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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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Christian Pastoral Care**
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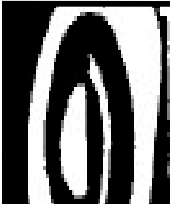
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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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

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

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Editorial: Melanesians with Current Concerns

David Vincent, guest editor

The main articles in this issue each deal with a topic of current concern to the churches. It is also noteworthy that all of the writers (except the final one) are Melanesians, and that several of them wrestle with the issues, specifically in relation to their own cultural traditions. These, then, are some positive examples of an emerging contextual theology. At the time of their writing, the authors each belonged to the community of Rarongo Theological College, near Rabaul, and thus reflect much of the present thinking of the United church in Papua New Guinea.

Howard Dian opens our discussion with an evaluation of a Pentecostal “revival” movement within one circuit of the United church. This movement has created a considerable amount of confusion and division within the church, but Dian’s analysis brings out some positive aspects of the “revival”, as well as indicating the problems that it has caused. He recognises that a failure in Christian teaching and nurture has left church members open to influence by the movement, and recommends that the circuit respond creatively to the challenge of this “revival”.

The next three articles follow naturally from Dian’s discussion, in that they each elaborate upon an issue, which is commonly raised by such renewal movements (although that fact is not their own starting point, nor their immediate concern). All three of these writers give particular consideration to the relevant Melanesian cultural background of their topics, and so provide new perspective for theological reflection.

Ignatius Ketobwau describes the confusion, which exists in the minds of Trobriand Islanders, in relating the Christian teaching of heaven to their traditional belief of paradise, *Tuma*. He suggests that this difficulty was created by the early missionaries' lack of appreciation for traditional culture and beliefs. Ketobwau argues that a truly omnipresent God should be understood as being also in *Tuma*, and, indeed, that such an interpretation is required by a proper understanding of the incarnation. Christ should be seen as a Trobriand Islander, who completely understands the values and aspirations of these communities, and is, thus, able to lead them most fully into salvation, and eternal life.

William Amo gives a vivid description of traditional healing in the Duke of York Islands, and explains both the natural, and the spiritual, aspects of this. He argues that such practices should be understood as gifts of God, empowered by His Spirit, and that, when transformed in this way, they should be accepted as a part of the church's pastoral ministry. He believes that this provides an important means of contextualising Christian faith and experience in the lives of Melanesians.

Taumata Hobart explores the way in which Melanesian Christians understand the sacrament of baptism. Interviews, which he conducted, highlight the concern that baptism is seen as a means of protection, with only a lesser emphasis upon a theological, or ecclesiological, understanding. By describing traditional rites of initiation (both at birth, and at the transition to adulthood), Hobart shows the cultural background to this view of baptism, and is also able to draw out some similarities in meaning between traditional and Christian initiation. He then suggests how these insights could be helpfully developed in the church's teaching.

The following article by Mark Neapila brings an assessment of peace initiatives for Bougainville. Neapila is, himself, from that trouble-torn island, and has been living there during part of the present

crisis. He describes the main attempts, which have been made to address the issues, and analyses, both their approaches to peace making, and also the reasons for their failure. He also assesses the involvement of the churches, and outlines a biblical understanding of peace, and peace making, which would provide a new way forward, through forgiveness and justice. Neapila's article is a serious and positive contribution to this major national issue.

Mission theology is the concern of Vasi Gadiki's contribution, here. He begins with a review of missionary thinking, indicating the more-recent development of contextual issues. This leads to consideration of mission in the Bible, and a review of the United church's present mission emphasis.

Church administration is probably not the most obvious, nor the most popular, topic for a theological journal, but Lobia Auela's short article is both insightful and helpful. Drawing on his experience in the public service, Auela identifies, and describes, common weaknesses in planning, and in stewardship, indicating their causes, and suggesting possible solutions.

The final article in the issue is something of an "in-house" concern of theological colleges, with a discussion of curriculum. But a wider readership also may well be interested to know how one such institution continues to develop the way, in which it prepares people for ministry in the church.

Encounter with the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

Howard Dian¹

Howard Dian comes from the Suau area of Papua, and is currently serving there as a minister of the United church. He graduated from Rarongo Theological College in 1995, and holds a Bachelor of Divinity degree.

Summary

This article describes, and evaluates, a renewal movement within the Fife Bay circuit of the United church. While some aspects of this movement are perhaps specific to the eastern area of Papua, many of its features are similar to other such renewal movements. The author is somewhat critical, and cautious, of this movement, and yet recognises that the church needs to learn from it, and to make a positive response.

Introduction

The aim of the “charismatic movement” in the Suau area of the United church is to bring Christian renewal to the church from its “sons”, who are employed in Port Moresby, or Alotau. The result of the crusades is that the encounter has taken the form of a renewal movement, through which the young villagers have formed small fellowship groups in many villages.

The “born-again” Christians claim to have had direct experiences of the Divine God, through Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. But emotionalism may mislead individuals to found their faith

¹ This article is extracted from a sub-thesis presented at Rarongo Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The entire work may be consulted in the College library.

on false emotions and feelings. Nurturing the small fellowship groups is a problem, because each group does not have a trained pastor. Therefore, emotionalism, and lack of proper pastoral nurturing, can become a major factor, leading to schism.

But, among United church members, there remains confusion, misunderstanding, and tension, over different opinions, theologies, and Christian lifestyles, between the “born-again” and the “not born-again”. The differences have become the current challenge to Christian faith and practice of the United church members in the Fife Bay circuit. This current challenge can be termed a “faith crisis”, because the faith of the Christians is challenged seriously. We shall now clarify, and interrelate, the “faith crisis” between the movement and the church.

Clarification of the Faith Crisis

The “faith crisis” has revealed that the United church members do not really understand the current situation. Many members do not know where they stand in their faith; whether they are with the United church, or with the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. It is important that the root causes of the “faith crisis” be revealed in our discussion.

(a) Direct and Indirect Experiences of God

Many of the Pentecostal-charismatic Christians claim to have had real and meaningful direct experiences of God in the crusades. New expressive designations such as “born-again Christians”, “not born-again”, the “haves” and the “have nots”, are used, as a means of distinguishing between the “converted” and the “not converted”. Direct experiences of God are overemphasised, while indirect experiences are hardly recognised and appreciated.

In this situation, it must be remembered that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. God cannot be confined to being directly experienced in the crusades only. Direct experience is mostly personal, and God can cause it to happen anywhere, and any

time, when He wills to do so. The apostle Paul had an unexpected direct experience of God, while he was travelling on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6).

Indirect experiences of God are realised through His providence in creation, in the answers to prayers, and in other people, or events. Therefore, direct and indirect experiences of God are both important, for they reveal the fullness of God's will for each person.

(b) The Mind and the Body

The Pentecostal-charismatic movement has developed a charismatic spirituality. It depends, strongly, on the use of feelings and emotions in worshipping God. Freedom of participation and emotional expressions are allowed, and the preaching is usually emotional. The mind is least engaged in the charismatic spirituality.

On the other hand, the spirituality of the Fife Bay circuit puts emphasis on theology, doctrines, creeds, sacraments, bible studies, etc. Orderly worship and preaching give good teaching about Christian growth and development. The circuit operates on hierarchies and structures, as approved by the Assembly of the United church. Christian discipline is given to correct the wrong-doer, and with proper nurturing, he is assisted to learn to grow into Christian maturity.

In the Fife Bay circuit, it has become noticeable that bodily expressions are only for the young people. The elders are seen as mature Christians, who are able to use only the mind and the heart to praise, and honour, God in worship.

In this kind of situation, it must be realised that human beings consist of the mind, the body, and the heart. All three form the totality of a human being. And, made in the image of God, we must be able to worship God in the wholeness of the given image. But the heart is the

centre of the whole human being. And when Christ is in control, He is able to control the mind, and the body, from the heart of man.

Therefore, Christ, the Lord and Saviour, is able to control, and discipline, the mind and the body, from the heart, so that man may be able to worship God in faith, spirit, and in truth.

(c) Religious and Practical Works

Within the renewal movement, some of the “born-again Christians” would spend the whole day studying the Bible, and praying. As a result, their gardens have no food, because no crops were planted, leading to hunger.

The Christian character is a religious character, which must exercise the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in order that the quality of the religious Christian character is realised, witnessed, and appreciated in reality. The religious Christian character is only abstract, when it is without deeds. Therefore, by praying only, it cannot produce a quality religious character, in reality. This means that faith, exercised in prayer, must be actualised as faith in action. Faith without works is a dead faith (James 2:15-16), or faith without works is an abstract faith, a faith that cannot be witnessed in reality.

Therefore, both religious and practical works are important, and need each other for meaningful results. And so, all Christians must be encouraged to exercise their Christian faith, not only in prayer, but also in works. Only then, will the quality of Christian character be realised in reality, as worthy citizens in the Christian community.

(d) This World and the Next World

The Pentecostal-charismatic evangelistic crusades strongly emphasise the times and events of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The signs of His coming are interpreted by the current increase in chaos, disorder, and natural disasters, in the world today. The

preaching is forceful, emotional, and intimidating, which may suggest that people are converted out of fear, and not from the heart.

The direct experiences of God contribute to a strengthened expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ. At the same time, “born-again Christians” forget that they are still in the present world. This creates the problem of trying to be spiritually in the next world, while one is physically in this world.

In trying to address this issue, it is to be understood that this world, and also the next, are both important, and interrelated, biblical themes. The kingdom of God is both “now” (in this world), and also “not yet” (in the next world). The kingdom of God as “now” (in this world) is a spiritual power of righteousness, peace, and joy that is living in the hearts of men, women, and children, who obey the will of God, and are redeemed, and forgiven of their sins. In the kingdom of God, Christ reigns as the power and authority over the life of a Christian. The fruit of the Holy Spirit reveals evidence of the presence of the kingdom of God, and of Christ’s rule, in a Christian (Gal 5:22-23).

Therefore, the purpose of Christians is to make known the kingdom of God, and the reign of Christ, to this world, while, in faith, hoping for the next world, through the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The Root Causes of the “Faith Crisis”

The root causes of the faith crisis seem to lie in both the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, and also in the United church Fife Bay circuit.

