "combined Religious Centre". Alas, the reality, both financial and ideological, was otherwise! The whole vexed question of religious studies at UPNG deserves separate study, which I hope to give it at a later date. From about 1965 on, an Inter-church Committee for Religious Studies at UPNG, thereafter known as the Inter-church Committee for Liaison with the University, debated the MCC proposals and made representations to the university, but without practical effect. At one stage it envisaged a "Christian Institute" (May 6, 1967), though it withdrew the plan for residential colleges (February 5, 1966). Today, the whole question of the

relationship between confessional theologies and the study of local and world religions (e.g., Islam!) would have to be faced anew.

10. The role of the gifted Divine Word missionary, Fr Pat Murphy SVD, in bringing about this remarkable step would repay further study (according to Knight, "A New Era?", 285, "at the time there were only two instances of the Catholic church having become a member of a local or national council of churches", though a document compiled for the WCC in 1971 notes considerably more by then, cf. **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 200-215). Fr Murphy's papers have now been recovered and deposited in the office of the Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference's Commission for Ecumenism, CBC Haus, Gordons, Port Moresby.

11. This expression is as indicative of the prevailing mentality as is the omission itself. A letter from Port Moresby ecumenical circles in the early 1960s advises an intending visitor from Australia that there would only be one or two Papuans there it would be worth his while talking to. . . .

12. **Report: The Work of the Join Commission of the Anglican and Catholic churches in Papua New Guinea, 1970-1973**, ed. By Patrick Murphy SVD, Secretary (mimeograph, July 31, 1974).

13. **Liklik Buk: A Rural Development Handbook Catalogue for Papua New Guinea** (Lae: Liklik Buk Information Centre, 1977), now also available in an expanded Pidgin translation by Ulrich Bergmann, **Save na Mekim: Buk bilong kain kain wok na kain kain samting bilong helpim sindaun bilong yumi** (Lae: Liklik Buk Information Centre, 1982).

14. E.g., the seminar on Religion and Development, jointly sponsored by MCC and the Melanesian Institute, 1978; and three workshops on Partnership in Mission and Development held with the cooperation of the Evangelical Alliance, in connection with the 1980 Melbourne conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

15. Though he did see a constructive role for MCC, albeit somewhat larger than the one it was already playing, Narokobi could be quite scathing on the divisive influence of the churches in Melanesia, see his **The Melanesian Way**, ed. By Henry Olela (Port Moresby: Institute of PNG Studies, 1980) 153ff., and his essay "Towards a Melanesian church" in **Voices of Independence: New Black Writing from Papua New Guinea**, ed. by Ulli Beier (St Lucia: Univ. of Qld Press, 1980) 230-235.

16. Cf. Leslie Boseto, **I have a Strong Belief: The Reverend Leslie Boseto's own story of his eight years as the first Melanesian Moderator of the United church in Papua New Guinea**, ed. by Glen Bays (Rabaul: Unichurch Books; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1983) 50-51, 62, 94, 172. On Herman To Paivu, see Knight, "A New Era?", 286. Joshua Daimoi has been chairman of both MCC and the Evangelical Alliance.

17. At its annual general meeting in February 1984, the MCC formed a Review Committee, whose terms of reference called for a more effective administrative structure for the MCC secretariat. On October 26-29, 1984, a consultation of

development experts from the member churches was held in Mt Hagen. It made far-reaching proposals on the future of the Long Range Programme, which should concentrate its resources on a nation-wide Development Awareness Campaign, and on the decentralisation of MCC itself to allow wider participation by competent ecumenists from the different regions. In the course of 1984, I was able to call into being a committee on Theology and Melanesian Life (unbeknown to me, when I proposed this at the general meeting, the then general secretary, Revd Timo Ani, had circularised heads of churches and members of the executive on November 15, 1982, about the need for a "Faith and Order Committee at the National Level", with the specific purpose of responding to the WCC's Lima Document on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry). The Australian Council of Churches sponsored a retired accountant for two months to subject the finances of MCC to a much-needed thorough review. It remains to be seen whether these measures will have the desired effect.

18. Victor Hayward, Editorial 1, **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 127, introducing a special issue on Christian Councils.

19. Knight, **"A New Era?"**, 282-283, asserts this of Roman Catholics, but I believe it applies to others as well, particularly the Evangelical Lutheran church; see Schwarz, "The Ecumenical Setting", and my companion study in the ELC-PNG centenary volume, "The Autonomous church in Independent Papua New Guinea" (forthcoming).

20. Lukas Vischer, "Christian Councils – Instruments of Ecclesial Communion", **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 132-147; 137.

21. Vischer "Christian Councils", 137.

22. Consultation Report, par. 11-12, **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 190-191.

23. Nikos Nissiotis, "Christian Councils and the Unity of the Local Church", **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 158-166; 166, 164.

24. Apart from the usual cooperative bodies, such as the Churches' Medical Council and the Churches' Council for Media Coordination, the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (founded April 1969) and the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service (founded in 1970, with ecumenical participation since 1974) enabled ecumenical dialogue to be carried out in theological education and missiological research.

25. Once again, James Knight's perceptive comments on the situation in the Catholic church can be applied to others. He points out that local Christian Councils do not function well in rural areas (like most other Western Institutions!), and in the towns they are often overwhelmed by the numerous evangelical missions and sects, cf. **"A New Era?"**, 286-288. The latter seems to be the case in Lae, whereas, in Goroka the Eastern Highlands Christian Council is restricted to the "mainline" churches, and has trouble cooperating with the evangelicals. And yet, Lukas Vischer insists: "To be regarded as a fellowship of yet-divided churches, a Christian Council must

include, as far as possible, all churches and Christians, who are engaged in the ecumenical movement in a specific area", "Christian Councils", 135, though, of course, to the more fundamentalist bodies, the ecumenical movement is a harbinger of the Antichrist.

26. Secretariatus ad Christianorum Unitatem Fovendam, **Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National, and Local Levels** (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1975) 27. This document was circulated to National Councils of Churches by the General Secretariat of WCC in August 1975.

27. **Ecumenical Collaboration**, 29.

28. I give further examples of this aspect of the document in my essay, "Sprache de Einheit – Sprache der Zwietracht. Der Rassismus als Testfall ökumenischer Kommunikation", **Ökumenischer Theologie. Ein Arbeitsbuch,** ed. by Peter Lengsfeld (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980) 259.

29. For further development of these ideas, with references to the wider literature, cf. J. D. May, "Vorbereitende Überlegungen zu einer Konsenstheorie de Konziliarität", **Una Sancta** 32 (1977) 94-104; "Consensus in Religion: An Essay in Fundamental Ecumenics", **Journal of Ecumenical Studies** 17 (1980) 407-431; "Übereinstimmung und Handlungsfähigkeit. Zue Grundlage ökumenischer Konsensbildung und Wahrheitsfindung" (with H. G. Stobbe), **Ökumenischer Theologie. Ein Arbeitsbuch**, ed. by Peter Lengsfeld (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980) 301-337.

30. Vischer, "Christian Councils, 140.

31. Vischer, "Christian Councils", 140, 141.

31a. "Consultation on the Significance and Contribution of Councils of Churches in the Ecumenical Movement", Venice 1982 (mimeo).

32. Vischer, "Christian Councils", 142; cf. **Ecumenical Collaboration**, 28: "It is not enough that the church simply have delegates in a council or other ecumenical structure; unless they are taken seriously by the Catholic authorities, the Catholic participation will remain purely superficial".

33. Those who may be inclined to think that this – the missionary method of Paul! (1 Cor 1:17) – is no more than an unrealistic pipe-dream, might like to consult the experiences of missionaries, who have tried it with success, such as the Lutheran pioneer of the Huon Peninsula in New Guinea, Christian Keysser, **A People Reborn** (Engl. trans, of **Eine Papuagemeinde**, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980), or the Catholic missionary to the Masai of Tanzania, Vincent H. Donovan, **Christianity Rediscovered** (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2nd ed. 1982).

34. A unique starting point for dialogue in these matters has now been provided by the so-called "Lima Document", **Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry** (Geneva: WCC, 1982 = Faith and Order Paper No. 111), to which the MCC member churches should

by now be responding; see also William H. Lazareth, **Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: A Study Guide** (Geneva: WCC, 1983 = Faith and Order Paper No. 114); **Towards Visible Unity: Commission on Faith and Order, Lima 1982, Vol. 1: Minutes and Addresses; Vol 2: Study Papers and Reports**, ed. by Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: WCC, 1982 + Faith and Order Papers Nos. 112, 113); **Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry**, ed. by Max Thurian (Geneva: WCC, 1983 = Faith and Order Paper No. 116); **Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration**, ed. by Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright (Geneva: WCC, 1983 = Faith and Order Paper No. 117); Günther Gassman, "Lima – Vancouver – und danach. Die Rolle von Glauben und Kirchenverfassung", **Ökumenische Rundschau** 32 (1983) 259-291; **"Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" and its Reception in U.S. churches**, ed. by Jeffery Gros, **Journal of Ecumenical Studies** 21 (1984) No. 1.

35. Noting the reasons why the churches in Melanesia have become engrossed in their own administrations, **The Times** of January 27, 1985, editorialised: "In the face of these and other problems, most church leaders have opted out of a direct involvement in the MCC. So now, instead of speaking with their collective voice, decided after healthy debate, it tends to speak, when occasionally it does, only with the small voice of its own bureaucracy."

36. Basil Meeking, Editorial 2, **One in Christ** 8 (1972) 130.

# WHAT IS ECUMENISM?

## A Catholic Viewpoint

**Robert Lak**

*This paper was prepared for the 1985 Annual General Meeting of the Melanesian Council of Churches on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference Commission for Ecumenism.*

Many might wonder how much sincerity there can be in the prayers of men and women throughout our country, and the world, for church unity.

How can a Catholic, they ask, who belongs to a church with clear-cut doctrinal requirements and absolute certainty about her doctrine, pray for unity without causing resentment among people of other faiths? On the other hand, how can a Christian, who belongs to a church, which considers itself one among many, unite himself with the prayers of Catholics, who maintain that their faith is the only true faith?

These are serious questions that need careful examination. Several considerations will throw light on our difficulty. Could we say that the religious differences, so very evident in this country, or in today's world, betray the very purpose of God, who intended mankind to be one family under a common Father? Is it not shocking that men, who are brothers, should call upon their common Father in so many divergent and contradictory ways? This is even more so when we consider the more-profound unity that fallen mankind has achieved through the redemption of Christ. Like scattered sheep, we have been gathered together into one flock, and reconciled with God through the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. It follows, logically, therefore, that Christ should have asked

for unity in His last will left to all His disciples. "That all may be one, even as thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou has sent Me" (John 17:21). Are not all Christians (Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, United, Baptists, Salvationists) disciples of Christ? And did He not teach all His disciples to pray for unity, when He prayed for the unity of His church? Therefore, it is because Christ demands it that we, though fully aware of our doctrinal differences, have to strive, pray, and work for unity. Our concern for unity, and our prayers to that end, do not evolve from a passing trend of modern times. Unity is the final and perpetual will of Christ, left as a precept to **all** His disciples.

Praying for unity must make us aware, in a practical way, that we are Christ's disciples, and that, as such, we are committed to carry out His will. But we cannot be His true disciples, nor can we hope to be doing His will, unless we dedicate our lives to the gathering of all peoples into one flock. Our eternal shepherd has entrusted the realisation of this unity to our works and prayers. The approval of praying for unity is motivated by the church's deep concern for carrying out the will of Christ.

There are three basic reasons for the church's encouragement of praying for unity:

1. The church wants each Christian to pray for unity, because of Christ's insistence on its necessity.

2. The church wants us to realise that **all** Christians have torn to pieces the seamless robe of Christ, which is His church.

3. The church wants us to become convinced that it is our concern and task to restore the seamless robe to its original beauty.

## 1. The urgency of Christ's Prayer for Unity

Prayer for unity is demanded by Christ. God the Father sent His Son to gather the scattered sheep into one flock. Christ's redemptive sacrifice was intended for all men, and was the source of our complete union among ourselves, and with God. But, just as it is true that the church, inasmuch as it is of God, possesses the divine gift of unity in a mysterious manner, so it is also true that the men who compose the church would periodically cause disunity within some churches. This grim vision was certainly present to Christ at the moment of His passion. Like a father, who on his death bed fears that his children will contend with one another over the inheritance, Christ at the Last Supper had a foresight of the contention that would arise among His own over His inheritance, the church. So he prayed: "Holy Father, keep in Thy name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them I Thy name. Those whom Thou hast given Me I guarded." (John 17:11-12) "Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as You, Father, in Me, and I in You, that the world may believe that You have sent Me." (John 17:20-21)

Unity must be hard to maintain if Christ prayed for it in an insistent way at the last hour of His life. He knew His apostles too well. He had taught them for some years, but they were not yet fit to be the cornerstone of His church. Their minds were still on earthly things (goods); their hearts on the future glory of the new kingdom. He knew also about the betrayal of Judas. It was for all of them, and for all their followers, that Christ prayed. Unity was not going to be easy among such people, and it would be even more difficult when the church would grow.

Dissensions started very early within the primitive community. Doubtless, on the day when they went out from the upper room to preach the resurrection of Christ, the apostles intended to be united. But soon conflicts began. In the community of Jerusalem, we find the first disputes over language, caste, and mentality: Hebrews versus Greeks. These were quickly settled. But, immediately, the acceptance of the Gentiles became a source of dissension: were the Gentiles to be admitted among the people of God? The conflict was

a strong one within the community; but the apostles came to an agreement at Jerusalem. The danger of separation was prevented. Judaisers insisted that the Gentiles be subjected to Jewish rituals. Paul fought that view forcefully. Peter was equivocating on the matter. So Paul stood up against him, and reproached him publicly. All this proves how quickly people working for the same Master could be exposed to misunderstanding, especially when they did not see each other often.

Nevertheless, Peter and Paul never separated in the moment of crisis. Although they disagreed, they knew that Christ was one, and that they could not divide Him. Paul became the great apostle of unity within the church. In fact, Peter and Paul died together as brothers in faith. Church tradition has always linked them together. Unfortunately, this example was not followed by the later generations of Christians. We can see from all this the urgent need of prayers for unity. Unity in the church has never been an easy matter. As long as unity exists, there is always a danger of shattering it. A trifling matter can destroy unity, but it takes centuries to reestablish it.

Church unity is something that should concern us very deeply. Let us pray for it more fervently. It is the will of the Lord. And, besides, He has promised us that our prayers will be heard, if made in His name. "Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13) Did He not tell us also that, "Where two or three are gathered together for My sake, there am I in the midst of them"? (Matt 18-20) But we are never more obviously united than when not only two or three people, but two or three different denominations unite with one another in the name of Jesus, and in faithfulness to His Word, to ask for unity. However, the command of the Lord went unheeded. Maybe this is why we find ourselves so disunited.

## 2. Christians are Responsible for Tearing Christ's Seamless Robe, His Church

The second reason for which the church approved praying for unity is that all of us may realise that we have torn to pieces the

seamless robe of Christ. Unfortunately, Christians have become unaware that unity is an essential element in the structure of the church.

Divisions became a regular feature in the history of the church. They succeeded one another with monotonous regularity. I will not go into the historical aspects of it, but let us keep in mind that the causes of our divisions are not only dogmatic but also religious, cultural, and social.

After the Reformation, instead of a spirit of disunion, there breathes within our church, and all other churches, the Spirit of Union. It is a gift from the Spirit. The Spirit of God is breathing once again over the whole church, as over the primitive waters. He is impelling us to bring together what has been torn asunder. It is marvellous to see all the churches in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands today striving hard to come together, leaving aside their past animosity, and submitting, in all sincerity, to the implications of our common commitment to Christ.

It is in this spirit that the church has been encouraging prayer for unity. The church wants us to realise that sewing back together the seamless robe of Christ, and restoring it to its original beauty, is our concern and task.

Indeed, the same insights, that first animated many Protestant communities, are now spreading, and growing deep, within the Catholic church. Much ecumenical work has been initiated and carried out by Protestant churches and Protestant groups: their work was truly monumental. The World Council of Churches is a standing monument to their willingness and their efforts. This same spirit is now taking hold of the Catholic church, and we owe this especially to Pope John XXIII. "Ecumenism is a name for the contemporary movement for unity produced by the Spirit among all Christians, a single movement, to which each church makes its contribution, according to the principles proper to its own self-understanding." (Gregory Baum, "Ecumenism at the Vatican Council", **The Ecumenist**, vol. 2, no. 2, January-February 1964, p. 21.)

Truly Pope John has awakened the Catholic church to the reality and depth of ecumenism: his life was indeed an ecumenical life. He received and embraced people of all Christian communions so frequently and so warmly that someone remarked that a Methodist bishop had a better chance of seeing the Pope than a Catholic bishop.

His love embraced all, and made all people feel like brothers and sisters again. Using a quotation from St Augustine, and giving it a new meaning, he once said: "Whether they like it or not, they are our brothers; and they will cease to be our brothers only if they will cease to say the 'Our Father' ".

Pope John emphasised the serious obligation to foster ecumenism on the part of all Catholics, Cardinal Lienart, Bishop of Lille, France, quoted Pope John as saying that, at the final judgment, we will be sentenced according to what we have done or not done for unity.

Pope Paul VI has followed closely the footsteps of Pope John. In his opening address to the second session of Vatican Council II, he asked pardon from our separated brethren: "If we are in any way to blame for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness. And we ask pardon, too, of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us." With Vatican II, the church has definitely committed herself to ecumenism.

## 3. The task of Ecumenism

But what does ecumenism mean? Many, indeed, fail to see the meaning of this movement. For some, it is a new method of attracting converts; for others it is a public relations effort for the Catholic church; for still others it is a method by which one can compromise religious truths, and come out with an agreeable formula. None of these ideas could claim the genuine name of ecumenism.

Ecumenism is a movement that impels individual Catholics, and the Catholic church, to draw closer to those who, though separated from visible unity with the Catholic church, are already

one in Christ, and belong in a real way to His church. Ecumenism creates among Christians an atmosphere in which all are stimulated to open themselves to the inspirations of the Spirit, who will lead all Christians to unity. The ecumenical movement is a leaven of renewal in all churches: it teaches new dimensions of charity, it leads to a deeper understanding of the revealed message, and it brings to the fore the missionary awareness of the Christian faith. Ecumenism demands conversion, and willingness to live more faithfully, according to the dictates of the Lord: thus, if all Christian churches will live up to the demands of the gospel of the Lord, they will necessarily, one day, embrace each other as sisters in one and the same faith.

Christian divisions, even though they are due to God's chastisement for infidelity, are not to be looked upon only negatively: they also have a positive effect on Christian people. Many bishops, during the council, have repeatedly acknowledged that the Catholic church shares in the responsibility for the unfortunate division of Christianity. We Catholics must repent, live up as perfectly as possible to the demands of the gospel of Christ, and love each other. And Christianity will become, once more, a sign to the world, rather than a stumbling block. By means of unity, both internal and external, Christianity will once again be the great sign that will attract all to Christ.

Through the Ecumenical Council, the Catholic church wants to renew herself, in order to present to the world her pristine plenitude and spotlessness. As long as she remains on earth, however, she will always be a pilgrim church, a church of sinners. Other Christian bodies also are renewing themselves, and striving to fulfil Christ's will in its fullness. The day when we will sincerely call each other "dear brother, dear sister" may be not too far off. We long for it ardently.

Retaining the best of the catholic tradition, the Catholic church is beginning to stress some of those things that the churches of the Reformation have constantly emphasised: the Word of God, the priesthood of the faithful; as well as that which our venerable sister churches of the East have strongly stressed: the collegiality of bishops beginning to rediscover the sacramental and liturgical life.

We are now appreciating much more our common bond. We all want to be faithful to scripture, and to the early tradition of the great Fathers, and all this says about the differences that separate us. Above all, we are interested in fulfilling God's will. We do not know when we will embrace each other as brothers and sisters; only God knows that. But, meanwhile, we have to pray and strive for unity, convinced that this is the work of the Spirit, to whom we must be faithful.

# ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY IN MELANESIA

**Leslie Boseto**

*Address at the inaugural meeting of the National Environment Council for Papua New Guinea, held at the National Coordinating Centre, Waigani, 18 February 1985.*

First of all, I see that God has a great concern for the whole world, and for the universe – because He is the Creator, the owner, and the giver of all things, the beginning and the end of this world, and the hope for a new heaven and new earth.

His Spirit in creation feels anger and pain at what is happening. If we read Romans 8:22, "The creation itself groans for the new birth of the earth", we, too, have the same spirit that creation has, groaning with the creation – strangled together.

I think this is very important for us to realise as we try to care for the earth, and try to be good stewards, to have human kindness in the world. Therefore, our goal is clear, because we are aiming at something, which God has already assured us that we will be part of, in His community.

Today, we hear a lot about people (from all corners of the earth) talking about the politically oppressed, economically poor, racially alienated, and the consequences of such talk – we hear of refugees running away from their government.

We continue to hear about hunger in all parts of the world, exploitation, fighting, and increased unemployment. I was in Vancouver in 1983, and the figures they gave at that time were 35 million unemployed in the industrialised societies. I used to think that if we were following them, we would be better in terms of

development . . . but for what? For whom? To where? And so forth. But they haven't reached a goal yet, and one writer said, by the end of 1990, there will be 100 million unemployed in industrialised societies. It is a fact! But where are we going? Are we developing a majority, or supporting the survival of a minority? But to be sure, they are secure.

What is wrong? We try to look for more researchers from outside to keep on researching to know more about the things we can put together in programmes or systems. Especially in Third World countries, we continue to look for such people. We look for a new international order (there's a lot of talk about that one!) – "How can we narrow the gap between rich and poor people?" Something's going wrong – we try to find a new system, new programme, and so forth. Those of us who are Christians preach a lot about "Jesus is the answer to our problems". But how?

Sunday by Sunday, we talk a lot about that from pulpits. For me, it is a time for Christian churches in the Pacific – the Melanesians – to look at what is gospel, what is the concern of God. Is God just concerned with the survival of individual denominations? Or **is he concerned with the total community** and the people of Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and the other Pacific nations?

I have come to see that the whole concern of God through Jesus Christ is for **the whole world**. His concern is for the totality of man, and the community in every context. Therefore, His movement was from the centre to the periphery. If I can give you some biblical references, this will remind you of what I mean: "The attitude you should have, is the one that Christ Jesus had. He always had the nature of God, but He did not think that by force He should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of His own free will, He gave up all He had, and took the nature of a servant." (Phil 2:5, 7)

Let's reflect that He was the centre of all power, all resources, all wealth – all things; but yet, His movement is to the periphery, to the oppressed – to the poor. This sort of understanding of the gospel is very important for Christian churches today. We must take it seriously, in order to play our part in caring for society.

I am a lay person in relation to the environment, but I begin to see that when the gospel concerns the totality of man and the community, we begin to see that man's relation to nature, to His land, and to His people – to decision-making bodies – it so try to relate to each other, and that is where I begin to be interested in learning more about this question of caring for the environment.

Jesus, the whole gospel of God if you like, is wholly concerned about the human community; He started from the lowest level. He was born outside Jerusalem, outside the religious hierarchy, or the élite pyramid structure of society, and started where the people are. He was crucified outside the gate, too. This is what Paul saw when he wrote in 2 Cor 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich He made Himself poor for your sake, that through His poverty you might become rich".

In Mark 10:45, we read: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve, to give His live to redeem many, to try to care for many. Not for a minority, not for the élite, but **He came to serve many."** Here in the Solomons, I began to raise the question: What is work? I tried to develop a theological understanding of what it is, and what is the understanding of it in Melanesian society.

Here we see that, for Jesus, work is to help people, to care for many; not to help maintain institutions – although we need these things, to be cooperative. Then I came to the programme of the gospel, and this is how I saw it before I went back to the Solomons, and tried to experiment with some ways of helping people to understand their situation, and begin to be aware of their direction, to be critical of their situation, and so forth.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has chosen Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. To set free the oppressed, to announce, 'The time has come when the Lord will save His people.' "

When they celebrate the jubilee, every 50 years, and every seven years, it is a time of liberation to set free the slaves onto their own tribal land. It is a time of recovery, it is a time to stop **spoiling the environment**, to stop spoiling **people**, to try to create reconciliation, unity, and the feeling of belonging to each other. And Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, has shown us the concern of God, and the heart of God, saying of Himself that "I have come in order to really communicate this gospel to humankind!" Therefore we see the concern of God, His holistic concern, and it is very important for the bearers of the gospel today.