In the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, “born-again” Christians cause the “faith crisis”. They begin witnessing within their immediate homes, and, consequently, many families have left the United church. They convince people, by sharing their conversion experiences, and teaching on the nearness of the second coming of the

Lord Jesus Christ. It is through personal evangelism that the movement has easily convinced many United church members. Of course, the greatest effect comes from the crusades.

On the other hand, within the United church, there seems to be a lack of evangelism. In the early 1980s, Revd Gasika Gasika and Revd Morea Igo travelled to the Fife Bay circuit, to hold evangelistic meetings there. Many converts were received, and cared for, in the various United church congregations. But, for many years now, the Fife Bay circuit has not had any evangelistic meetings, that is, until the arrival of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement.

Equally, the United church circuit has had an inefficient “seekers’ class”, as may be seen from two points. Firstly, as most congregations have had only lay pastors, and caretakers, of congregations, they lack the knowledge to run seekers’ classes properly. The other problem is that, without seeking the will of the candidates, their names are forwarded to the congregation meeting, for consideration to attend the seekers’ classes. Usually, this was done, simply to fulfil the requirement of sending young people to these classes. Later, upon the recommendation of the pastor, the church meeting decides who is eligible for confirmation.

This has, then, raised the important question of “confirmation or conversion”, which is the most-controversial issue at this time in the Fife Bay circuit. This is the main cause of the divisions, because it is dealing with the faith of Christians. The “born-again” Christians believe that their recent conversions are more meaningful to them than when they had confirmation in the United church. Through their new conversion experiences, and testimonies, many United church members began to doubt their confirmation in the church.

Confirmation is when, in a special service, the congregation, on his confession of faith, accepts the *Tau eo’o* (“seeker”). The confession of faith declares that Jesus Christ is their personal Lord and

Saviour, who is also Lord of all races and nations. It also declares their belief in God's gifts of forgiveness, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. The confession is also to be faithful members of the congregation, and of the church. It is concluded, in promising to use the new life in Christ, in personal life, in the family, and in the community. Then, hands are laid upon the head of the candidate, with prayer to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to be strong against all evil forces, and to continue to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, in newness of life.

Confirmation involves the reaffirming of the candidates' baptismal vows. And so, through the grace of God, the candidate is received as a confirmed church member. Confirmation calls upon the willpower of the candidate to make a confession of faith before God. The candidate makes a vow from his heart, through the consciousness of his submission, and confession, to God.

On the other hand, the Pentecostal-charismatic conversion experience is more emotional, in their submission to Jesus Christ. Conversion is the act of turning away from sin and self, towards God, through Jesus Christ, and is the kind of testimony claimed by many of the "born-again" Christians.

The harmonising factor, is to look beyond conversion and confirmation, and to see the truth of each belief, exercised in reality, in the Suau context. The gospel, in reality, always settles in well with any context, and is lived by the people harmoniously.

Decline in the Nurturing of the Community of Faith

The identified root causes of the faith crisis have gradually penetrated other parts, and functions, of the church in the circuit. This penetration has caused a general decline in the life of the church, and, especially, in the pastoral care and nurture that is offered to the people.

Lack of nurturing of the youth is one major evidence of the decline of the functions of the circuit. Young people are generally enthusiastic, and always wanting to discover life themselves. But the congregation pastors, and lay pastors/caretakers, are responsible for all the youth in the circuit. The youth members do not participate actively, or eagerly, to take over God's work from the elders. The church is not encouraging the youth enough, to recognise their place in the participation of all of God's people, in their immediate context. The youth fellowships in the congregations are now divided.

Related to this, as we have already mentioned above, the lay pastors and caretakers cannot adequately lead their youth fellowship in the "seekers' classes". Good interpretation of the word and theology are needed to give understanding, and win obedience of "seekers' class" candidates.

It has become obvious that in the congregations many of the deacons have been in their positions for too long, so that their leadership qualities gradually decline. Although the deacon's group members know that their leader is not really working to the expected standards, it is usually argued that deacons should stay for the whole term as required by the church's policy.

Other church positions held by laymen also apply the policy of the term of office in the same way. It should be mentioned here that the young people are always encouraged to take up responsibilities but yet give little response. This is probably due to their desire to take up responsibilities only in their youth fellowship groups.

Further evidence of the decline in the functions of the circuit is seen in the lack of other aspects of church ministry. The Fife Bay circuit has not managed to live the gospel, to the standard expected by the church, especially in youth ministry, Sunday school, and in teaching Christian education in the schools. Most youth fellowship groups, and Sunday schools, operate, according to the abilities of the

leaders. The lay pastors, and the caretakers, do not help to organise these young people. Hence, the young people's needs are not met in these fellowship groups. Due to the circuit's continuous financial problems, many of the regionally-organised programmes are frequently not attended.

Pastoral Approaches to the Encounter

The faith crisis in the United church members begins to form, when they see, or hear, unusual acts, or testimonies, in the crusades, and the "born-again" Christians. These unusual acts, or testimonies, create a contradiction to their faith, as taught in the beliefs and practices of the United church. The more they see and listen to the stories of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, the more the United church members become convinced of it. In this way, the two views on the Christian faith create conflict in their thinking. On one hand, there is the faith and beliefs of the United church, and on the other, the beliefs and practices of the Pentecostal-charismatic renewal.

The way to address the situation is to select the concerns of the United church members on the Pentecostal-charismatic beliefs and practices, and to exegete them, using biblical themes. But it must be remembered that Pentecostal-charismatic views are not the same as the United church, in all their beliefs and practices. Therefore, the controversial issues in the faith crisis must be examined biblically, to reveal the truth, in relation to the beliefs and practices of the United church.

United church members do not have their Christian faith planted firmly in their hearts. A firm faith in Jesus Christ would never be moved. And so, the problem with the United church members is that they do not have a faith in Jesus Christ, sufficient to keep standing, in their encounter with the Pentecostal-charismatic.

The weak faith of the United church members is due to the weakness of the work of the gospel in the Fife Bay circuit. The

weakness is seen to be in the planting of faith after infant baptism. As the child grows up, the family and the community are responsible to bring the child up in the Christian faith. But parents seem to fail in teaching the Bible to the children at home, and further, the church is failing to teach the children effectively in Sunday school, and through Christian education.

As the child grows older, the weaknesses in the youth fellowship, and the seeker's classes, mean that the confirmed member is still to come to faith in Jesus Christ. If the confirmed member discovers a change in heart, during the confirmation, then he needs Christian nurturing to lead him into a genuine personal commitment. Close guidance is very important for newly-confirmed members, and should be a priority in the United church at Fife Bay.

The weakness in nurturing and counselling has resulted in poor leadership qualities, backsliding, and a failure to be actively involved in the work of the church. Therefore, there is an urgent need for ways and means to draw backsliding Christians back to Christ. There is need for Christian conversion, and for Christians to live Spirit-filled lives.

If the root need is for Christians to live Spirit-filled lives, how can this be achieved? What is a Spirit-filled life? Is it a once-only experience, or something that may happen many times? These are vital questions that must be answered, and then exercised, so that the theory is proved, practically.

More specific to the present situation, there can be two forms of direct approach to the problems. The first approach is through personal contact with members of the movement, by United church members, who feel that they can approach them. The aim is to establish personal understanding and appreciation of each other. Both should make clear to each other their differences. Good relationships, and life in the community, are needed urgently. The communal life of

society is now disintegrating, and, therefore, other ways and means must be attempted to restore the missing togetherness of the society.

The other way of direct approach to the present situation is for the Fife Bay circuit executives to have a round-table discussion, on the present life in the society. The leaders of the two groups should make a critical evaluation of the crusades. God expects good living, and concern for people, from all Christians. If the Pentecostal-charismatic leaders do not respond positively to the call, then other indirect approaches should be strongly encouraged.

These indirect approaches are to be centred on the work of the church in the circuit. It should, by now, be realised that the future of the circuit depends on the present, younger generation. Likewise, in the indirect approaches, the aim must become the nurturing of a child, from youth to maturity. This means that the gospel must be applied, at vital points in the life and growth of the child. These vital points are: when the child is young in age, when he is converted, and when he is mature.

Therefore, when a child is at a young age, Sunday school, Christian education, and youth fellowship must be taken seriously by the clergy. This must be seen as the beginning of helping the young people realise the meaning of the gospel, in their own context and understanding. The seeker's class is the next important point, where the young people are taught, and guided closely, to learn the meaning of being a Christian, of Christian living, and the responsibilities involved. After being confirmed as a church member, it is important that they are nurtured, through Bible studies, and other church activities.

In the Suau context, a vital point is missing in the continuing nurture of Christians, in that the church and marriage ceremonies are not integrated. There is a missing link, in the life of current Christian marriages. The couples, although Christian, are living a life that is not

blessed by the church. What the church should now do is to take part in the marriage ceremonies, and to engage the gospel, in the customary marriages. In this case, the service of blessing may be held at any time after the marriage, but it would be better for the service of blessing to be held during the customary marriage. This is something that the circuit executive should seriously think about, and discuss in the church's council meeting.

However, evangelism, and the teaching ministry must not be overlooked. The purpose of evangelism is conversion, and teaching about Jesus Christ, in relation to the needs of the people. The teaching ministry is very important, because it brings the understanding that should consolidate the faith, already founded on Jesus Christ.

Overall, the Fife Bay circuit needs to seriously reconsider its present functioning, and should plan to make necessary adjustments. Ministerial training is an essential need, and young Suauans should be encouraged into this field. All church members should be encouraged, by the circuit, to take active participation in the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ: the children, young people, those who are married, bachelors, the elderly – everybody should play their part.

The Challenge of Vernacularisation

Underlying much of this problem, is the wider need for the vernacularisation of the gospel. The United church had moved through localisation, indigenisation, and contextualisation of the gospel. The vernacularisation of the gospel is to be seen as the dynamic force that can energise indigenisation and contextualisation, in the hearts of the local people. The vernacularisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the Pentecostal-charismatic speaking in tongues, or speaking in unknown local languages. But the vernacularisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to bring the gospel to the people, where they are, and in the true, known, and lived languages of the people. The language of the gospel must be translated into the language of life. Therefore, the language of the gospel must be translated into the

language of fishing, gardening, making houses, the language of cutting grass, etc. The language of the gospel must become the language of the totality of human existence, in their contextual realities.

The language of the people and the language of the gospel must interact so that both reach their climax in the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. When the language of the people, and the language of the gospel in Jesus Christ, interact, then the gospel is incarnated in the language and culture of the people; the vernacularisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is realised.

The United church has members, who speak many different languages, live different cultures, and are vastly separated, but are united in the language of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The language of the gospel must speak to each language group, within the whole church. This is the vernacularisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, the United church Fife Bay circuit urgently needs the vernacularisation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, through the ways and means that are known to the people – the Suau language – to be in that totality of life that makes a Suauan, a real Suaun, in his own proper context. The vernacularisation of the gospel will bring true meaning to the people of the Fife Bay circuit.

It is a fact that many of the trained clergy, today, do not speak Suau, while others never preach a sermon in the local language, until they are transferred to other circuits. How easy it was, when, before the end of their first year of God's mission to the Suau people, Revd James Chalmers and Pi, a South Sea Islander, translated the first two chapters of Mark's gospel, and a few hymns, into the Suau language.

The disciples, on the day of Pentecost, were filled with power for ministry, and spoke in known languages. Is this not a sign that the Holy Spirit can teach the present clergy of the United church to speak the language of the people, to whom they are ministering? Therefore,

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the United church Fife Bay circuit is in the position of appealing to God's workers to vernacularise the gospel to the Suau people.

***Tuma*: the Trobriand Heaven**

Ignatius Ketobwau¹

Ignatius Ketobwau is from Kiriwina Island in the Trobriand Group. He graduated from Rarongo Theological College in 1994, with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, and is now Principal of the United Church Pastor's College in the Papuan Islands.

[In the printed version, some citations were referenced in the text, while others were shown as footnotes. All citations have now been referenced as footnotes. —Revising ed.]

In all Melanesian societies, where the belief in life after death was accepted, there was a place where the spirit of the person went to continue his life, but in a different form. Those places were thought to be better than the earthly ones. Therefore, Melanesians looked forward to going to those paradises. They were seen as the highest achievement for all Melanesian societies. The Trobrianders had *Tuma*, where everyone wanted to go. When life seemed too hard to bear, Trobrianders would even commit suicide, so that they would escape the hardship, and be with their ancestors in *Tuma*. Those places, like *Tuma*, were believed to be true, and no one doubted or questioned their existence. *Tuma* was real to the Trobrianders, until Christianity challenged the Islander's faith.

Many educated Trobrianders today have taken a negative stand toward Christianity, as a whole, after realising what it did to their culture. The problem was not within Christianity, rather, it was a difficulty with how Christ was presented. The European approach worked in the past, when Trobrianders were not exposed to the white man's way of living. Now that they have been educated, they have seen Christianity as nothing

¹ This article is extracted from a sub-thesis presented at Rarongo Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The entire work may be consulted in the College library.

but Western imperialism. That, of course, is not correct. Christianity is the message of liberation, and salvation, for all humanity. However, how it was presented did not really show liberation, but rather destruction.

In this paper, I will attempt to suggest ways of rediscovering the true message of liberation and salvation in Christianity. I aim to do this, by identifying Christ as a Trobriander, who can enable Trobrianders to experience a higher existence, not in heaven, or *Tuma* only, but here on earth first, and finds its fullness with God, wherever He is.

Tuma and heaven are destinations for two different religions, which have many similarities, as well as differences. Both are viewed as resting places of spirits, or souls, of the faithful followers of those religions. The reality of their existence is unquestionable, though they cannot be rationally proven.

Trobriand Islanders, in the past, did not have a definite doctrine of their paradise, *Tuma*. However, all Trobrianders agreed that it existed. The fact that living people had visited *Tuma*, strengthened the belief of its existence. There were no questions asked, and no doubts entertained, in the belief systems of the Islanders. However, when the Christian concept of heaven began to creep into the traditional belief systems, it created doubts, and raised questions concerning the existence of *Tuma*. Many Islanders began to divert their attention from *Tuma* to heaven.

Very few islanders have successfully absorbed the Christian concept of heaven into their belief system. Many have opted to retain *Tuma*, as their highest achievement, but the majority of the islanders have found themselves “sandwiched” by the two concepts. They began to ask questions, such as, “Is *Tuma* heaven? Can the Christian God live in *Tuma*? What is the difference between *Tuma* and heaven?” I will attempt to answer these questions in this article, by discussing the similarities and differences of these two destinations. I will also attempt to identify God’s place in *Tuma*, and suggest some ways, in which these two concepts can be harmoniously married.

Similarities and Differences of *Tuma* and Heaven

The belief in the realities of *Tuma* and heaven are one, but in different forms. Both belief systems require faith, as the only basis of the knowledge of their existence. No scientific investigation, or rational formulae, can be employed to prove the existence of these paradises. The reality of their existence is based on faith alone. Although these belief systems vary in physical expression, and may be regarded as two different systems, it does not necessarily mean they oppose, or contradict, each other. Both systems are complete in themselves, and are parallel truths.

a. Religious Similarities

The Christian concept of heaven, which originated from Jewish and Greek belief in the survival of the person after death, is parallel to the Trobriand idea of *Tuma*. These two beliefs are part and parcel of the total beliefs of the two systems, in their respective religions. Both religions believe in a supernatural being, or beings. The practical results of their beliefs are expressed in worship and ritual, and have a particular view of the world, and of the nature and destiny of man. Also, in these religions, there is a particular view of the way man ought to live his daily life, in order that he may enter the everlasting destination.

The fact that no human being has ever lived without some experience of religion, is the joining factor of these two belief systems. No society in the world can dismiss religion, as Farley has stated:

No human being has ever lived without some acquaintance with religion in some form. Every community of people, even the most primitive, has some religious beliefs and practices. . . . Of course, there have been great varieties of beliefs and practices. . . . Of course, there have been great varieties of belief, due to wide differences in powers of understanding, but the essential religious emotion, or attitude, is everywhere the same.²

² F. A. Farley, *The Faith*, London UK: Epworth Press, 1938, p. 16.

Although the doctrine of *Tuma* has not been highly developed, and clearly defined, it is in agreement with the Christian concept of heaven, as the destination of man. Therefore, the main similarity, or oneness, of *Tuma* and heaven is the religious belief of their existence.

b. Glimpses of Paradise

The reality of the existence of *Tuma* and heaven has been strengthened by visits, taken by living people, into those places. *Tuma* had been visited by the *Tokesivila*, and has been seen by those who were about to die. Heaven, on the other hand, is not out of reach. The Bible records some experiences, where living people saw heaven. In St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he told of a person he knew, who was caught up to the third heaven, and told of many "inexpressible things" (2 Cor 12:2-5). St Paul may have been modest in his approach, not wanting to clearly state that he was the man. Also, in the prologue of the book of Revelation, St John testified that he was shown the things of heaven. Many other Christians have claimed to have had visions of heaven. Because conscious men and women have seen *Tuma* and heaven, it is difficult to dismiss their reality.

However, those "visits" were only glimpses. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether the boundaries of both paradises have been explored. For instance, if the *Tokesivila* only visited *Tuma*, how do *Wabwaima* and *Walisiga* look? If Paul was caught up in the third heaven, how many more stages of heaven are there? Therefore, it is not totally incorrect to suggest that both *Tuma* and heaven are part of each other, and can be seen as one.

c. Physical differences

In the light of what has been said, above, the discussion on the physical differences of *Tuma* and heaven does not necessarily mean that they are totally different. For instance, as a Melanesian, I am physically different from a Chinese person. However, the physical difference does not make me an inferior being to the Chinese. Of course, there are minor differences between us in terms of appearances. Similarly, *Tuma* and

heaven may have many physical differences, but are really the same reality. There are a lot of physical differences between these two heavens, but I will discuss only a few of the major ones.

One major physical difference between *Tuma* and heaven is their locations. While heaven is believed to be somewhere in the sky, or above, *Tuma* is underground. Because *Tuma* is underground, one can easily be tempted to conclude that it is inferior. However, it is incorrect to say that what is below is less than that which is above. It is correct, in mathematical terms, but not in belief, for faith cannot be equated to mathematics. The cosmology of Trobriand society is different from Jewish and Greek societies. However, the idea of a higher destination, beyond the world of the living, is the same for both heaven and *Tuma*.

Another great difference, is the destination of the rejected. In the Trobriand belief, a spirit is caused to turn into a *Vayaba*, when *Topileta* rejects him. There is no idea of the rejected spirit experiencing indescribable pain. However, his rejection will mean that his life's cycle has ended. He will never again experience rebirth, but will remain an "alien" forever. In the concept of a Christian heaven, there is a place called hell, where the rejected spirit will experience torment for eternity.

The causes for rejection, in both places, are also different. A person is rejected from *Tuma*, when he fails to pay the "entry fee" of valuables. How he had lived his earthly life does not really matter, as it does not determine his entry. On the other hand, the earthly life of the person, in Christian belief, is what determines his eternity. Those who accept Jesus Christ, and become part of the community of believers on earth, have the assurance of eternal life in heaven. Those who do not belong to the community, end up in hell.

God's Place in *Tuma*

When I raised the question of whether or not the Christian God lives, or has a place, in *Tuma*, Revd Lepani Gumagawa paused for a long time, before finally answering:

Theologically, we describe God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. These words mean that God knows everything, His power is beyond compare, and He is present everywhere. If I say, God is not in *Tuma*, because *Tuma* is not the heaven Christianity teaches about, then I am questioning the omnipresence of God. But, if we believe that God is truly everywhere, then He must be in *Tuma*.³

Revd Lepani Gumagawa did not, at any time during our interview, suggest that, because God is in *Tuma*, then it becomes heaven, in the Christian sense. His emphasis was on the fact that God is everywhere, and because of that, he is also in *Tuma*.

The question of God's place in *Tuma* is not merely a question of His presence there. Rather, it is a question on the total existence of God. The question is really asking: "Is there a God?" Traditional Christian faith affirms the existence of God. Yet, that affirmation denies God's omnipresence when Christianity restricts God to remain in the Jewish and Greek heaven. Christianity's "developed" doctrine, too, has placed God in a restricted zone, with boundaries, thus restricting Him from moving away to other heavens, like *Tuma*.