In the Pacific, we talk about "total human development", the constitution of Papua New Guinea calls it "integral human development", and the gospel that we've been preaching also talks about the whole concern of God through the whole Christian community, the church, and so forth.

Therefore, the same thing that the government and the church are talking about is that we try to help the whole community – to start with people, from people, and for people. To work with the community, because His communities are stewards of God's creation – to look after **His land, His forests, and His sea**.

These are some of my reflections behind my move to go back to the rural areas when I left Port Moresby four years ago. Perhaps you know that I was given the position to be the Moderator of the whole United church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands for eight years. I'd been attending a number of global meetings organised by the World Council of Churches, the Pacific Conference of Churches, and others. I came to ask serious questions of myself: "Where to start? – Where to start?"

It's good for officials of the churches, and the leaders of the world communities, to talk about how we can help society, help people, help community; but the question of "how" and "who" can start is due, and very important. Both ministers and politicians are preaching how to help people in the rural areas, how to help majorities, but what we need is people who can implement those sermons and political preachings.

Therefore, I left here in 1980 and went back to my home island, Choiseul. I spent two years with my wife Hazel. We went travelling around, that's the first thing we did. We slept in every village, tried to understand their concerns, their struggles, their thinking, and their beliefs. Walking, paddling, riding on an outboard motor canoe around Choiseul, like this, for two years. We slept anywhere, on mats, on the floors, and talked with people – we enjoyed very much trying to relate to the people at the grassroots, and the next thing we did was to call a conference.

We used to call it a "Village-Based Conference", and you see that behind it was my belief and conviction that God has total concern for the total community – the whole gospel for the whole people.

In these conferences, we invited politicians, we invited presidents of posts at the local level, and justices. We invited community leaders, nurses, and women. We tried to come together to share our concerns. But it's not just exercising traditional ways of running conferences, as you are familiar with. We used to have papers to collect information and stimulate discussions.

We tried to take the gospel seriously to where divisions were, where people are not getting on well. We tried to see that the gospel concern is with reconciling people, to create and establish peace, to help people to see that development is not just in terms of money – to put up the budget, and ask for money to come for building roads, and buying boats, and so forth. These are very good for helping people, but development is to help communities.

I found that one of the important things that we can do to help people is to be aware of what is happening in their environment, and this is exactly what we tried to do. The topic that we tried to share was the topic of whole community, and the whole gospel, bringing together the young and the old, male and female, to come together and to discuss what they can do to be a united force in the community, to build a better village, and a better community.

As I see this movement, it is both ecumenical, and also concerned with the total environment. In the course of planting

coconuts in the Solomons, people did not think about the native trees, they just cut them down without utilising them for timber, they just let them rot. But in the conference we say: "Let us now look after our trees, and begin to utilise the trees". So the question of a portable sawmill came to our minds – to start a sawmill. We put it in the hands of the community to think about portable sawmills, and that made them question, "Is it good to bring logging companies into the area?" We weren't talking about the destruction being caused by logging companies on the island, we tried to start from the community, to be aware of the environment, and the responsibility to care for the forest. Then we put in their hands the portable sawmills.

Because of that, the awareness of the people was growing, and they began to ask: "Was it better to bring in logging companies or not?" The question came from the people themselves. They began to see their worth, and the potentialities that they can realise; that they can saw their own timber, and they can price it for sale in such away that their village communities are able to buy.

If the logging company had been invited to Choisel Island, perhaps they would saw the timber, but the cost would be very high for the local people, and perhaps they couldn't afford it. Therefore, you can see how the people began to think, "Perhaps it is better for us to look after our trees, our forest, and slowly to cut our own timbers."

Another programme that we try to develop is the question of land disputes. If anything came in relation to customary land disputes, people said, "Let us go to court, the court will fix it, the judge will settle it." But after they've been through the courts, nothing is settled, and people still raise the question. They were not satisfied with it. They take it to a higher level of court called "Customary Land Appeal Court", and so on. Even if they finalise the decision, there is still a conflict. There's no peace, there's no sort of reconciliation, no unity.

So we said: "Alright, the court is there if anyone wants to go, he or she can still go there, but let us put the brake on now, because, with regard to customary land and land boundaries, people in the villages and tribes closer to the area concerned know more about the

situation." Therefore, we said: "Let's invite some old people, who know about your tribal lines and your genealogies, to come and sit down and look at it, and then reach a solution."

Also, we say that the gospel preaches about "the Kingdom", and invites everyone to be in the Kingdom. Sunday by Sunday, we hear the message about "the Kingdom", "belong to the Kingdom!", save the souls of individuals, and so forth, but if we believe that the gospel preaches the presence of the Kingdom, to make the Kingdom present on earth, then the people must fight against anything that's dividing them, and try to be reconciled to one another.

Here again, I think it's very important to see how the whole concern of God is in each locality and context. Therefore, I was surprised when one time we held a Land Committee (it has become an annual thing for me to lead this), and one of the persons who used to receive reports about land disputes said that he was surprised that, since we started trying to settle our own land disputes, about 15 cases were withdrawn after they'd already paid court fees.

That is a sign that perhaps what we are doing is helping the people, and I hope that Christians, as St Paul says, "can judge the whole world, they can even judge the angels" (1 Cor 6:2-3). It is the gospel's concern, and sometimes the gospel's concern confirms the traditional values of our forefathers and our ancestors more than something imported or transplanted from Western society.

Therefore, what I have been trying to do, instead of trying to be specialised in my understanding of environment and the question of ecology (although I have been with Pacific people in saying that we want the Pacific "Nuclear Free"), is to see that the foundation of development is people, and the majority of people demands of us leaders, and the people making decisions, **to be with them**. This is why God helps us in Jesus Christ to see His action is not an action through preaching, or through just transmitting ideologies, theologies, and doctrines. But that He transmits or carries through His will through people, and my concern with other church leaders today is to try to help people to be aware of their own context and the direction in which the world is moving.

After we've been hooked into the international system of the world, it is very difficult sometimes to **unhook** ourselves to **be ourselves,** and this is where, in the light of the gospel, I believe we can! And the only way to be able, is to start from where the majority of the people are, and this is the area where I am trying to operate today. This is my conviction and my belief, and this is what I've been trying to experiment with. I continue to learn.

Lastly, I would say that building a community, I believe, is the work of God Himself. He is the "Community-Creating God". He created community through Christ, to relate to people, to bring in the outcast, the oppressed, the sinners, to be together to form a group to express the presence of the Kingdom, and to witness to that Kingdom, but we can only witness to it when we see people are reconciled, are forgiven, and are free. To be reconciled in order to be a reconciling force, to be united in order to be a uniting force, to be forgiven in order to be a forgiving force . . . these have elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as given to us.

I saw people cry after they were touched at a deep level of their existence by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They opened. In one of our Conferences, a person had taken another village person to court. After the court decided he had won the case, they had not been getting on well together, they continued to be enemies. Standing near us, he stood up and said, "Oh how can I today establish a living and united community with my brother there, can you help me?" They embraced each other, they were crying, and that is the power of the gospel, and what happens with Pentecost. It must be a Pentecostal Community, although we can only see it through human beings.

It must be "A Forgiven and Forgiving Community, a Reconciled and Reconciling Community", if it is to bring about justice. Development, justice, and peace are interrelated, and I see that we must try to understand more what God's concern is in Jesus Christ, and what is "Good News".

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# DISCUSSION

## Instruction on the "Theology of Liberation": A Comment

**Laurenti Magesa**

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### Immediate Reason: Latin America

More than any other, it is, without doubt, Latin American theological thought that was the immediate reason for the issuance of the "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation' ", released on September 3, 1984, by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). For one thing, Latin America and its Theology of Liberation are specifically referred to a number of times in the document. But, perhaps more telling, is the fact that it is Latin American theologians of liberation who have recently come under scrutiny by church authorities. In a letter to the Brazilian Franciscan, Fr Leonardo Boff, for example, the Prefect of the CDF, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, some months prior to the release of the Instruction, invited him to Rome for "a conversation" together. The colloquy took place on September 7, with Cardinals Paulo Evaristo Arns and Aloisio Lorscheider of the Brazilian Episcopal Commission for the Doctrine of Faith in attendance in support of Fr Boff. The CDF had reservations about the theology of Fr Boff's book **Church: Charism and Power**. Similarly, earlier in the year, the Peruvian bishops voted to establish a seven-bishop commission to begin a formal study of the writings of Peruvian Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, who is widely acknowledged as the "father" of Liberation Theology on account of his pioneering work in this area, **A Theology of Liberation**. Reportedly, on a recent extraordinary **ad limina** visit to Rome, September/October this year,

the Peruvian bishops, led by Cardinal Juan Landazuri Ricketts of Lima, rejected a CDF draft-document condemning certain "erroneous opinions" of Fr Gutierrez's theology. Instead, another document, more general and pastoral in tone, was adopted.

Nonetheless, the questions and concerns raised by the Instruction cannot be relegated to the Latin American theological scene alone. Clearly, the CDF's document has, as was intended, wider import than that. It makes it quite clear that the Theology of Liberation is not limited to Latin America, where it was born, but that it has spread to other areas of the Third World, and is espoused by some in the industrialised nations as well (III, 2). Moreover, towards the end of August, Pope John Paul II sent a message to the bishops of southern Africa meeting in Harare, August 22-28, reaffirming the solidarity of the church with the poor and oppressed. But he dissociated the church from any form of social analysis "based on class distinctions and class struggle". The Pope obviously had Liberation Theology in mind here. He was voicing and applying the same concerns, later elaborated by the Instruction, to Africa.

**The Instruction: Basically Positive**

Many reviews of the Instruction agree that it is a positive document, overall. Far from repudiating the Theology of Liberation **in toto,** as was hoped in some quarters, the Instruction endorses it. It spells out its purpose as not being a condemnation of those who speak and act on behalf of the poor, nor an endorsement of those who are indifferent to the plight of the oppressed (Introduction Section). Further, it is not meant as an approval of people or organisations which create poverty and/or benefit from it (XI, 1). On the contrary, the Instruction notes that the liberation theme is fundamentally biblical, and theologically valid: it has to do with the freedom of the people of God, and its practical realisation in society (II, 4). As such, the Instruction stresses in several places that liberation is a fundamental task of the church.

Prefaced on this central understanding, the document is intended as simply a warning against "deviations, and risks of deviation" in certain kinds of liberation theology. These dangers

consist, according to the Instruction, in using "in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought" (Introductory). Among these concepts, the Instruction is particularly concerned about the understanding of personal sin, the use of Marxist social analysis, and the concept of class struggle in doing theology.

In the following lines, I would like to relate these concerns briefly to the African situation, specifically, the African Catholic theology of liberation.

**Personal and Social Sin: Inseparable Reality**

The Instruction points out the danger of being so preoccupied with social and structural sin as to virtually ignore the presence of personal sin. This is a critical mistake, the document notes, because personal sin in the heart of man is the cause, basis, and reason for socio-economic and politico-cultural alienation. For a humane order to exist in the actual structural-institutional spheres, which govern social life, it is the human heart that must be transformed (Introductory). To reverse this order, is to annihilate the transcendence of man as the basis of ethical value (IV, 15).

It is, indeed, reductionist, to ignore, relegate to the background, or deny the significance of personal sin in the process of conversion towards the full acceptance of salvation offered by Jesus Christ. The scriptures, and the various traditions of the church, are unequivocal in that respect. Yet, just as reductionist, would be to de-emphasise the significance of social sin, prioritisation between the two is theologically dangerous. In traditional Africa, as an instance, sin – whether it is an unconscious infringement of an interdict (or taboo), or a deliberate transgression of a clearly-defined ethical demand – has its manifestation and effects on society. Personal cleansing alone seldom suffices to regularise the relationship between God and man, without cleansing the whole society, which has been affected. And to be effective, the cleansing of society must ultimately include all members of that society. The scriptures seem to paint a similar picture: in true repentance, there must always be social evidence of personal reform.