This was exactly what the early Methodist missionaries did to God, when they presented Him to the Trobriand Islanders. Instead of identifying God's existence, in the midst of the total life of the people, they tried to replace the Trobriand values and beliefs with a Western way. In so doing, they restricted God from entering into the total lifestyle of the Islanders. They denied God's existence in *Tuma*, while, at the same time, taught that "God is everywhere". If God is really everywhere, then He is also in *Tuma*.

When I asked my informant, Bokadala, whether or not Christians, who had died, went to *Tuma*, she replied affirmatively, without giving any further details. Another informant, by the name of Mweyawata, made

³ Interview with Revd Lepani Gumagawa, January 12, 1994.

mention that his father, Tosila, during one of his visits to *Tuma*, came across a place that was brightly lit, with some light that was not from the sun. Tosila saw a great multitude of people, all dressed in white, and standing around something that was glowing in the centre. Tosila hid in the nearby bushes, and gazed with amazement at the glory of the place, until one of the whitely-dressed people saw him, and told him quietly to leave, because the place was highly sacred. Tosila believed that those people were Christians.

Mweyawata said his father, who was a great *Tokesivila*, made it possible for Bokadala's first trip to *Tuma*. He had, himself, visited *Tuma* many times, but had not seen any place like this before. I was unable to confirm the story of Mweyawata, because Tosila was old, and had lost his memory. When I went to his village, his brother told me that Tosila was dying. He had requested the Catholic priest to come and give him the last sacrament. Consequently, Tosila became a Christian after his experience of the highly-sacred place in *Tuma*. If this is sufficient to be taken as confirmation of Mweyawata's story of his father's experience, then God must also be in *Tuma*.

Trobrianders, in the past, believed that *Tuma* was in three stages: *Tuma*, *Wabwaima*, and *Walisiga*. Even *Tokesivila*, like Bokadala, mentioned about going only to *Tuma*, which was generally believed to be the original step up of the Trobriand community. Every village, road, beach, and island, in the underworld was exactly the same as those in the Trobriand Islands, but in perfect condition. The question of whether or not Tosila had some acquaintance of *Wabwaima* or *Walisiga* will remain unanswered. However, I am inclined to think that Tosila did have some glimpse of one of these two places, or stages.

The Highest Achievement for a Trobriand Christian

The highest achievement for Trobrianders, before the introduction of Christianity, was *Tuma*. All longed to join their ancestors in the land of *Kemwana*, where happiness was everlasting. In the long past, those who were found guilty of unforgivable crimes, like incest, would choose

suicide, rather than live with the pain of being ridiculed by the whole community. Suicide was classed as a good death, where the person would find happiness in *Tuma*. Many more islanders would rather be in *Tuma* than to live in this world, with toil and hardship. *Tuma*, then, was the highest achievement.

On conversion, that is, turning to God, and believing that He is the source of their power and total being, Trobriand Christians have shifted their efforts, from wanting to go to *Tuma*, to striving for a place in heaven. The concept of heaven, as the highest achievement, was thought to have penetrated into their total being, and directed their everyday living. Their lives had to be lived in a way pleasing to God. Their conversion meant that they would now seek access to God's power, through Jesus Christ, the "one mediator between God and men" (Tim 2:5 NIV). This also meant that their conversion was turning away from all other mediators, like the *Tokesivila*, at least in their role as mediators, who brought back power and wealth from *Tuma*. Ancestors would still be venerated, or respected, but not related to, as the means and mediators of power, through the *Tokesivila*.

The conversion of the Trobrianders also meant that they had turned to a God, who was seen as more transcendent than any spiritual being they had ever known. They employed the phrase *Baloma bomala* to describe this new God. Trobrianders used *Baloma* for spirits, and *bomala* to describe their sacredness. Yet, not at any time, before the introduction of Christianity, were these two words put together to describe a super-spiritual being. There was very little idea of a creator being. Their explanation of their existence started from the myths of origin, where it was believed a man and his sister, both from the same clan, broke open a cave, hole, or a tree, and led the whole clan out. Beyond the point of first emergence, no one knew. Therefore, the new experience meant that they had to come to terms with this God, who was behind their emergence and existence, and who was believed to be above all other spiritual beings.

The characteristics attributed to Him were also new, and more attractive, in the sense that they did not suggest any degree of negative fear. In describing this type of conversion, Ewan Stilwell wrote:

Conversion, in Melanesia, therefore, means turning to a Spirit Being, who does not easily fit into the Melanesian category of Spirit. Of great significance, is the fact that the Christian God is a God of love, and a God who desires man to relate to Him, not on the basis of fear of the negative effects of His power, but out of deeply-felt spirit of thankfulness, and love for Him, as small children would relate to a good father. So, conversion is fundamentally entering into a loving, obedient, dynamic relationship with the living God, and believing in Him is the trusting commitment of one's life, which issues in lifelong faithfulness, lifelong allegiance to Him.⁴

What, perhaps, was difficult for Trobrianders to absorb was the concept of this "One true God", who originated a loving relationship with men. It was not the difficulty of accepting the idea of a loving Father, but the difficulty of accepting a Father who was foreign. A "father", to the Trobrianders, was one who was the husband of their mother, or all the maternal aunts, or the members of their father's clan. Anyone outside this circle was not regarded as a father. It was an insult to a Trobriander, when one claimed to be the father of the other. It meant that the person had sexual relationship with the other's mother.

Therefore, when God was presented as a Westerner, He was regarded as a foreigner. Although Trobrianders became Christians, they did not absolutely relinquish the values of their traditional belief systems. In actual fact, they carried over into Christianity what values and beliefs they were so accustomed to. One of them, was the fear of the negative effects of the powers of the divine. How much more should they fear the "jealous God" (Deut 5:9 NIV) now that they had accepted Him?

⁴ Ewan Stilwell, "Towards a Melanesian Theology of Conversion", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (1993), p. 35.

Although His loving acts were intended to dismiss fear, most Trobriand Christians, even up until today, still have the same fear they had of the Trobriand deities.

The shift in the highest achievement may have been seen visibly, but that did not absolutely mean all Trobriand Christians had been transformed, totally. Many wanted to go to heaven, while *Tuma* was still within them. In their struggle to accommodate these two ideas, they placed themselves in a difficult situation. Up until today, Trobrianders are still confused on which destinations to go to. Therefore, an appropriate Trobriand theology is needed to address the situation. In the next section, I will attempt to suggest ways of addressing this religious problem. The concept I will suggest, is not without dangers and disadvantages. It will also not be exclusive, thus, it is open to debate and criticism. However, there has to be a start somewhere, where Trobrianders can really claim the “one true God” as their own, and not as a foreigner.

The Beginning of a New Trobriand Christianity

Western missionaries, after experiencing a new kind of religion, namely Christianity, felt they had to share the urgent message with others. Therefore, they came to Melanesia, including the Trobriand Islands, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their message did help, in many ways, to reform Trobriand society. For all the good that they did, Trobrianders are thankful. However, with all the positive changes, they brought destruction to the culture, which included social organisations, political and economic systems, religious systems, and the total activity of Trobriand habits, ideas, and customs. The gospel was not presented as it really is. The “content” of the gospel (Jesus Christ) was presented, together with the Western “container”. Jesus was not presented as the Son of God, who became flesh, and made His dwelling among all peoples, pitching His tent, igloo, thatched roof house, or other form of dwelling. He was not presented as wanting to be in the midst of different peoples, so as to make it possible for them to be redeemed (John 1:14). He only made His dwelling among the Westerners, so it seemed, because

missionaries wanted the Trobrianders to relinquish their ways, and follow those of the white man. They wanted the islanders to accept the gospel, the valuable content in the container that they were offering. Yet it was impossible for the Trobriand “container”, even if it was viewed as having a lesser value, to be relinquished by the people. The container was their total life.

Because of what has been said above, many Trobrianders, today, see Christianity as identical with Western imperialism. As more and more Trobrianders become liberated, and developed, in both secular and religious circles, they will see how much destruction Christianity has done to their culture. The more they are educated, the more they will question the value of this “foreigner” religion. Some have already identified the negative aspects of Western Christianity. One such person is Patrick Tobigabwela Tomausi, a graduate of Political Science from the University of Papua New Guinea, and formerly a senior public servant, for over 20 years, with the Papua New Guinea government. This is what he said about Christianity:

Western churches, because of their original roots, inherited the characteristics of Western culture. That is, they have a materialistic attitude, which is commonly known as “capitalism”. Furthermore, they have preconceived ideas, and myths, of the people they preach to, and teach. They called the people “heathens”, or “pagans”, because they are not enlightened by their Christian teachings. Christian churches play a dual role, wherever they go, including Papua New Guinea. They preach the good news, on one hand, and manipulate capitalist production, on the other hand. . . . They are among the wealthiest institutions in Papua New Guinea.⁵

Views, like that of Tomausi’s, would not have been expressed, if Christianity was presented in “content” only, without the “container”. If Jesus Christ was presented, to be accommodated in the more-communal

⁵ Interview with Patrick Tobigabwela Tomausi, March 14, 1994.

Trobriand way, educated Trobrianders would not have vigorously attacked capitalism. However, as it is, many Trobrianders see Christianity in no different terms from that of Western imperialism.

a. Jesus Christ, the Basis of Trobriand Theology

God's plan of salvation found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. God, who initiated the wonderful fellowship, and relationship, with men, revealed Himself, in the way men understood best. He became man Himself, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells how Christ "made Himself nothing", and, not considering equality with God, became like us and lived as a servant (Phil 2:6-7). The reason for such an "emptying" is that, "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV). The "world" that God loved so much may have initially meant the Jewish world, because Jesus was speaking to a Jew at that time. However, the Genesis account of the creation of man in God's image, and the commission given by Jesus to go to all nations (Matt 28:19), included the Trobrianders.

Thus, the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the Jewish community does not restrict Him to be a Jew only. Rather, the Jewish race was used as the channel of God's blessing to "all peoples on earth" (Gen 12:3 NIV).

Jesus Christ's incarnation was really an incarnation to the whole of humanity. We do not deny the fact that Christ was born a Jew, and would remain an historical Jewish figure. However, as far as common human characteristics are concerned, Christ was both a Jew, and a Trobriander. If this thought is seen as blasphemy, and impossible, then the concept of incarnation to the whole world is false.

Joe Gaqurae, who made the first attempt to recognise Christ as a Melanesian, argued that, if Christ's incarnation to the whole world is to be accepted, all races, especially Melanesians, in this case, must claim Him as a Melanesian also. In his article, "Indigenisation as Incarnation", he wrote:

We do not attempt to make Christ become a Melanesian. We cannot make Him a Melanesian. He is already a Melanesian. The incarnation affirms the fact that He is already a Melanesian. He has been indigenised, or localised, by God Himself. We cannot do what already has been done. We only have to recognise the fact. We just have to wake up to the fact that, through the incarnation, Christ has already incarnated, and identified Himself with the whole of humankind, not only Jews. . . . If it was possible for Christ to become a Jew, what can stop Him from becoming a Melanesian, to me?⁶

What can really stop Christ from becoming a Trobriander also? Only the finite human mind can reject this truth, and continue to see Christ as a Jew, or a Westerner. Many finite minds think they know God, and can restrict Him to a certain locality, or race, only. Yet, many theologians, like Emil Brunner, believe that God cannot be fully known, either by scientific methods, or by faith. God is beyond human conception. He is not within our knowledge, rather our knowledge is in God.

No man can know who God is. The cleverest scholar knows nothing more, concerning God, than the simplest man. There dwells, of course, within every human heart, a feeling of something higher than itself, a dim apprehension of a Power ruling all that is, and giving His Law to all that lives. . . . What variety of ideas, men have of “God”, and “the divine” – and how many have no conception of the matter, whatsoever. Who dares to say, “I know who God is. I know His plans and purposes?” This much we know of God: He is the great mystery.⁷

No man has seen God, except the Son of God, who claimed, in John 14:9, that anyone who has seen Him, has seen the Father. His Father

⁶ J. Gaqurae, “Indigenisation as Incarnation”, in John D’Arcy May, ed., *Living Theology in Melanesia: a Reader, Point 8* (1985), p. 213-214.

⁷ E. Brunner, *Our Faith*, London UK: SCM Press, 1959, p. 63.

was the one, whom people claimed as their God (John 8:54). Jesus Christ is that great mystery revealed. This self-revelation of God, through Jesus Christ, is the only fundamental basis of our knowledge of God. Of course, not all people know God, in Jesus Christ. It all depends on what Jesus means to them. Those, to whom Jesus is only a noble, wise, and obedient man, and the greatest of all religious leaders and saints, do not have God. But those who have the Son, as “God revealed”, have the fulfilment of God’s saving act, through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He is the basis of Trobriand theology, or any theology, for that matter.

b. Accepting Christ as a Trobriander

In order for Trobrianders to accept the finished work of Christ’s atonement, they must first accept Him, as the true revelation of God. This can be done, only when they identify Christ, in their own belief system, and pattern of thought. Christ must dwell in their midst, and be one of them. Christ must be seen as a Trobriander, who understands them in their joys and sorrows. They will be able to accept the fact that Christ is the “high priest”, who is able to sympathise with their weaknesses. He was tempted in every way like them, and yet did not sin (Heb 4:15). He will become their *kabogigisa* (model), the one who came, not to do away with culture (human activities, achievements, and beliefs), but to fulfil it. He will be able to change, reform, and restore, Trobriand culture, because He is in that particular culture, and understands every aspect of it. A foreigner, on the other hand, can never bring reformation, acceptable to the Trobrianders, because he does not understand all the depths of the Trobriand mind and being.

The only purpose for the atoning work of Jesus Christ was because man had sinned, and had fallen short of God’s glory. The image of God, originally created in man, had been spoilt by sin. That is, God’s purpose for man had been replaced with what man wanted to do for himself. Man had corrupted the culture, which constitutes man’s total lifestyle, given by God. So God came, Himself, in Jesus Christ, to reform and renew that culture. He continues to come, again and again, in His Spirit, to reveal

His plans for reformation and change in societies. Yet, that reformation is not experienced by all cultures, because changes are dictated by one particular culture only. It is difficult, because it is like using a screwdriver to mend a torn *laplap* (cloth). Because of this, changes have been viewed negatively, rather than in a positive way.

The sad thing is that many Trobriand Christians have accepted the use of Western ways, taught to them by early Western missionaries, as the only means to reform their own cultures. An attempt made by a lay pastor, Toboeta, to sing praises to God, and the Christian message in the traditional tune seemed very funny to them. Yet the initiative, taken by Toboeta, was a positive step towards identifying Christ as a Trobriander. For only a “Trobriand Christ” can change the Trobriand culture. His spirit, which indwells Trobriand Christians, will enable them to bring forth reformation and change to their own society. As they partake in the mission of Jesus Christ, in reconciling man back to God, they will experience liberation, reformation, and change, in their own “Jerusalem” first. Thus, they will experience the kingdom of God, which had already come upon them, and had become an earthly reality. They will foretaste the heavenly state of life, here and now, and fully experience it later with God, wherever He is. The assurance of eternal life in Christ is sufficient for any Trobriand Christian. It is better than attempting to know where God really is, whether He is in *Tuma*, or the Jewish and Greek heaven.

Conclusion

Those, who saw that Christianity had failed to address their situation, meaningfully, commonly ask the questions raised by Trobriand Christians. The Christ, presented by the missionaries, who held strongly to the traditional Christian view, did not fit well into their lifestyles. The pattern of belief, they were so accustomed to, had been disturbed by the introduction of Christianity. Although the basic elements of the two religious systems were seen as one, presenters of the “new way” viewed the “old way” as ungodly and misleading. Therefore, those who got converted into the new belief system were told to relinquish their old “pagan” ways, and totally accept the new, as it was presented.

What the missionaries failed to see was the fact that the traditional religious experiences of people, in this case the Trobrianders, became the basis of all their religious experiences. By this I mean, the traditional Trobriand religious experiences, and the belief of a spiritual realm, made it possible for them to accept Christianity. If Trobrianders did not believe in the powers of spiritual beings, it would have been impossible for them to accept the Christian concept of a transcendent God. In other words, Trobrianders accepted Christianity, because they had already had some religious experiences, themselves.

The Trobrianders' religious experiences were not separate from all other experiences. Rather, their whole day-to-day experiences were nothing but religious. Their lives revolved around the world of spirits. Their political, social, economic, and other activities of life, were influenced and guided by the spiritual order. Nothing happened without the spirits, and nothing was possible without their powers. Their total being, and existence, depended entirely on the spiritual order that was born in, and with, them from the very beginning.

This study has enabled us to understand the inner realm of Trobriand religious experiences. It has also enabled us to understand the confusion that Trobriand Christians have gone through. While the basic elements of both their traditional religion and Christianity were one, they could not harmoniously marry the two. This was because the new way was disturbing their total lifestyles, from where they originated. What they did, and where they would end up, was never questioned before. Christianity taught a different path, and pattern of life, of which the people had no knowledge. It was hard for them to comprehend, because it was foreign.

Although Jesus Christ was presented as the means for salvation, Trobrianders found it hard to accept the idea of a foreigner saving them. How could he? He would not know their deep aspirations, values, joys, and sorrows. They knew that their salvation came from their gods and

spirits, who had their real and perfect existence in *Tuma*, their heaven, where life, in its perfection, was experienced.

Before God can appropriately address Trobriand situations, He must first become a Trobriander. This paper suggests that God, who was incarnated through Christ, must first be identified as a Trobriander. Only then, can He be seen as capable of becoming the means of salvation for the islander. The truth of God's incarnation, through Jesus Christ, to the whole of humanity, can be accepted. Trobrianders would look back into their traditional religion, which was the basis of their culture, to identify God there. They would view their pattern of life as the means of salvation, which has found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This would enable them to view their religion and Christianity as one, rather than seeing them as two separate systems, in conflict with each other.

Some Trobrianders may disagree with this paper, and I take full responsibility for this. However, there has to be a start somewhere, so that Christ can be made more meaningful in the lives of Trobriand Christians. The joy and deep value of God's salvation, through Christ, can again be experienced in its fullness.

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The Use of Traditional Healing Practices in Christian Pastoral Care

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Introduction

The subject of this article is a challenge to ministers and pastors, in the development and growth of the church today. Although we are in the scientific age, traditional healing practices are still holding to their roots, in most Melanesian societies.

In this paper, I shall discuss the general topic, by considering the subjects of spirits, the causes of sickness, and of healing, gifts of healing, lives of sacredness, healing in the Old and New Testaments, contrasts between traditional healing practice and Christian ministry, and, finally, the transformation of traditional healing into Christian ministry. Alternatives, suggestions, and recommendations are also mentioned in concluding the discussion.

Healing is the restoration of the body to health from sickness. It refers to the “wholeness” of humanity, in both the physical and spiritual aspects of life. To be whole, means to be complete, or in good condition; to be free from defect or disease; to be well in body, and to have a sane mind.

Melanesians have experienced healing in their localities, ever since time unknown, mostly through herbalists, believed to be using power from the spirits. They used two kinds of traditional healing beliefs and practices, which were very much at the centre of the lives of these people. The early missionaries, however, gave very strong teaching to abandon this traditional

healing, but the people did not listen to them, because it was part of their lives, and power was seen in it.

In my society, there are two categories of spirits: firstly, there are the spirits of human beings, and, secondly, the wild, or bush, spirits. Ghosts of human beings retained the physical and social characteristics of the former living self. My people do not know how a man becomes a ghost, but they know simply that, when a man dies, he becomes a ghost. The wild spirits are divided into two types, namely, good spirits and evil ones.

Good spirits are believed to be the motivating force in various medicinal plants that are looked after in small quantities around the houses. The good spirits give power and healing to these natural means, so that, when they are consumed, or used externally (washing with, or rubbed on, the skin), they are effective in making the person recover from sickness.