The relationship is consequently integral: personal sin is as much a cause of social sin as social sin is of personal sin. It is hardly a question of which is prior or more fundamental here. The two are so intrinsically related in actual life – "the condition of the world" – that it would be mechanistic to say that the one can effect authentic liberation without the other. To be sure, the transformation of social structures alone cannot bring about personal spiritual metanoia, but neither can personal transformation of the heart, in itself, bring about the transformation of sinful social structures. The biblical Exodus theme, so central to Liberation Theology, is properly not limited to either personal spiritual freedom alone, nor solely to freedom from social enslavement. It incorporates both into one authentic liberation. As the Instruction points out, one leads into the other, in a united progressive manner.

In Africa, for instance, where some important social institutions – in the economic and political spheres – have not yet solidified into a sort of "religion", Catholic Liberation Theology could show the link between them and morality, in order to avoid the mistake so prevalent in other areas. There, it is asserted, that there is no relationship whatever between economics, for example, and ethics; that the political institutions, and economic conduct of individuals and nations are irrelevant or extraneous to salvation. To do this effectively, theology must give equal emphasis both to personal and social transformation.

**Social Analysis: According to Karl Who?**

Social transformation, which influences personal transformation, requires an understanding of the functioning of social structures and institutions, and how to change them. This understanding is provided by the science of what is now known as "social analysis". The Instruction's main warning in this area is that Marxist social analysis is so inimical to the faith and religion that it may in no way be used at the service of Catholic theology (Introductory). Further, since Marxist ideology is indivisible, "no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology" (VII, 6). And the varieties

of the ideology make little difference. Insofar as they are truly Marxist, they all end up in denying justice, freedom, and human dignity, through a policy of collectivisation (VII, 7).

For the theology of liberation in Africa, the problem here is extremely practical, and demands an unequivocal stance. The fact is that many African states, while refusing to accept wholesale Marxist ideology, have yet accepted the Marxist analysis of society on national and international levels. They see in this analysis, many contributions towards an awareness of the functioning of unjust structures. They recognise that social analysis does not create classes, status differentiation between people, racism, or sexism; it simply points out the existence of these realities. But, if Marxist theology is indivisible, and the use of one of its elements, such as its method of social analysis, inevitably leads to the embracing of the entire fateful system, then theology in Africa must be sincere, and speak out against such analysis on the basis that socio-political institutions and orientations have a lot to do with the Christian understanding of salvation.

But what is the real situation on the African scene? Apart from a few avowedly Marxist states, many African states profess and espouse a social philosophy generally known as African Socialism. Social analysis of the Marxist kind is a feature of many forms of African socialism. Yet, all things considered, neither Karl Marx, nor the communist system, matters very much to them, apart from this one element of analysis. In fact, most couldn't care less about the entire philosophical system of Marx, particularly as regards its crude atheism. What is important to them is the truth about their societies, and their struggle, from a position of weakness, for justice in a structurally-unjust world. They feel no obligation at all to Marx or his communist system.

There is an opportunity in Africa for theology to make use of social analysis without panic. Facing Africa are two great evil dragons waiting to swallow it, and social analysis may provide for theology a method of understanding and repelling them. These dragons are communism and liberalism. Communism is atheistic; liberalism not formally so. But the worship of money (mammon) that characterises liberalism, and excludes the supernatural, is no less

atheistic. In the end, philosophical propaganda of party commissars is just as inimical to the church and religion as the practical atheism of the money-centred "spirit of free enterprise" is to the faith. The threat in the former must not dull theological vigilance against the poison in the latter.

**Class Struggle: A Reality to be Regulated**

As has been mentioned, social analysis, even Marxist social analysis, does not create classes; it simply points out their existence. Nor does it create class struggle. It may not always be in the extreme form of blind violence, which (the Instruction is right) is one of the main faults of the Marxist system, because it encourages it (VIII, 6). But, even non-violent ways towards social justice (XI), are clearly indicative of class struggle, where "class" can mean unjust distribution of social, economic, cultural, or political power, resulting in one group of people dehumanising the other. Justice requires that the "battle (for it) be fought in ways consistent with human dignity" (XI, 7). But the battle must be **fought**. It requires techniques, tried plans, strategies, and political options to realise structural transformation towards justice. As D. C. Maguire notes in his "The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology", mere moralising is not enough:

> In the social order, . . . talk of love and friendship can be a prescription for disaster. Justice is incipient love, and, in the political order, it is the only form that love takes. Privatistic talk of love is at that level unavailing, naïve, and ultra-conservative in effect. Ironically, love-talk in the social-political sphere provides an ideological veil for injustice, and inures one to the needs of the poor, for whom justice is life blood.

The recognition of the reality of "class" struggle in theology must not necessarily lead to the acceptance of "blind" violence as a means towards justice. On the contrary, such recognition may help to prevent violence by deliberately conducting the struggle for justice in more human and humane channels of "dialogue and persuasion", wherever possible. To deny the reality of class struggle does not

mean that it does not exist in situations of gross socio-economic differentiation. It would be good for theology in Africa not to ignore this fact.

## Conclusion: the Instruction as a Service to Theology

For Liberation Theology in Africa, therefore, the Instruction is of profound value. It raises important questions of immediate practical consequence to the situation in the Continent that theology must consider. It makes necessary a study and clarification of certain elements of theological thought that might have been taken for granted hitherto. For these and other reasons, the Instruction is indeed a document of great service to doing theology in Africa today.

# Liberation Theology in the Context of Papua New Guinea

**Albert Bundervoet**

*Archbishop Albert Bundervoet MSC, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Rabaul, has kindly given permission to publish the following paper on liberation theology. It was prepared by him for the Catholic Bishops' Conference as a working paper only; it represents his personal views, not the official position of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, as such. It is a very timely document, and we hope it will stimulate discussion in wider theological circles in Melanesia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the "Preferential Option for the Poor" became a growing reality in the Church of Latin America, some parts of the Bible, where God shows Himself as the liberating force of the oppressed people of God, received more attention, and the whole of the Gospel message was read with eyes on the inhuman situations of poverty, injustice, and oppression of the majority of the peoples of Latin America. This analysis of real situations under the light of the Word of God was the origin of Liberation Theology. This theology is part of a conversion of heart by the Latin American church, resulting from Vatican II, Populorum Progressio, and the Conferences of Medellin and Puebla.

Between 1964 and 1980, I visited Brazil and several countries of Latin America seven times. During these years, I was able to observe the shifting of the church from supporting the governments, towards supporting the poor and oppressed. And I saw it as a movement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## 1. Liberation Theology in Latin America

Under the moving force of the Holy Spirit, theologians remain what they are – human beings. They were touched by the cry of the poor in their situation of need, injustice, and oppression. They thought that the voice of the poor should be heard and listened to by the Latin American church. That means that their theology was oriented towards the specific tasks of evangelisation in Latin America.

## 2. Liberation Theology in Papua New Guinea

**Basic Principle**: If evangelisation is to be effective, it can never prescind from the cultural and social context in which it takes place, or from the life-situation of those to whom it is directed. That is why Liberation Theology, as it was elaborated in Latin America, is not, and cannot, be an "article for export".

I understand that, in similar situations, similar theologies can be produced. But for our situation in Papua New Guinea, the frame should be different. The content should be different. We have to go back to the cultural and social situation of our country, and to the life-situation of our people. Indeed, Christian faith is not indifferent to that reality.

The analysis of the situation of our people constitutes a real challenge to the work of evangelisation in the church. And in this Year of Youth, we have only to think of the problem of youth in our country, to see how urgent and acute the need is. In fact, the community of the people of God has the mission of announcing the Good News of Redemption to all peoples, at all times. That means that they have to pay attention to the signs of the times and places, that they have to listen, in the Name of the Risen Lord, to the joys and the anxieties, the hopes and the fears of the people of God, especially those who do not have a voice elsewhere.

## 3. We have to learn from the Liberation Theology of Latin America

For us in Papua New Guinea, it could be a danger to conclude, from the fact that our situation on the social and cultural level is different from that of Latin America, that we do not need Liberation Theology at all. Liberation Theology is a reflection on the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is a message of freedom and a force for liberation, in the context of the life-situation of a concrete people.

Here in Papua New Guinea, our analysis will show us:

- A country, where power is a temptation to corruption, and corruption is the beginning of acquiring the goods of the community to enrich oneself; it is the beginning of the oppression of others.

- A rich country with a growing economy, where greed and materialism develop quickly, with their offshoots of drinking, gambling, and stealing, leading to gangster and rascal activities.

- A country where the analysis of the social, economical, cultural, and political situation is a great need, in order to identify the real needs. And then, in the light of the Word of God, we try to find out what is the will of God for us and our people, here and now. We know the weak and wrong points we will discover in our analysis are so many forms of sin, injustice, and selfishness. The whole history of salvation is there, to show us how God set His people free, if they follow the directions He shows to men.

## 4. We have to find our own way

Once this work of analysis has been done, the national-pastoral planning process can start. The first thing to do is to start with a **Theological Bishops' Commission**, that accepts the challenge to reflect and find ways of implementing the analysis, and,

consequently, the planning. This Bishops' Commission should have the faculty, at some stage, to co-opt into their deliberations a number of priests, and, if deemed necessary, of lay people, thus providing a channel for two-way communication. What way are we going?

From experiences elsewhere in the world we have to learn that, if we want to move our people away from materialism, and to keep them open to spiritual values, we must be careful to build up, in our pastoral-planning process, many forms of spirituality, movements concentrated on the imitation of Christ. For instance, from the beginning, the accent has to be put on "personal conversion" as a prerequisite for any changes for the good. We have to fight for the values of family life, which have such deep roots in the culture of our people, against the present permissiveness on all levels. Prayer groups will have to help us to keep the balance against materialism – groups of people who come together to listen to the Word of God, to reflect on it in the light of the Holy Spirit, searching for what it may tell them in their situation, and putting the Eucharist and Christ Jesus in the centre of their lives. Our conversion towards a theology that touches life, and the reality people live in, will be coloured by the "See", "Judge", and "Act" method of the Catholic Action of Josef Cardijn, now raised to a pastoral principle.

As long as the church does not tackle the weak points, the sins of our society, anything else it does – Mass and the sacraments, processions and devotions, and, to some extent, its social works of schools and hospitals – could at times appear hypocritical.

## 5. A glance at the future

What I try to say is that the contemporary contextual theologies invite us urgently to bring the reality of Papua New Guinea and the Word of God together for reflection, prayer, and deliberation. That, leaving each bishop free and responsible for his own diocese, guidelines be elaborated on a national level to meet the most urgent needs of the people of God in our country. In that way, Papua New Guinea should build its own Liberation Theology, in order to keep the church and people together. We should not forget that the church and the good news were brought into the reality of

Papua New Guinea as "Fremdkörper", from outside, and that the process towards authenticity, towards integration into the life of our people, is an ongoing process, where our own Liberation Theology has its task. Mistakes made elsewhere, and correctives imparted by the church, will guide us in our work.

# The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Inter-religious, Inter-ideological Dialogue

**Leonard Swidler**

*Reprinted with permission from Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 20:1, Winter 1983 (September, 1984) revision)*

Dialogue is a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow. This very definition of dialogue embodies the first commandment of dialogue.

In the religious-ideological sphere in the past, we came together to discuss with those differing with us, for example, Catholics with Protestants, either to defeat an opponent, or to learn about an opponent, so as to deal more effectively with him or her, or, at best, to negotiate with him or her. If we faced each other at all, it was in confrontation – sometimes more openly polemically, sometimes more subtly so, but always with the ultimate goal of defeating the other, because we were convinced that we alone had the absolute truth.

But dialogue is not debate. In dialogue, each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as he or she can in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely, and, as it were, as much from within, as possible. Such an attitude automatically includes the assumption that, at any point, we might find the partner's position so persuasive that, if we would act with integrity, we would have to change, and change can be disturbing.

We are here, of course, speaking of a specific kind of dialogue, an inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue. To have such, it is not sufficient that the dialogue partners discuss a religious-ideological subject, that is, the meaning of life and how to live accordingly. Rather, they must come to the dialogue as persons somehow significantly identified with a religious or ideological community. If I were neither a Christian, nor a Marxist, for example, I could not participate as a "partner" in Christian-Marxist dialogue, though I might listen in, ask some questions for information, and make some helpful comments.