The most important high spirit to our people is known as *Tilik*. This spirit lives everywhere: in the air, the sea, the mountains, and even in the place of the dead. He is powerful, and benevolent, a loving protector, the spirit of the dance, of feasting, and also of the *Tubuan* and *Dukduk* societies. A legend, in the Duke of York Islands, says that *Tilik* took part in the creation of the world, and is feared by other spirits, all incantations for good purposes are carried out with the use of his name.

It is clear, therefore, and important for us to note, that definite similarities can be seen between *Tilik* and the Christian God, for they each are known to be powerful, good, loving, and saving. We shall refer to this again, when we discuss the relation between traditional and Christian healing practices.

Evil spirits, on the other hand, empower the plants kept by sorcerers in secret places. Other evil spirits are also believed to appear to people in the bush, frightening them, and are able to hurt, or to make them sick, in some ways. We generally believe that the good spirits are more powerful, and can overcome the power of the evil-spirited plants.

Traditional Causes of Sickness and Healing

In my society, people believe that there are a number of causes of sicknesses and diseases. Here, I will give examples of two causes, on the spiritual side, and of two others, on the natural side.

- (a) Ghosts and spirits that are mistreated can make people sick. A ghost or spirit may get angry, and cause discomfort or sickness, if he is sworn at, scolded, or if his habitat has been violated by being burnt, or damaged, in some way. Generally speaking, Melanesians believe that ghosts or spirits bring about any serious sickness.
- (b) Evil spirits may fight, or curse, human beings, without any good reason at all. These spirits live in the bush, forest, valleys, mountain-sides, or in swampy areas. They do a lot of harm to people, by frightening them, or causing sickness, by entering their bodies, and taking control of them (being possessed). These spirits do not care at all for human beings, but may cause madness, paralysis, miscarriage, and the like.
- (c) My people also believe that sicknesses are derived from natural elements, such as, air, water, soil, leaves, fruits, and other environmental sources. Sicknesses, like coughs, colds, and influenza are thought to affect a person if he/she spends too much time in cold weather. These sicknesses have been with the people since time immemorial, and were recognised as “natural” complaints.
- (d) It is a popular belief today that our ancestors, who lived during the pre-European period, were stronger than the present generation, and lived longer. They were well nourished, hardworking, and looked very fit. They ate taro, yam, nuts, pig meat, possum, fish, shellfish, fruits, and greens. As new goods, such as, rice, tinned fish, and meat, sugar, and other imported foods were introduced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,

people began to leave their local foods, and showed interest in the foreign ones. They were not aware that the new foods brought in new sicknesses also. As time passed, they realised that the new sicknesses in their society (such as high blood pressure, heart attacks, and diabetes) were caused by the foreign foods.

I will now refer to the same four examples, above, and describe the traditional remedies for these sicknesses.

- (a) If the sickness is deemed to be caused by the anger of a ghost, or spirit, the family of the victim will have to perform a recovery ritual. A member of the family may go to the graveyard, consult the ghosts in confession, and ask for forgiveness. Later on, the healer will come to the patient, and wash him with herbs, or rub them on his body, and, at the same time, put on spells for protection and recovery. The same recovery ritual is performed for either a good or a bad spirit.
- (b) Sicknesses caused by evil spirits are regarded as very dangerous, often deadly. People, who are attacked, can either be killed on the spot, or become permanently sick or paralysed. The victim's relatives have to give an appropriate amount of money (shell money) to the healer, who will then go to the spot, where the incident happened, and use spells to call back the spirit of the victim. The sick person will be taken to the sea to be washed, and later, at the house, his body would be protected by spells. The victim will be in the care of both the healer, and the relatives, until he recovers.
- (c) People, who are believed to be sick, by common "natural" complaints, such as, fever, colds, and coughs, are normally given liquid medicines. In giving these, the healer may pronounce spells, and wash the body with herbs. Normally, the

patient is encouraged to eat more food, in particular, the ones selected to give strength, and quick recovery.

- (d) It is surprising to see that our traditional healers, today, are quickly adapting themselves, to cater for the needs of victims of modern diseases. I have personally witnessed the work of a traditional healer in my village, who worked on cancer, venereal diseases of different kinds, tuberculosis, asthma, diabetes, paralysed body, pains, poisoning (understood as being internally demon-possessed), and many other sicknesses. He has been so successful that he is being asked, by people of different races, to help sick people, not only in New Britain, but also in other provinces.

According to some people, who have lived longer, and have experience of life, in different situations, the younger generation should be advised to eat local foods, rather than taking Western food. The best way of healing, and keeping fit, is to eat local foods, because they are fresh, healthy, and of the best quality.

Gifts of Traditional Healing

Melanesians are gifted people. Some are gifted in leadership, some in service, some in speech, and others, in healing ministry. We believe that healing comes from the spirits, but has originated from God alone, and is, therefore, a gift from Him. Through a number of interviews, in my recent visit to the village, I found that there are four main ways, in which these gifts of traditional healing are achieved.

Most of the healing practices come through dreams and visions, before they are handed down from generation to generation. Even today, there are still many Melanesians, who get their gifts of healing in this way. In many communities, there are expert “Wisdom guides” (*Tena Buai* in the Kuanua language), who initiate others into dreaming and visions. People, who are being initiated into this special area, have to be taken away from society, and kept in a secret place, called “*Marovot*”, where they are given special betel

nuts, with certain leaves, herbs, ginger, lime, and tree-roots. They are also taught how to pronounce the correct incantations,¹ and to abstain from particular foods, such as, fish with smooth skin, pig, chicken, and certain vegetables. When the initiated person has been absent from society for several weeks, he comes out to the community, and is recognised as “*Tena Buai*”, and is able to dream, and see visions.

Dreams and visions are often connected to healing. What actually happens is that a man/woman may appear in the dream, and show healing herbs, plants, roots, and other natural substances, and also pronounce the necessary spells. This type of passing on of secrets of healing to others is said to be open to anyone, who wants to be a dreamer, although, of course, a person has to pay (shell money) for the secrets. Most of the powerful healers and herbalists obtain their abilities from dreams and visions.

Secondly, healing gifts are often received from a person's own relatives. When people are close to dying, even today, they pass on the secrets of healing to their children, or to some other person. The recipients of these secrets are also blessed, so that they are empowered by the spirits to be healers. Because the secrets of healing belong to the individual family or clan, they must be guarded well from other clans or persons. The father, wishing to pass on the secrets, would take his son (a female healer would take her daughter, or other female relative) to a special part of the bush, where he is shown the appropriate leaves, herbs, roots, etc., and how to prepare them for use. Incantation, or calling of the spirits, is also learnt, along with the necessary laws, rules, and sacredness.

A third source of healing powers is by receiving them through friends, in a manner similar to receiving them from relatives. Fourthly, some people

¹ Incantations are normally said in short sentences, or phrases, in a repetitive way, for example: “Get this man well. Get this man well. Work in his body. Work in his body.” After repeating the words several times, the healer ends the incantation with the words, “*Tilik*, you hear me you say ‘yes’, you make this man well!” (*Tilik* is the name of the most powerful spirit, as mentioned above.)

study nature, in relation to sicknesses, and, by using natural means, are able to heal sicknesses and disease.

The use of healing gifts, and the whole process of healing, requires the observance of various taboos, in order to maintain sacredness. If the healer fails to observe these restrictions, *Tilik* may absent himself, and the healer loses his power and wisdom, even becoming sick himself. The person, who wishes to be healed, also has certain rules to follow. He may be stopped from eating particular foods, told not to enter graveyards, or sacred places, nor to sleep with his wife. To become healed quickly, one must follow the laws that govern the healing exercise, and observe sacredness. By doing this, the people involved will be pure, receive power from the supernatural beings, and so be healed.

In summary, traditional beliefs about becoming healthy combine supernatural beings, man and nature together, with respect for the laws and sacredness, set down by the gods, ghosts, or spirits. These beliefs were handed down from the ancestors, or are received directly from them, through dreams and visions.

Healing in the Bible

We will discuss this heading only briefly, giving some examples from both the Old and New Testaments. Healing by faith, and also with the use of medicine, will be considered, so as to bring out the similarities that exist between traditional healing practices in our societies, and the healing practices of the Bible.

In the Old Testament, we cannot establish the existence of a proper order of medical practitioners, in the early stage of Hebrew history. This seems remarkable, considering the long residence of Israel in Egypt, where medicine was well established. But, this is not to say that they never attended to their sicknesses: sores, boils, fevers, dysentery, leprosy, paralysis, and so forth.

There are some indications that the people of Israel used traditional medicines, together with faith healing, by applying leaves, herbs, fruits, resins, and other natural substances. “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?”, asked Jeremiah (Jer 8:22), evidently referring to a healing ointment that had been known from patriarchal days (Gen 37:25). Dill (Lev 27:30) was widely cultivated, not only for use in cooking, but also as a domestic medicine, while galbanum (Ex 30:34) was applied as an antiseptic ointment.² Isaiah used a preparation of figs in successfully treating a boil (2 Kings 20:7), and in the healing of Naaman, cleansing water was used (2 Kings 5:1-14). Elijah used symbolic action in reviving the widow’s son, thereby indicating that his own health and vitality were transferred to the boy, for whom he prayed.

In Ex 15:26, the Lord said that, if the Israelites did not follow the laws and commandments, He would bring upon them diseases, “for I am the LORD who healed you”. This shows that sickness was regarded as a spiritual matter between God and His people.

Turning to the New Testament, the purpose of Christ’s incarnation was not to condemn the world, but to save it; to save the whole creation. He had compassion and concern for the peoples’ health, healing, and wholeness, and was able to treat them, both physically and spiritually.

During His ministry, Jesus healed many people from a variety of sicknesses, including paralysis, and demon-possession. He even raised the dead. He healed by touch and word, often explicitly accompanied by faith (Luke 18:42). In these cases, healing took place, either through the faith of the healer himself, or through the faith of the sick person, or that of his friends. Jesus healed all age groups: children, the middle aged, and the elderly, alike.

Although Jesus emphasised faith for healing, He also used medicine, derived from nature, to heal people. He was both a faith healer, and also a

² So, Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1988, pp. 1331-1332.

physician. Two such examples, are the man born blind (John 9:1-12), and the use of oil and wine (Mark 6: 13 and Luke 10:34). We are also reminded, in 1 Tim 5:23, that wine was effective in healing digestive problems. The New Testament visibly shows that faith and medicine both played an important role in healing people.

Traditional Healing and Christian Ministry

The main contrast between traditional healing practices and Christian ministry is that the latter sees Jesus as the leading person. At His ordination by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was commissioned to put into operation God's plan for bringing total healing to the people living in a sin-sick world (Luke 4:18-19). The power of God was upon Jesus (John 1:33), enabling Him to heal every kind of disease, and He summarised His ministry as coming into the world to preach, to teach, and to heal (Matt 10:1, Luke 9:1, 26). Through His ministry, He taught His disciples that the kingdom of God had already come into this world, healing being one of the signs of its presence (Mark 1:15, Luke 9:2).

After Christ's resurrection and ascension, the leading agent became the Holy Spirit, who actively continued to participate in Christ's work, so that many people were healed by the apostles, in the name of Christ. The Holy Spirit was the main force, empowering and directing the believers in the apostolic age, and is, similarly, seen at work in the life of believers today.

The spells, divinations, and rituals of our traditional healing practices were not wrong. These practices were used by my society to heal people, and were right, during that time. Traditional healing was carried out, in the name of *Tilik*, and we have already noted the many similarities between this spirit and the Christian God. We may say, therefore, that God's saving exercise, through the ages, is seen in the activities and practices of the people, in saving themselves from sicknesses and demonic captivities.³

³ In recent interviews on the Duke of York Islands, many people testified that such practices were powerful, and of divine origin.

Yet, in the Christian context, the scriptures condemned such practices, because they were from other spirit beings (Deut 13:1-3, Matt 7:12-23). Such practices could heal through spells, divinations, and rituals, although some of these gave only temporary relief. Permanent healing by the Spirit of God can only be seen through the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 11:28-30). In Christian ministry, spells, divination, and rituals are exercised by being directed to Jesus Christ, who is the mediator between God and His people in this age.

Culture is not static, but changes continually. I would like to clarify, here, that, whatever the ancient ancestors had believed and practised, should not be regarded as evil. In fact, they experienced healing of the spirit, healing of the body, healing of the mind, and, at the same time, peace within their tribal groups. As Christianity came into our societies, healing was not restricted or confined to certain individuals, or areas, but became universal, for all cultures and nations.

What Christians have to do is to accept traditional healing practices, and let Christian values penetrate into them. The penetration of Christian values would allow traditional healings to be recognised as coming from God, enabling the people to experience and see the Lord Jesus Christ, in their own village and life. By acknowledging this, traditional healing practices that use local elements would bring people closer to God. This will enable the people's Christian faith to be concrete, and firm, as they experience the divine presence in their cultural practices and locality.

From my interviews with a number of people recently, Christians, today, see a great need to accommodate traditional healers in the church. There are many sicknesses in our societies that cannot be healed by medical doctors, or even faith healers. Because such sicknesses are caused, both culturally and socially, only traditional healers are able to relieve them. Since Western medicines cannot heal many Melanesian sicknesses, I see that traditional healers have a very important role to play in the church. I would like to emphasise here that traditional healing is available, and should be transformed into Christian ministry, or pastoral care.

There are two important factors that can help the people to recognise, and accept, traditional healing, as coming from God. Firstly, there is a need to recognise Christ as the centre of all daily life and activities, and, secondly, traditional practices should now be related specifically to belief in the Spirit of God. Both of these factors witness that, only through Christ's transformation of people and their cultures, can there be a better solution for their sicknesses.

The Christianity, brought by missionaries, created within people a negative attitude towards their culture and traditional life, that, whatever is cultural, is considered evil. Missionaries brought the gospel, but, at the same time, destroyed cultural values. Melanesians, therefore, thought of Christ as a foreign God, a God, who is not of their own society, but of Western society.

Jesus does not belong specifically to any culture, but belongs to all cultures, because God gives all cultures to mankind. Rom 3:10 says, "there is no one, who is righteous, not even one". This means that human beings are not perfect, and, therefore, need transformation. However, the transformation of a person is not enough to make him an effective, firm, and faithful Christian. There is a need to transform, together, both the person, and, also, his culture. We must not forget that the bad parts of a culture have to be eliminated to obtain purity in the life of a person.

Jesus came to transform people's lives and cultures, in order for them to enter the kingdom of God. Transformation is not a sudden leap from one state to another. It is a gradual process. It takes time and space before people can accept changes. It starts from the heart and mind, and then influences people's outward lifestyles. We should, therefore, recognise that the good values of traditional healing are to be Christianised, and used, while the negative values should be discarded, and forgotten.

Alternatives, Suggestions, and Recommendations

How then, we must ask, may traditional healing practices be encouraged as a part of Christian pastoral care? The following possibilities may be helpful:

- (i) The consulting of gods, spirits, and ghosts, for healing purposes, should cease, and traditional healers be taught to consult the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the new source of wealth, success, guidance, and protection. People's minds and hearts must be transformed and renewed, so that their thinking, in regard to healing ministry, becomes focused upon Christ. The Lord is the replacement, confirmation, and continuation, in the church today, of Melanesian gods, spirits, and ghosts (Matt 5:17).
- (ii) In His ministry, Jesus showed the world the reality of God, as He showed Himself to be a faith healer, and physician. The church has to transform the old healing beliefs into Christianity, so as to be accepted, in the light of Jesus Christ's teaching. Beliefs and practices must be Christianised. The receiving of Jesus Christ, through the Spirit of God, in traditional healing ministry, will enrich the church, making it healthier, and more fruitful.
- (iii) Divination, spells, rituals, incantations, and charms will not be accepted, unless they can be transformed, and can be linked with the Spirit of God. The church should transform such elements of traditional healing practices, if they are to be accepted in general.
- (iv) The laws, sacredness, and taboos of traditional healing practices should also be transformed, before acceptance in Christian ministry. The bad effects, which deprive and ruin people's lives, should be abolished, while the positive effects are to be accepted, and maintained, throughout the ministry.

- (v) People, gifted in the traditional healing practices, should be guided and encouraged, in order to be used in the church. They should be welcomed, to help the lives of Christians, through counselling, etc. Many people, today, are leaving the church, because they find it ineffective, and not able to satisfy their needs. Culturally-gifted people should be accepted, to participate fully in the ministry of God, in order to make the church more locally oriented and valuable. This would be a new, alternative means to bring many people to Christ.
- (vi) People must be convinced that the powers from traditional healing practices do not come from the healers themselves, nor from the spirits, but directly from God, through His Spirit. Likewise, natural items, such as, herbs, water, lime, ginger, stones, and liquids, which are used in traditional healing, must be understood as properties of nature, given by God since creation. They are derived from God, through His Spirit, and the power in them is from Him, and does not come from the ancestral, or other, spirits. The church must transform the thinking and attitudes of the people, enabling them to understand that all healing practices draw their power from God.
- (vii) The medicinal plants, around people's houses, used for protection and guidance against evil spirits and sorcerers, are not wrong. They are planted for the betterment of the people, and the church should develop the understanding of the people, so as to accept them as being from God. Likewise, the plants that are placed inside the house, and those, which are given orally, or rubbed around the body, as protection and guidance, should all be Christianised, and accepted.
- (viii) Prayers are to be encouraged in traditional healing practices, ending the activities, in the name of Jesus Christ. All traditional healing appliances are to be prayed over before being used. Since all things are created by God, praying for traditional

healing elements would be more appropriate, and be truly accepted by God (1 Tim 4:4-5).

For example, my wife's father (who is 85 years old, once a traditional healer, and now a deacon in the church), was glad to tell me that, for all the healing appliances he uses, he now prays over them, in Jesus' name. He strongly advised me that, for these healing practices to be effective, a healer and the patient both must have a strong faith in Jesus Christ, in order for the plants, or herbs, etc., to be empowered. You cannot use Jesus' name superficially, just for the sake of prayer. There must be a deep feeling for, and commitment from, the healer, if the practice is to be successful.

To conclude, we may say that the transformation of traditional healing practices into Christian ministry would enrich, attract, and localise people's thinking about Jesus Christ. The use of local materials, and the experiencing of His power, through local traditional healers, will give a sign to the church that Jesus Christ is a real Melanesian, as well as being universal. It should be encouraged, and developed, in order to protect and heal the pains, sufferings, and wounds of all Christians.

Discouraging traditional healing practices denies the grace of God, and contributes to the ineffectiveness of the church. Neglecting traditional healing will be a disaster for Melanesians, both physically and spiritually, since it denies the incarnation of Jesus Christ into Melanesian cultures, to transform both our lifestyles, and us. If we forbid traditional healing, Jesus Christ is falsified, as both human and divine. The belonging of Jesus Christ to all cultures shows that Melanesian Christians should accept traditional healing beliefs and practices, provided that they are Christianised. This will enable God, through his Holy Spirit, to be actively alive in the cultural perspectives, and will richly bless the church.

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Baptism as Initiation

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Introduction

The purpose of my study is to look at the sacrament of baptism. Theologians, in the Western church, tend to develop their ideas of the sacramental work of God, by building on previous writings, in this field of inquiry in their own culture. It is the author’s aim, in writing this essay, largely to break from this tradition, and to see what theological insights can be gained from the cultural beliefs, and practical experience, of the people of Melanesia. In particular, I will talk mostly about the people of Keapara, in the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. The study is mainly aimed at the meaning and theology of Christian baptism, within the Melanesian cultural context, and, specifically, in relation to traditional initiation rites, concerning which there are two major problems. Firstly, there is a lack of general and clear understanding of baptism, and, secondly, a lack of interpretation of baptism by Melanesians, so as to understand it, within the cultural context.

The early missionaries from the West misled our people, by condemning, as demonic, some of the most important Melanesian traditional initiation rites. The Melanesian people have been tossed here and there like puppets, which has made them feel and behave strangely. At times, they have become confused in their Christian life. The foreign teachings, pronounced by the Western people, have impacted the minds and hearts of Melanesians. This has made them become as foreigners, ignorant of the fact that traditional experiences, practices, and beliefs in initiation rites may help

¹ This article is extracted from a sub-thesis presented at Rarongo Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The entire work may be consulted in the College library.

them very much to understand the most important factors of Christian baptism.