It is obvious that inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue is something new under the sun. We could not conceive of it, let alone do it, in the past. How, then, can we effectively engage in this new thing? The following are some basic ground rules, or "commandments," of inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue that must be observed if dialogue is actually to take place. These are not theoretical rules, or commandments given from "on high," but ones that have been learned from hard experience.

**FIRST COMMANDMENT:**

**The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly.** Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes "this" rather than "that" proportionally changes my attitude toward them; and a change in my attitude is a significant change in me. We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on the other, as one hopes to do in debate – a hope realised in inverse proportion to the frequency and ferocity with which debate is entered into. On the other hand, because, in dialogue, each partner comes with the intention of learning and changing themself, one's partner, in fact, will also change. Thus, the goal of debate, and much more, is accomplished far more effectively by dialogue.

**SECOND COMMANDMENT:**

**Inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue must be a two-sided project – within each religious or ideological community, and between religious or ideological communities.** Because of the "corporate" nature of inter-religious dialogue, and since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learn and change themself, it is also necessary that each participant enter into dialogue, not only with their partner across the faith line – the Lutheran with the Anglican, for example – but also with their co-religionists, with his fellow Lutherans, to share with them the fruits of the inter-religious dialogue. Only thus can the whole community eventually learn and change, moving toward an ever-more perceptive insight into reality.

**THIRD COMMANDMENT:**

**Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.** It should be made clear in what direction the major and minor thrusts of the tradition move, what the future shifts might be, and, if necessary, where the participant has difficulties with their own tradition. No false fronts have any place in dialogue.

**Conversely – each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners**. Not only will the absence of sincerity prevent dialogue from happening, but the absence of the assumption of the partner's sincerity will do so as well. In brief: no trust, no dialogue.

**FOURTH COMMANDMENT:**

**In inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice**, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice.

**FIFTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Each participant must define himself**. Only the Jew, for example, can define what it means to be a Jew. The rest can only

describe what it looks like from the outside. Moreover, because dialogue is a dynamic medium, as each participant learns, they will change, and hence continually deepen, expand, and modify their self-definition as a Jew – being careful to remain in constant dialogue with fellow Jews. Thus, it is mandatory that each dialogue partner defines what it means to be an authentic member of their own tradition.

**Conversely – the one interpreted must be able to recognise themself in the interpretation**. This is the golden rule of inter-religious hermeneutics, as has been often reiterated by the "apostle of inter-religious dialogue", Raimundo Panikkar. For the sake of understanding, each dialogue participant will naturally attempt to express for themself what they think is the meaning of the partner's statement; the partner must be able to recognise themself in that expression. The advocate of "a world theology", Wilfred Cantwell Smith, would add that the expression must also be verifiable by critical observers who are not involved.

**SIXTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.** Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy, but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner, as far as is possible, while still maintaining integrity with their own tradition; where they absolutely can agree no further without violating their own integrity, precisely there is the real point of disagreement – which, most often, turns out to be different from the point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

**SEVENTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Dialogue can take place only between equals, or par cum pari** as Vatican II put it. Both must come to learn from each other. Therefore, if, for example, the Muslim views Hinduism as inferior, or if the Hindu views Islam as inferior, there will be no dialogue. If authentic inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue between Muslims

and Hindus is to occur, then both the Muslim and the Hindu must come mainly to learn from each other; only then will it be "equal with equal," par cum pari. This rule also indicates that there can be no such thing as a one-way dialogue. For example, Jewish-Christian discussions, begun in the 1960s, were mainly only prolegomena to inter-religious dialogue. Understandably, and properly, the Jews came to these exchanges only to teach Christians, although the Christians came mainly to learn. But, if authentic inter-religious dialogue between Christians and Jews is to occur, then the Jews must also come mainly to learn; only will it then, too, be par cum pari.

**EIGHTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust**. Although inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue must occur with some kind of "corporate" dimension, that is, the participants must be involved as members of a religious or ideological community – for instance, as Marxists or Taoists – it is also fundamentally true that it is only **persons** who can enter into dialogue. But a dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust. Hence, it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but, rather, to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Then, gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. Thus, as in learning, we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue, we proceed from commonly-held matters – which, given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility, will take us quite some time to discover fully – to discuss matters of disagreement.

**NINTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Persons entering into inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue must be, at least minimally, self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions.** A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue

primarily so we can learn – which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers. To be sure, in inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue, one must stand within a religious or ideological tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism. Without it, there can be no dialogue – and, indeed, no integrity.

**TENTH COMMANDMENT:**

**Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within"**; for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and "whole being", individual and communal. John Dunne here speaks of "passing over" into another's religious or ideological experience, and then coming back enlightened, broadened, and deepened. As Raimundo Panikkar notes, "To know what a religion says, we must understand what it says, but, for this, we must somehow believe in what it says". For example, "A Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he is not, in one way of another, converted to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or another, becomes Christian."

Inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue operates in three areas: the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity; the depth or "spiritual" dimension, where we attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within"; the cognitive, where we seek understanding and truth. Inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue also has three phases. In the first phase we unlearn mis-information about each other, and begin to know each other as we truly are. In phase two, we begin to discern values in the partner's tradition and wish to appropriate them into our own tradition. For example, in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Christians might learn a greater appreciation of the prophetic, social justice tradition – both values traditionally strongly, though not exclusively, associated with the other's community. If we are serious, persistent, and sensitive enough in the dialogue, we may at times enter into phase three. Here we, together, begin to explore new areas of reality, of meaning, and of truth, of which neither of us had even been aware before. We are

brought face to face with this new, as-yet-unknown-to-us dimension of reality only because of questions, insights, probings produced in the dialogue. We may thus dare to say that patiently-pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new "re-evaluation", a further "unveiling" of reality – on which we must then act.

There is something radially different about phase one, on the one hand, and phases two and three, on the other. In the latter, we do not simply add on quantitatively another "truth" or value from the partner's tradition. Instead, as we assimilate it within our own religious self-understanding, it will proportionately transform our self-understanding. Since our dialogue partner will be in a similar position, we will then be able to witness authentically to those elements of deep value in our own tradition that our partner's tradition may well be able to assimilate with self-transforming profit. All this, of course, will have to be done with complete integrity on each side, each partner remaining authentically true to the vital core of their own religious tradition. However, in significant ways, that vital core will be perceived and experienced differently under the influence of the dialogue, but if the dialogue is carried on with both integrity and openness, the result will be that, for example, the Jew will be authentically Jewish, and the Christian will be authentically Christian, not despite the fact that Judaism and/or Christianity have been profoundly "Buddhised," but because of it. And the same is true of a Judaised and/or Christianised Buddhism. There can be no talk of syncretism here, for syncretism means amalgamating various elements of different religions into some kind of a (con)fused whole, without concern for the integrity of the religions involved – which is not the case with authentic dialogue.

# DOCUMENTATION

## Catholic Bishops' Conference Statement on the Charismatic Renewal in Papua New Guinea

*This statement was drafted by Bishops Ray Kalisz (Wewak) and Hermann Raich (Wabag), and it was adopted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference at its May, 1985, meeting.*

Pope John Paul asked 650 leaders of charismatic communities from 108 countries at a special audience that "all their spiritual efforts be towards a personal encounter of each individual with Christ, in the community of the church". The aim of the conference of these delegates was "to integrate the sacramental and charismatic dimensions of Catholic spirituality".

This statement, along with Pope Paul's description of the movement for renewal in the Spirit as "a chance for the church and for the world", is to be the fundamental guideline given by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands for Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Papua New Guinea.

Thereby, the Conference gives its approval to the charismatic movement as one of the authentic movements for spiritual renewal of the church taking place in Papua New Guinea. There seems to be no doubt that there is an outpouring of the Spirit upon the Catholic church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, expressed by an upsurge of interest in parish bible groups, Legion of Mary, lay ministries, and responsibilities in the church, as well as movements going on in liturgy, catechesis, etc., for which we thank God.

The aim of the Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is to help the faithful to experience more sincerely and intensively the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, which they have already received

through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. However, a cautionary note is implied in Pope John Paul's statement, quoted above, that this renewal is to be made "in the community of the church" – not independent of, or even worse, outside of, the church. The CBC of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands stresses this aspect, or characteristic, which must always be present in the CCR. Experience has shown that, when not properly guided, the CCR, because of its admitted emotional dimension, tends to withdraw itself from traditional teaching and lawful authority. On the other hand, experience has also shown that, under sound leadership, it (CCR) has been a powerful force for renewal in a deepening of faith, prayer life, love for the Word of God, return to a meaningful reception of the sacraments, and participation in the sacrifice of the mass.

As Vatican Council II states, "the church, being a pilgrim church, continually renews itself". Hence, the CCR is by no means the only authentic movement of renewal in the church today, yet it is no doubt a powerful spiritual force of renewal, but, as is the case with all renewals, it needs ecclesial approval and guidance, as well as authentic Catholic teaching. For the most part, this can be done only within the parish and with the pastor, whether or not he himself is charismatic, either personally, or through others, providing this guidance and spiritual nourishment.

We feel that it would be helpful at this point to enumerate the positive results, as well as some negative aspects, that are often experienced in the CCR.

Some positive results:

– Usually people are attracted to know God deeper through the Word of God in Holy Scripture.

– People are strengthened to free themselves from all sorts of attachments, for instance, from slavery to passions, from revenge, hatred, envy, from addiction to gambling, alcohol, and drugs.

– People become more sensitive to the suffering of others, willingly serve, and develop deeper faith, and stronger hope

– The spirit of fellowship becomes deeper among the members of the group, as well as with people outside the group.

– Priests and the religious feel urged to live their priesthood and religious life more intensively.

– In families, the relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, show signs of mutual understanding and love.

– Many people become active in spreading the faith. They are conscious that proclaiming the faith is not only the task of priests, but also the task of all believers.

Because of these positive elements, pastors and leaders of the faithful should not reject charismatic renewal, a priori, on account of prejudice.

Some negative aspects:

– Some members of the CCR feel that now, for the first time, they have received the Holy Spirit, thus belittling the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of baptism, penance, confirmation, etc., and that they now "possess" Him and His gifts, and they tend to look down with a certain contempt on those who have not joined their group. They fail to realise that the Holy Spirit works in other ways in the lives of other people.

– The atmosphere during charismatic prayer meetings sometimes is not healthy, and too great a stress in put on feelings, as if those who attend are to be brought to a certain exaggerated experience. At times, it is forgotten that a charismatic gift is given for building up the faithful, and not for personal satisfaction. It is an

unhealthy sign if members of the charismatic movement feel that there is no longer any need to attend services (mass) in church together with others, nor a need for the hierarchical structure of the church. Convincing proof of the presence of the Spirit does not lie in our feelings, but, above all, in our deeds, and our daily way of life.

– Sometimes people who are involved in the CCR tend to give a fundamentalist interpretation to holy scripture. This means that they take the text of holy scripture literally, and that they are of the opinion that, in holy scripture, a direct answer can be found for every sort of problem.

– Likewise, there is a tendency to think that each one can interpret the meaning of every text of scripture for themself, and that there is no need for the official teaching and interpretation of the church, as though they alone possessed the Spirit, and the church, to whom the Spirit was promised, did not.

– Some think that, because they have received some gifts or charisms of the Holy Spirit, they are automatically saints, and far advanced in spirituality, and thus have the right to speak authoritatively for the church. They fail to realise that what makes them holy is how they live their lives in faith, not what charisms they have received.

**SOME HINTS**

The charismatic renewal should be integrated into the life and activity of the local church, for the unity of the faithful is the most important fruit of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-14). Through this integration into the life and activity of the faithful of the local church (parish, outstation, neighbourhood-community), the danger can be avoided that the renewal becomes too spiritualistic and not realistic enough. The service of the people to society is a very important testimony to the church. Participation in the life and endeavours of

the parish is a sign of genuineness and of the purity of the charismatic renewal.

The leaders of the charismatic renewal, who work with the permission of the local bishop, must be conscious that the situation of the faithful is not everywhere the same. A majority of the Catholics in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are still very young. Attention has also to be given to the fact that many of the faithful only recently rejected magical charisms in their beliefs. Too great a stress on the special charisms, gravely endangers the growth of faith of the believers, for magical religious belief can come back. Since the situation of the faithful varies from place to place, it is, therefore, within the competence of the local bishop to evaluate whether the charismatic renewal can be approved, or not, within his diocese.

If the charismatic renewal is given approval with a diocese, pastoral care should be provided, so that the movement can develop well. In this development, the whole sacramental and liturgical life should be integrated. This life should inspire their prayer meetings, and their lives. Not only this, the whole tradition of the church, all along the centuries, should be studied and integrated as well, e.g., the Veneration of the Cross, the Stations of the Cross, the Veneration of Our Lady, the Rosary, the Veneration of the Saints.

Charismatics should remember the giver of the gifts, who is the Gift, the Holy Spirit Himself, and that the greatest gifts are faith, hope, and love.

The expression "baptism in the Spirit" often causes a false understanding among the faithful, and a belittling of the sacrament of baptism. The meaning of "baptism in the Spirit" should be explained – and, in general, other descriptive phrases used, e.g., "outpouring of the Spirit".

Charismatics should recognise other valid movements of renewal in the church, and not try to force their movement on others. In the early church, the charismatic church of Corinth was quite different from the church in Galatia, but both were faithful to the teachings of Christ.

Charismatics, and others, should do nothing to destroy the unity of the church – something for which Christ prayed as a sign of His presence.

At the present time, there is a great amount of anti-Catholic activity among the smaller sects, some of which are Pentecostal. The advice to the faithful is not to join these groups in their prayer meetings, where the sects tend to alienate Catholic charismatics from the church by their constant preaching of anti-Catholic doctrine. This can become a form of brain-washing, which is very harmful to the faithful.

## CLOSING WORDS

To complete our instructions, we wish to remind you, brothers and sisters, of the teachings of our mother church, which were given to us by the Second Vatican Council.

> "The same Holy Spirit sanctifies the faithful of God, guides them and adorns them with virtues, not only through the sacraments, and through service, but He also gives to everyone gifts according to His will (1 Cor 12:11). He also bestows special gifts to the faithful belonging to various groups. These gifts enable them to carry out various tasks and duties, which are of benefit to the renewal, and further building up, of the church, according to the principle: "To everyone the Holy Spirit is given for the good of all" (1 Cor 12:7). These charisms, the great and the extraordinary ones, as well as those that are given in a more ordinary way, but more widely, must be received with thanks and consoling joy, for they are very appropriate and useful for the needs of the church. But the extraordinary gifts should not be sought after in an exaggerated way; nor should we, on account of these gifts, put excessive hopes on the results of apostolic endeavour. It is the right of the leaders of the church to judge their authenticity and their orderly use. It is within their special competence not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test everything and to keep what is good." (See 1 Thess 5:12 and 19:21.)

# REPORTS

## Ministerial Training for Aboriginal Australians

*In August-September, 1985, Dr John May was able to visit the most distant member school of MATS, Nungalinya College in Darwin, and its subsidiary (soon to become autonomous), Wontulp-Bi-Buya, in Townsville. This is his report on the situation of pastoral training for Aboriginal Christians.*

The fact that the Uniting church has nominated an Aboriginal, Revd Terry Djinyini Gondarra, as Moderator-elect of its Northern Region, and that the Anglican church is about to ordain its first Aboriginal bishop for Northern Australia, is testimony to the foresight of these churches in laying the foundations of theological training for Aboriginal ministers. Nungalinya College, in one of the newer outer suburbs of Darwin, grew out of a community development centre started by the Uniting church, as it became clear that Aboriginals aspired, not just to social work, but to pastoral ministry. The College is residential, though allowance is made for the nomadic trait in Aboriginal culture, by integrating time spent in the students' home areas into the curriculum. A subsidiary of Nungalinya, which includes the Roman Catholic church among its sponsors, Wontulp-Bi-Buya, in Townsville (North Queensland), uses the theological education by extension (TEE) method to cover a vast area, stretching from northern New South Wales to the Torres Strait Islands. Yet another approach, is that of the Lutheran church in Central Australia, which has trained Aboriginal pastors "on the job", without any institutional or organisational structure, for some years, though this is now under review.

Both Revd Don Carrington, Dean of Theological Studies at Nungalinya, and Revd Robert Bos, who runs Wontulp from the Queensland-style "basement" of his Townsville home, are quite

explicit about the need for an indigenous Aboriginal theology, as the basis of authentic Aboriginal ministry. Together with several other people throughout Northern Australia, they are patiently exploring the interpretation of the Bible by Aborigines, in the light of their own myths and legends. Both are studying indigenous movements, which have sprung up outside the official churches, similar to the new religious movements in Melanesia. (It is interesting to note that a Melanesian, Mr Alexander Dawia, is writing a thesis on Aboriginal theology at the University of Papua New Guinea.)

Because of its more hierarchical ministerial structure, and its special requirements for ordination to the priesthood, such as celibacy, and a high academic standard, the Roman Catholic church has been unable to participate wholeheartedly in these experiments, though it does make use of the orientation courses offered by Nungalinya and Wontulp's TEE materials. Fr Martin Wilson, whose Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit is presently based at Pularumpi, on Melville Island, collaborates with Nungalinya on courses, and produces the journal **Nelen Yubu** ("The Good Way"), to which people, interested in Aboriginal theology and ministry in Northern Australia, regularly contribute field reports and articles. And yet there have been some outstanding examples of ministry to Aborigines by Catholics, such as Fr John Leary, in the Northern Territory, and Frs Maurice Heading SJ and Pat Mullins SJ, in Townsville, where, for over ten years, the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council has been a forum of discussion and action on many issues affecting Aboriginals. (Thanks to Fr Mullins, who is a member of it, I was able to attend one of its meetings.)

It would be quite unrealistic to discuss Aboriginal theology and ministry, however, without taking into account the struggle for land rights – and, especially in North Queensland, for elementary human rights – in which all Aboriginals, to a greater or lesser extent, are at present engaged. The movement to regain legal title to ancestral land has been particularly successful in the Northern Territory. The Northern Land Council, based in Darwin, controls access to vast tracts of Aboriginal land, especially in Arnhem Land, and negotiates mining rights and royalties on behalf of the local people. The Aboriginal Land Councils are funded from these payments, and not from grants controlled by the Department of

Aboriginal Affairs (much to the latter's chagrin!), and they are responsible, not to the DAA, but to the federal minister. The Central Land Council is mainly occupied with the negotiation of so-called "excisions" from pastoral leases and former mission stations. When the Whitlam Labor government granted Aboriginal stockmen on the huge Central Australian cattle stations the award wage (i.e., the wage level negotiated by agricultural workers' unions for their members), they became uninteresting as a source of cheap labour to the owners (mainly overseas-based multinationals), and were consequently evicted with their families. Some eked out an existence in the desert, while others drifted into Alice Springs, where the newly-conferred right to drink alcohol spelt their social and moral ruin. Mission stations, such as the Roman Catholic one at Santa Teresa, 80 km south-east of Alice Springs, and the more-distant Lutheran one at Hermannsburg to the west, are progressively handing back ownership and management of their leases to Aborigines.

Legislators in the Northern Territory, and especially in Queensland, are doing everything in their power to ensure that as little as possible is actually conceded to Aborigines, e.g., according the latest NT proposals, Aborigines, who have settled in towns, are deemed to have forfeited any rights to traditional lands. The national campaign for land rights tends to be spear-headed by mixed-race Aboriginals, whom Western education has equipped to take on the media and the politicians at their own game, such as the highly-controversial and articulate Pat Dodson of the Central Land Council. The tribal Aborigines of the Centre and the Far West reportedly feel threatened by this activism. There is also the question of their preparedness to take over the administration of areas, which include national parks, mine sites, and cattle stations. The Institute for Aboriginal Development, begun by the Uniting church, and now under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, offers courses in many of the required linguistic and technical skills to Aborigines around Alice Springs. The real problems confronting Aborigines would seem to lie deeper: What is their ultimate motivation for participating in such activities? Are they prepared to accept full responsibility for them in the Western economic and political context?

At the core of all these issues is the relationship of the Aborigines to their land, a relationship which is intrinsically

religious, and pervades their entire culture, although this is seldom appreciated by Europeans, including missionaries. It may not always be easy, even for Melanesians, to grasp just how central the land is in Aboriginal religion, and relations between Melanesians of the Torres Strait Islands and Aborigines in North Queensland are not always harmonious. Perhaps it is here that the churches can make a unique contribution, by encouraging Aboriginal Christians to express their relationship to the land theologically, so that its connection with human rights, and social ethics in the broader Australian context, becomes clearer. The churches, cooperating ecumenically, can also help both Aboriginals and Melanesians to see that these issues are Pacific-wide, as is brought out in a Uniting church bulletin on New Caledonia:

> People in Australia often call for an end to French nuclear testing in the Pacific, and the Australian government has criticised the French. But the French government always replies that Australia supplies the uranium – and the uranium is mined on Aboriginal land. If we talk about a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific, or an end to French nuclear testing, we have to talk about these issues, which are all linked: land rights for Aboriginal people, freedom for the people of Tahiti, and independence for Kanaky. (**Kanaky Update** 2/10)

Let us make no mistake: despite the dedicated and creative efforts of a number of church people, the pressures on Aboriginal Australians to deny them their basic rights, and keep them in ignorance of the wider implications of their struggle, are enormous. They, and the other peoples of the Pacific, need leaders firmly rooted in their own cultures, yet able to transcend tribal, geographical, and racial barriers in Christian solidarity. To this end, much more could be done to coordinate and indigenise theological education in the region.

MATS could well intensify its relationships with theological centres in Northern Australia. Aboriginal students could attend our Study Institutes and Student Conferences, and student exchanges could be resumed (Moderator-elect, Djinyini Gondarra, was educated at Rarongo Theological College in East New Britain). We could contribute to one another's journals, and issues affecting Christians

through the Pacific could have a more prominent place in our curricula. The Australians are keen to participate more actively in MATS, and this report shows what an important contribution they could make.

John D'Arcy May, The Melanesian Institute, Goroka

## Lutherans in Dialogue: Papua New Guinea and Tanzania

The second Study Seminar between Lutheran pastors of Tanzania and Papua New Guinea was held at Makumira Lutheran Theological College in Arusha, Tanzania (August 5-September 15, 1985). However, it is really the third such seminar, for the first one saw a gathering of participants from third-world churches, together with counterparts from Europe and North America, on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession on the home soil of Luther and Lutheranism. As one participant described it: "We came to see the birthplace of Luther and Lutheranism".

But the coming to see had an ulterior motive and a good one. For the colleagues in Papua New Guinea, and other third-world churches, I hope they realised they were making "a grand tour of Rome" (likened to Luther's own tour to Rome), and not just a tribute to historical monuments. It was a gathering that should be rightly called "a return visit" by the brothers and sisters from the third-world churches. It was a visit that has historical significance. For it may be viewed as a mission at a turning point, or a mission at a horizontal level, where we can fully dialogue as equals.

The Seminar in Makumira, Tanzania, followed the theme already established in the Second Seminar in Lae, Papua New Guinea: toward "Lutheran Identity in the Afro-Melanesian Contexts". What is such identity? The questions of identity naturally call into view matters of theology, and confession in those contexts. How does Lutheran theology and doctrine (or Christian for that matter) hold in the emerging churches, as they make the

transition from being recipients to being givers; from being under-dogs to being equal partners?

The Makumira Seminar specifically addressed itself to a dozen or so different topics, which were viewed out of the contexts of culture and traditional religions, and their challenge by the gospel and Western traditions. The topics included questions of **revelation in traditional society and Christianity**; the question of **power and the work of the Holy Spirit and spirits**; the question of **death, and life after death, in traditional society and the Christian faith; suffering, sickness, and healing in traditional society and Christianity; mission and evangelism in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies**; and the **prophetic role of the church in developing nations**.

Even though it was the second seminar between the two churches, the dialogue is still at an exploratory stage, and necessarily so. The fruitful dialogue must grow naturally. Real work has to be done in the respective churches, out of specific contexts in which they live. The results and experience of progress and problems must continue to be shared and dialogued. And joint seminars, such as this one, involving more participation by third-world churches, will be beneficial. This was experienced in the valuable contributions made by Revd Heinz Ehlert, representing the Lutheran church in Brazil, and Professor Gyoji Nabetani, representing the Lutheran church in Japan.

New hopes and possibilities were raised toward theology, in the contexts of these churches, as well as avenues of continued sharing. An excitement was expressed by member of both churches in what may be summarised as affirmation of the oldest dream of Jacob at Bethel: "Truly, God was in Melanesia and Tanzania, and we did not know it". What did he mean to our ancestors, and what does he mean to us now? Having discovered and known **Anutu** in Melanesia and **Mungu** in Tanzania, what should be the response of our church in Melanesia and Tanzania? This, I think, is the essence of our dialogue. Like Jacob's, this response should involve a commitment that should begin in a practical way. And this should be followed through in a deliberate and consistent manner.

Such commitment should involve a memorandum of understanding between the churches involved. It should also include a sharing, in an open and honest way, rather than be defensive of particular views and beliefs. It should involve a readiness to identify needs, and a willingness to share in meeting those needs, and to rejoice together where blessing is due us. This practical approach has already started, where pastors from Papua New Guinea made return visits to the home congregations of counterparts in Tanzania, to get a first-hand insight of the contexts, of out of which the church lives there. This was done for ten days prior to the presentations of the main study and discussion papers, as well as sharing and exchanging of experiences. Yes, the practical approach does matter seriously.

During visits with a number of congregations, there were some surprises. There were some who said: "We thought your coming meant a white visitor. We did not know there were blacks in Papua New Guinea. But, excuse me, how did you leave Africa and end up over there?" To which a Papua New Guinean participant replied humorously in another group later: "God created all people, and decided to leave whites in Europe, and scattered blacks all over the world." Behind these sentiments lie deep questions. Can a black really love a black, share with him, and serve him? Whether this is an immediate realisation or not, there is already a proposal for exchange programmes, such as students, seminary teachers, or even pastors. It is up to the churches concerned to explore these possibilities seriously. Dialogue should not be seen as an academic exercise toward a new-breed indigenous theology, but every occasion of dialogue should be an occasion to share our faith.

On the theological level, new challenges begin to emerge, which must be faced realistically. If we are content to say that **Anutu** or **Mungu** was in Melanesia and Tanzania before the coming of the gospel, we must also be able to establish the nature of such revelations in relation to central elements of Christianity and the gospel, viz., salvation, reconciliation, redemption, and the like. Similarly, words and concepts, such as "traditional religions" and "traditional culture", should be defined or redefined as it is implied, in view of traditional religions and culture under study. This is to help clarify two issues. Firstly, with a view to helping us to

distinguish pure animism, though animism is part of the raw material for traditional religious studies. Secondly, studies of culture, as in the case of Melanesia, are not of "a" culture, but of a multiplicity of cultures. It must be substantiated what exactly are the elements and system of the culture referred to. For reference to culture is often generalised.

It is envisaged, and encouraged, that this dialogue may involve more so-called "south-south" dialogue among Lutherans, with a wider scope, but it may also be a good foundation for inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue at home and abroad.

Kasek Kautil, Martin Luther Seminary, Lae

# CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,

**re: "The Name of God in Melanesia" by Rufus Pech**
**(*MJT* 1, 30-46)**

Christian greetings to you.

I wish to bring to your attention that, having carefully looked at **Melanesian Journal of Theology,** Volume 1, No. 1 of April, 1985, I discovered that on page 33 No.5b, the Toaripi name for God is incorrect. The right name should be **UALARE** and not **Atute**, as printed.

I further wish to advise for your information that the Trinity names for God in Toaripi language area as follows:

UALARE Oa – God the Father
UALARE Atute – God the Son
UALARE Safu,
ARAHOHA Lareva – God the Holy Spirit

Trusting that this meets your approval.

I remain yours in Christ Jesus,

Mark Makeu Forova,
Second-year Student,
Rarongo Theological College,
Keravat, via Rabaul

Dear Sir,

**Re: The Name of God in Melanesia –**
**Comments by Mark Makeu Forova**

I am very grateful to you both for passing on to me a copy of Mark's letter of 26.9.85. I believe it presents an excellent chance to start a correspondence column in the **Melanesian Journal of Theology**.

I make no excuses for the error as regards the name of God in Toaripi. There may well be others as well, and it would be good to have them pointed out. The error does show up one very good point: that a secondary writer is only as good as the sources he is using. In my case, two things worried me: firstly, that I had no way of checking my source; secondly, that the sample given by H. Rosin is 35 years old. What we really need is an accurate and up-to-date listing of such material from the many more translations we have today, thanks chiefly to the efforts of SIL/WBT translators. These, in turn, should be arranged according to their language "families", phyla, etc., as these have now been set out in volume one of the new **Pacific Language Atlas**.

In the meantime, let me copy for you and other readers, in full H. Rosin's summary paragraph on p. 88 of his **The LORD Is God,** on which I relied so heavily in my presentation:

> The total picture of New Guinea is extremely variegated and intricate in this respect. Certain groups may be discerned, besides isolated units. In 1950, there were translations in about 30 out of 300 languages (two complete Bibles, nine New Testaments; the remainder are smaller portions, but none of them less than a complete book). Further development, of course, depends on the radius of the respective language ("trade languages", "minor languages"). Tests of translations show that **elohim**, respectively **theos,** is rendered as follows: In the Dutch area in the West of the gigantic island, the Malay-Arabic **Allah (Alla)** has made its way (Windessi-Bentuni, Mafur = Numfor). In the area of the Lutheran Mission in the North-East, it was possible to agree on **Anutu** (Kate), **Anute**

(Ragetta), **Anoto** (Yabim = Jabem). In the field of the London Mission Society in the South-East, liberty and diversity prevail, not always to the advantage of Bible translating: **God** (Kiwai, Kunini), **Iehovah** for **theos** in the NT (Goaribari = Kerewa), **Eloi** (Namau), **Harihu** (Orokolo), **Atute**, akin with **Anute**? (Toaripi), **Dirava** (Motu), **Palagu** (Keapara, Hula), **Oeva** (Mailu). In the extreme South-East, where the missionary area of the LMS touches the Methodist area, the already-mentioned designation **Eaubada** appears (Suau = Daui, Tavara). In the area of the Methodist Mission in the islands contiguous in the North-East, **Eaubada** is to be found in the important Dobu Bible (1926), but also in other translation (Bwaidoga, Tubetube, Kiriwina). On Deboyne Island, however, one discovers **Iehovah** (Panaieti) 1894, introduced by the Australasian Methodist Missionary Society (for **theos** in the NT), whereas the Liebenzeller Mission did the same in Manus Island (Admiralty Group) in 1921. North of Goodenough Bay, in the range of the Anglicans, one meets everywhere with the designation God (Wedau, Mukawa, Binandere, Notu), which carries the more weight as a complete Bible (Mukawa), is to be found here, and the aforementioned Pentateuch in Wedauan, together with a NT in the same language.

What we must deplore in view of this multiplicity, is not the diversity of the renderings in itself, but, rather, the diversity of the principles, or better their absence. . . .

With sincere thanks for your helpful explanation of the names given to the Holy Trinity in the Toaripi language,

Revd R. Pech,
Lecturer, Martin Luther Seminary, Lae.

# BOOK REVIEWS

SCHRIETER, Robert J., **Constructing Local Theologies** (London UK: SCM Press, 1985) ISBN 0334019559, pp. 158, paperback, £6.50.

In **Constructing Local Theologies,** Robert Schreiter ranges over a wide range of topics in the short space of 158 pages. He discusses different models for local theology (a term he prefers to indigenous theology, or any of the other phrases at present in use), and says why he regards the contextual model as the most satisfactory. He outlines the stages by which a local theology is likely to develop. He analyses the different tools used to study culture, with particular emphasis on the semiotic study of culture. He employs insights from the sociology of knowledge to show how, in the course of the church's history, different approaches to theology have been related to different cultural conditions. He examines the whole prickly question of norms and criteria for Christian identity. He looks at the often-neglected phenomenon of popular religion; and he concludes by facing the problem of syncretism, and the dual religious system.

Although he covers a great deal of ground, Schreiter is basically concerned with two important questions that, together, constitute the subject of the book: "How is a community to go about bringing to expression its own experience of Christ in a concrete situation? And how is this to be related to a tradition that is often expressed in language and concepts vastly different from the present situation?" (p. xi). He emphasises that what he has to say is provisional and incomplete, and that many of the issues he raises demand further analysis. The approach is inter-disciplinary, with much made of the social sciences, and ecumenical (the author is a Roman Catholic priest).

Schreiter shed new light on almost every issue he discusses. In analysing popular religion, he makes use of the approach of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, who saw popular religion as the

way in which the subaltern class maintains its identity over and against the ruling class.

Schreiter suggests that every class produces its own characteristic religious expression, but that, since the popular religion of the upper and middle classes coincides with the religiosity of the clergy, it has not been recognised for what it is. He gives us a subtle analysis of syncretism from the point of view of the receiving culture rather than the incoming church, which should be required reading for any missionaries still talking about "Christo-paganism".

On two particular issues, Schreiter has something of great importance to say. The first is his attempt to describe the ways in which different cultural contexts have stimulated different kinds of theological response. Four styles of theology are outlined: theology as variation on the sacred text, theology as wisdom, theology as sure knowledge, and theology as praxis. It is the third of these which has its home in the West, but it is the second which Schreiter predicts will develop in Africa, South-East Asia, and the Pacific.

The other is Schreiter's attempt to discuss the role played in theology by traditional criteria for orthodoxy (scripture, creed, councils) with the aid of an analogy from linguistics. Linguistics scholar, Noam Chomsky, sees grammar, not as creating language, but as describing it. Grammar does not lay down normative rules for language performance, rather it tries to explain how people, competent in a language, actually generate speech. In other words, rules emerge from language performance: they do not dictate what the basic structures of language performance should be.

Schreiter sees the faith into which we are baptised as being like basic competence in a language. Theology, and other expressions of the Christian tradition, are analogous to speech or language performance. Traditional criteria for orthodoxy operate rather like rules for grammar. Grammar helps us to see what is not a well-formed phrase, and in the same way, scripture, creeds, and the decisions of the councils, set the boundaries for belief, but do not attempt to describe all the conceivable possibilities for theological expression within those boundaries.

A major theme of Schreiter's study is that local theology should be contextual. He glances at translation and adaptation models of theology, but he comes down in favour of the contextual models, and, for most of his book, concentrates on them. Contextual theology begins by analysing the situation in which the church finds itself, and attempting to see how Christ is presently speaking through that situation. Local theology flows from the dynamic interaction of gospel, church, and culture. Clearly, the method actually used to analyse the cultural situation is of crucial importance, and I must confess to doubts about the one Schreiter advocates. This is the semiotic approach, which concentrates on the sign system of a culture, and on trying to discover the relationship between signs. Schreiter acknowledges that some critics have alleged that semiotics is too-Western a mode of explanation, but quickly brushes these objections aside without adequate discussion. Certainly, it is not immediately apparent that a semiotic approach would be helpful to liberation theologians, who are concerned to examine their particular context in terms of socio-economic exploitation and oppression.

Some non-European readers may well feel that Schreiter, sitting in his study in Chicago, is too prescriptive in his approach. A way to have avoided giving this impression would have been to have looked at the actual writings of some local theologians in more detail, and to have seen how they handle the topics under discussion. Instead of giving us his ideal map of how local theology should be constructed, Schreiter could have shown us the process at work in selected examples.

Having made this criticism, it must be said that this is a book which deserves to be widely read and carefully studied. It is not always easy to read, partly because the argument is fairly condensed, but I would readily concur with Fr Edward Schillebeeckx, when he comments in the foreword, that this work is important, not only for the missiologist, but for all who are engaged in the serious study of theology.

Paul Richardson, Newton College, Popondetta.

GRASSI, Joseph A., **Broken Bread and Broken Bodies: The Lord's Supper and World Hunger,** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985) ISBN 0883441934, 116 pp., paperback, US$6.95.

For anyone who has not as yet been exposed to the ideas of liberation theologians, **Broken Bread and Broken Bodies** is a simple, yet persuasive, introduction. A Christian, not concerned for the plight of the millions of people living daily below the poverty line, crawling into bed at night with pains of hunger in their bellies, watching their children die from lack of nutrition, would be a strange believer indeed.

Liberation Theology is not everyone's "cup of tea". To the more conservative, it smacks of disrespect for authority, seeds of revolution, and is nothing short of political leftist propaganda dressed in disguise as Christianity. Yet, if there is one point at which Christians of all persuasions are likely to share a bond of common concern, it is surely for the problem of feeding the world's masses. As the media, especially through television, bring the famine of Ethiopia into our homes, the suffering from floods in Pakistan, the trail of refugees on the march looking for food and shelter for one reason or another, few people can be left untouched by the anomaly of the overfed switching from one crash diet to the next, as against the emaciated and malnourished underfed and hungry of the world.

In this little book, the Christian symbol of broken bread is contrasted with the broken bodies of the 15 million people who die of starvation each year, and the 500 million who suffer from acute hunger and severe malnutrition. The Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, becomes the focus of the solution to the problem. Broken bread is symbolic of Christ's last meal with his disciples, and of His own broken body on the cross. In this, it has sacramental meaning. But, as Professor Grassi leads the reader through a Bible study and historical sketch of the social and political times of Jesus, one comes to understand the breaking of bread as a literal sharing of food, a call to feed the hungry.

Part I, "The Eucharist and Radical Discipleship", therefore, gives a brief survey of the social, economic, political, and religious forces in Israel at the time of Christ. It shows a society starkly

stratified, seething with injustice and suffering, oppressed by Rome, and weighed down by the burden of excessive taxation. Nor could all injustice be laid at the feet of Rome; much came from within Jewish society itself. Taxation by the Herods, for instance, was more oppressive than taxation by the colonisers. Side by side with a minority of wealthy Israelite landowners, prepared to collaborate with Rome, was the vast majority of people, who lived in poverty and suffering.

Nor was all oppression rooted in the economic, social, and political systems: the religious institutions further segregated groups within society. Religious laws, which designated people "clean" and "unclean", promoted discrimination and inequality, with women, in particular, suffering under a patriarchal system.

Chapter 2 poses the question of Jesus' reaction to this milieu. Was His response simply spiritual, or was He a political and social revolutionary? Grassi believes that "God, and the great prophetic leaders of the Old Testament, served as prototypes of the kind of leader Jesus was to become – one sensitive to the historical situation of human beings, and especially ready to service the down-trodden." (p. 12).

The Palestine liberation movements of the first century included the Sicarii, Zealots, Pharisees and Sadducees, Essenes, and finally the movement of John the Baptist, proclaiming his radical message that the kingdom of God was at hand. If the kingdom were to be a "definite realm in which people obeyed God and practised justice" (p. 19), then his message had a strong political overtone. Grassi notes that Josephus, the Jewish historian, ascribes political motivation to the movement, and that this was also Herod's perception. While all these movements were religiously motivated, at the same time, each group placed varying degrees of emphasis on social, political, and religious reforms.

Jesus' approach was profoundly religious, but He continued to preach the same radical message as the Baptist, and this He directed especially to the poor. Grassi picks up the words of Albert Nolan, "To say 'Thy kingdom come' is the same as saying 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'." (p. 22). While Grassi believes that

Jesus did not see Himself as a purely political leader, "He did understand the significant political implications of His teachings and actions" (p. 23). Rome certainly saw him as a political leader, and his disciples considered him the Messiah, who would restore an earthly kingdom of Israel. "We were hoping that He was the one who would set Israel free" (Luke 24:21). Grassi concludes that Jesus was a religious reformer, His approach was that of a social revolutionary, and, politically, He perceived an actual realm in which His teachings would be put into practice.

Chapter 3 highlights Jesus' message of good news for the poor. This was the reiteration of the call of the Old Testament prophets. Grassi shows that for Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, to know God was to know a God of justice, and spirituality could not be separated from practical justice. Justice is not a call for charity or generosity from the affluent: it is a biblical teaching that the earth, and its resources, are a gift from God, lent to human beings for the equal benefit of all. Jesus' good news for the poor was an attempt to break down social and religious barriers, to bring justice to women, to lepers, the mentally ill and disabled, and to the hungry, and underprivileged. The command, "follow me", did not mean passive listening, but full collaboration", as Mark's do-it-yourself gospel shows (p. 25). If the kingdom of God is to prevail, then the kingdom of Satan must be overcome. Chapter 4 challenges the reader that the only means of winning this holy war against selfishness, greed, and human desires for pleasure and personal gain, is for people to have a "revolutionary inner conversion that links them in obedience to God, who is a God of justice" (p. 42).

Perhaps the most dynamic chapter of the book is chapter 6, the linking chapter between Parts I and II. This chapter centres on the Christian motif of sharing food. Just as the miracle of the manna in the desert for the children of Israel was as much a miracle of sharing, as one of actual food, so, too, was the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which fed the five thousand. Jesus did not simply say to His disciples, "Give them to eat", but, "You, yourselves, give them to eat" (Matt 14:15; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13) (p. 52). This is the key to the miracle of sharing: "we ourselves" are the ones who should provide food for the hungry. Just as the members of the early church in the book of Acts shared bread

together, so the Lord's Supper today must link Christians to the situation of hunger and exploitation in our contemporary world.

Part II leads the reader to a deeper understanding of the Eucharist. It is both sacrament and action-sign of the kingdom, as the title of this section says, and it is a covenant of obedience to Christ. If one bread makes believers one body, as St Paul claims, then the Eucharist has compelling social implications, and the Christian community is challenged to reflect on this in words and deeds. Faith and works are linked as the means to continue Jesus' ministry to the poor. For, as St Paul points out in I Cor 12:26, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it". In the account of Jesus joining with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is not until the breaking and sharing of bread that He is recognised. When this story is linked with Christ's words in Matt 25:35-36, "I was hungry, and you gave Me food", we see the special significance of this message.

Grassi challenges his readers to take Christ's words literally, as well as spiritually, and, in so doing, to muster Christians as individuals and communities to action, so that the Eucharist perpetuates, politically and socially, the miracle of sharing. Faith language can then be translated into food language.

**Broken Bread and Broken Bodies** is written in simple terms. Its solution may sound too simplistic. Christians with goodwill and an acute sense of morality, even so, feel helpless to know where to start. If all believers sold what they had and gave to the poor, it would be a drop in the ocean of the overwhelming problems of the world. This book shows, however, that Christians must not allow themselves to be overwhelmed on a personal level, but have a covenant with God to go beyond that level and mobilise, on a political and social level, to institute change.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to readers in Melanesia. For tropical islands, which do not know the suffering of starvation, abject poverty, and oppression, it can both inspire less selfishness and self-centredness towards other less-fortunate nations, and prompt the reader to look inwardly at justice at home, where

creeping greed, corruption, and class stratification could, one day, result in broken bodies, if the bread is not shared today.

Lynn Giddings, Eastern Highlands Provincial Rehabilitation Committee, Goroka.

BARR, James, **Escaping from Fundamentalism** (London UK: SCM Press, 1984) ISBN 0334003857, x + 195 pp., paperback, £2.95.

There is increasing concern throughout Melanesia about certain Christian groups, which are aggressively evangelistic, to the point of denigrating other churches, and re-baptising converts. Attention tends to focus on the charismatic phenomena often fostered by such groups, as if these were somehow un-Christian, although such phenomena are attested in scripture, and have their counterparts in traditional Melanesian cultures. Many people seem to overlook the root cause of the problems posed by sectarians: their peculiar attitude to the Bible, which they regard as an arsenal of infallible proof-texts, giving them an exclusive claim to true faith. This attitude is generally known as "fundamentalism".

James Barr, a distinguished British exegete, and Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, has already produced a thorough scholarly study of this widely under-estimated mentality (**Fundamentalism**, London: SCM Press, 1977, 1981). The work under review "is intended rather as a pastoral book. It seeks to offer help to those who have grown up in the world of fundamentalism, or who have become committed to it, but who have, in the end, come to feel that it is a prison from which they must escape." (vii). Its basic thesis is "that fundamentalism is not, as its adherents suppose, soundly founded upon the Bible itself" (viii). Scripture does **not** say that it is inerrant, or infallible, not even in the favourite fundamentalist proof-texts, 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:20-21 (see ch. 1 on Biblical Inspiration and Authority).

Himself a model combination of tolerance and scholarly objectivity, Barr insists that fundamentalism "is lacking in a sense for the total history of Christianity, from the Bible up to the present

day" (ix), and that its deceptive simplicity has no other reason than that "it is worked out by, and destined for, people who are basically ignorant of the theological scene" (164). This may seem a harsh judgment, but Barr is at pains to show, by many examples, how fundamentalists lack any appreciation of the role of oral tradition in giving rise to the Bible in the first place (13), or that it is "the product of community tradition" (71). "Inspiration must attach to that entire process of the development of tradition within the biblical milieu"; once this is understood, it comes as no surprise that "it is the Bible itself, and the conviction of its authority, that generated biblical criticism" (71).

One of the most important clarifications made by Barr is that fundamentalism, far from being dictated by the Bible, is a narrowly-rationalistic philosophy (37), which imposes its particular definition of the divine perfection on the Bible, as such (ch. 12), thus giving rise to the tendency to take single texts in isolation from their context (3), and to deny the evidence of translation and re-interpretation within the biblical text itself (ch. 15). Barr drives these points home in his treatment of controversial topics, such as prophecy (chs. 3, 11), legend, myth, and miracle (ch. 9), inspiration (ch. 13), and the origins of the world (ch.14).

Barr, himself a Protestant, argues that it is not so much the Reformation, with which "modern fundamentalism has only a limited extent of valid identification" (153), as the conservative tradition within Protestantism that gives fundamentalism its dubious authority. The practice of evangelistic revivalism, so widespread in Melanesian countries, appeals to the doctrine of justification by faith alone for its legitimation, but fundamentalists fail to see how this can apply to communities as well as to individuals (53). "Fundamentalists seem to me to fail to perceive that the Bible itself can be made into the instrument of human pride, human self-affirmation, human will to dominate, human ideological fervour" (199).

Though I have picked out some of Barr's strongest points, the tone of the book is not polemical. Barr tries to show by example, as well as by argument, how it is quite possible to acknowledge the beliefs of Christians who are different without compromising one's

own or caricaturing theirs. His chapters on "Being Orthodox" and "Staying Evangelical" (chs. 16, 17) should prove particularly helpful to those looking for guidance in a painful personal decision, rather than scientific analysis. Both Pentecostals and Evangelicals often fail to realise that there is no compelling reason why they should also be fundamentalists. Though it is understandable that many Melanesians, confused by the demands of modernity, and the variety of Christian groups, at first, feel grateful for the apparently simple solution offered them by fundamentalists, Barr's patient explanation of the ways in which fundamentalism, in fact, falsifies the Bible, should bring them a sense of liberation.

John May, The Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

DONDERS, Joseph G., **Non-Bourgeois Theology: An African Experience of Jesus** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985) 200 pp.

"Non-Bourgeois Theology" in this book refers to the largely unwritten religious experience and insights of ordinary people, as opposed to the formal, written work of professional theologians, based on documentary sources and religious experience of ages past (p. 154f). Joseph Donders tries to put into words the informal theology that lives in African religious experience, and he does it very well. Whether his interpretations of African experience are authentic, this reviewer is not competent to judge. But in 29 short essays, of 5 or 6 pages each, he gives a vivid account of ordinary African life situations, and he brings out their theological implications in exciting insights. This book is African theology in action. It also is an apology for this kind of theology, although, presented as it is, it does not need much of an apology.

Having said this, I am still left with a few nagging questions. Is Donders not a bit too romantic about things African, and a bit too harsh on things "Western"? How much of this is due to insight into things African, and how much to thoroughly "Western" existentialism and 1960/1970s Western European counter-culture? Is African culture going to be an exception to the rule that each civilisation, as each individual, is in need of constant metanoia? And

that each civilisation, like each individual, is challenged by the gospel? The author chastises the invasion of Africa by "Western" values and ways of thinking. So far, so good. Do we have to right the wrong by having another one-way traffic, now in the other direction? Donders' case would have been stronger with a little less romanticism and African chauvinism. Still, his book makes for valuable reading for anyone committed to the ideal of enculturating the Christian faith into the rich variety of cultures with which God has endowed mankind.

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