Traditional Rites of Initiation

Initiation rites were traditionally practised in almost all cultural groups of Papua New Guinea. Within its rich diversity of customs, they were an integral part of renewal, and affirmation of growth, life, and belonging. Some important rites were carried out, as initiation into the community, while others were as initiation into adulthood. We shall consider examples of each of these, in turn.

In Keapara, Central Province, when a woman gives birth to a baby, she was not allowed to be seen by relatives, except those who have helped at birth. The baby is washed with water by the grandmother, or other elders on the maternal side. The ritual washing always went with words, or ritual sayings, for example: *Inaku e Amaku palagura raka au aumai*, meaning “The spirits of my mother and father come back to me.” It was a belief that, once the baby jumped, or moved in fright, in cold water, the spirit left the baby’s body at the same time. Therefore, the spirit had to be called back quickly, before it was too late.

After washing, a fire was made, and the grandmother would dry her hands over the fire, and then press them gently all over the baby’s body. It was said that the power of the fire would keep the child warmed, and safe from being harmed by any evil forces or sorcery.² Feasting followed, after three weeks, when the relatives, and others, would take turns to nurse the baby.

This initiation into the community, by water and fire, was intended to use the power of these natural elements. Water was believed to have power over any sorcery or magic spells, according to their religious belief. It has its natural power, because it is pure, and can wash away anything. Water gives life to people, plants, and all other living animals and creatures. In the

² Information received through interviews at Keapara, in December, 1995.

initiation ritual, the pure water washed away the sexual impurities, or any contaminating substances from the bad blood of the woman. The child was understood, and believed to have been purified, and made clean, to enter into the community.

Fire was naturally an important element in daily life. It protected people from any harmful creatures or insects. It would also frighten off wild animals, because of its heat, and would be used for cooking, burning grass for hunting, and so forth. As a symbol for initiation, the fire protected the child from being harmed by evil spirits, or sorcery, from the beginning of life.

The naming of the child was done by the elder man, if it was a boy, but, in the case of a girl, the elder woman would give the name. The naming of the child was also very important, for their identity in the community. The child's growth, care, teaching, and discipline were all in the hands of the parents, grandparents, and kinsmen.

Some other examples of initiation will illustrate the diversity of practices, and, although there are similarities, it is difficult to make broad generalisations. These parallels may, however, give us some general understanding of Melanesian rites.

In Keraki village, in Western Province, the naming of a baby was always done, when he began to babble, or stand up. The naming of the baby became the responsibility of the *tahori* (god-parent). In the case of a boy, this was usually one of the kinswomen on the paternal side, and in the case of a girl, it would be a kinsman on the maternal side. The child was then named after the god-parent, and the two continued to have a special relationship, with consequent rights and obligations.³

The most significant thing in the ceremony was the dedication of the child to be named by the god-parent. The naming and feast symbolised the Keraki's initiation of a child into the family or community.

³ Francis Edgar Williams, *Papuans of the Trans-Fly*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1936, pp. 175-177.

In New Ireland Province, a *garamut* (drum) was always sounded, when a child was born. This announced to the community the arrival of a new member. An uncle of the new child would climb a coconut tree, and cut down some fresh coconuts for the ritual. The women would gather, and make a fire, placing special ferns over the burning wood to create smoke. The grandmother, or another older woman, would sway the baby to and fro above the smoke. An empty coconut would be broken over the child, and all the women would shout together the new name of the child. They would then nurse the child in turns. A communal feast would follow, involving the whole village.⁴

The most important things to be noted in this ritual are as follows: Firstly, the *garamut* announced the arrival of a new member to the community, and, also, the sound drove away any evil spirit at the time of birth. Secondly, the swaying of the child over the smoking ferns was believed to give purification, and cleansing of the body from sexual impurities of contaminated substances from the blood of the mother. Then, the shouting of the name awakens the five senses of the child. Also, the nursing of the child symbolised the acceptance of the child into the community.

These, then, have each been examples of birth rites, through which the baby is accepted into the community. We shall, secondly, consider some rites of initiation into adulthood.

For the Keapara people, initiation into manhood required a period of seclusion and transition, after which they were asked to wash in the sea, before dawn. The elders would prepare them by rubbing coconut oil all over their bodies. Armllets and the perineal band *ivi* were worn, before they were all paraded in the village to be witnessed. A feast followed, involving the whole community.

⁴ A. Oliver, et al, "The Theology of Word and Sacrament in a Cultural Context", unpublished thesis, Rabaul PNG: Rarongo Theological College, 1982.

There were two important symbols used in this ritual: the perineal band and the coconut oil. The *ivi* visualised the maturity of a person. He was to be called a man, and must be respected as such. Also, he was now ready to be married. The coconut oil was connected with religious thoughts and practice. As coconut was used as one of the sacrificial foods for the spirits, oil was commonly used in dancing and feasting, as well as for curing stomachache, and putting the spleen back to its position. Coconut was also a visible symbol for man's responsibility in all of life. The future of the community was always in the hands of men: in defence, in the search for food, and general well-being.

In New Ireland, initiation into manhood was imperative, for recognition of maturity by the society. It was a custom that, if a boy was not initiated, he would be regarded as nothing more than a woman. As Oliver noted, "This remark gives some indication of the firm roles that men and women have in this society."⁵

This initiation involved certain tests of stamina, for example, in killing a wild pig, making gardens, or fishing. These tests had to be proved to the elders, towards his maturity, and total being. The successful candidates were initiated by the elders, or leaders, by the liquid, sprinkled from coconuts, broken above their heads. The candidates were then announced as mature, recognised men.

It is to be noted that the initiation strengthened, and reinforced, the traditionally-vital role of the men in society. Men became the breadwinners in the life of the tribe, as well as being responsible for obedience to the rules, or norms, of the society, and ancestors.

For the people of Wamira, in Milne Bay Province, initiation required the boys, and young men, to build their own huts, at the outskirts of the village. They lived there, in seclusion, for about four months, especially avoiding direct contact with women. They would also spend most of their time gardening, hunting, and fishing. During the seclusion, the youths were

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

neither initiated into secrets, nor instructed by the elders. At the end, they went through ritual bathing in the sea, wore a new perineal band, placed a comb in their hair for the first time, and returned to their father's home.⁶

The interesting things, to be noted, are the ritual bath in the sea, and the wearing of perineal bands, which are similar to the belief of the Keapara community. The ritual bath symbolised their changing of status from youth to men. The old self was washed away, and new self was put on, by wearing new perineal bands. They became men, and would be recognised, and respected, by all.

Traditional Initiation Rites and Christian Baptism

Turning now to compare Melanesian traditional initiation rites with Christian baptism, we can identify the relative meanings, or similarities. It will also give us some general understanding of what Christian baptism is, in the light of a Melanesian cultural context. This approach towards an understanding of baptism will help both new and old Christians to commit their lives fully to Christ, and to become totally new beings, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, in this comparison, there are some similarities, or related meanings and understanding. The following are some examples, which will enable Melanesians to determine how closely baptism can be understood in the light of their own society's traditional initiation rites.

(a) Symbolism

Symbols play an important part in religious life, and there are many different objects, or images, that suggest, or represent, people's beliefs, in Papua New Guinea. Many rituals have a symbolic nature, for example, the inauguration of special people, such as, elders, leaders, or chiefs, and also initiation of novices. All these become Melanesians religious sacraments.

⁶ M. Allen, *Male Cults and Secret Initiation in Melanesia*, Melbourne Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1967, p. 88-89.

Symbolism gives a spiritual atmosphere to the Melanesian world by attributing to it a sacred and mystical quality. That is, visible realities are symbols of the invisible world of the spirits. For example, Eliade stated: “initiatory death is often symbolised by darkness, by cosmic night, by the telluric womb, the hut, the belly of a monster”.⁷

The symbolism of transition rites is often that of rebirth: in the eastern Torricelli Mountains (Sepik) in Papua New Guinea, once the boys are all inside the *haus tambaran* (cult house), they disappeared from public sight for three months. In a special sense, they were swallowed by some mysterious creature: the ancestor – crocodile, monster, a pig, and so forth. Theologically, we may say that they die, in their seclusion, until, after having been fed carefully by the elders, they return as proud, healthy warriors, for the final and colourful ceremony.

This can be understood as similar in meaning to Christian baptism, although that is symbolised by immersion in water. The immersion represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, as well as our own death to sin, and rising to righteousness. According to the theology of Paul, we go through water, and are buried with Christ. We die with Him, and then rise with Him, to a new existence; in a rebirth, we became new men (Rom 6:2-4).

In the society of Keapara, initiation into community, as we have seen, is symbolised by washing with water, and providing protection by fire. That is, washing by water cleansed the body from impurities, with the belief of being a new person. This can also be understood as providing a parallel with the Christian rite. The fire, also, as symbolising protection by a deity over the child, may be seen as having a Christian parallel. That is, the laying of hands on the child’s forehead by a minister may be understood, theologically, as imparting of the Holy Spirit, dedicating the child to God, and accepting it into the family of God. The child becomes a new member of the covenant community of God, through the faith of the parents (1 Cor 12:12-13).

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, New York NY: Harper & Row, 1965, p. xiv.

(b) Rites of Passage

According to the language of cultural anthropology, rites of passage express the understanding, and meaning, of transitional rituals, as found all over Melanesia. A change takes place, which can be thought of as a passage from one stage to another, in the status of individuals and groups: the entry of a child into the community, the admittance of a young man into the meetings of grown-up men, marriage, death, and so forth. All such important events in life can be seen as going out and coming in, but there is always a rite in between. The three main traditional phases of separation, transition, and resocialisation may be seen as related to Christian baptism.

The rite of separation, where candidates for initiation are separated from the community, can be seen as related to a pre-evangelistic stage of a minister with the people. Here we are addressing unbelievers. The aim is to arouse interest, to prepare the ground. We enter into a dialogue with the people, listening, to understand them, and, also, creeping into their frame of reference, by discussing relevant life themes with them. It is a very difficult task for a minister, in the first stage of pre-evangelism. His approach must be more anthropocentric, taking men as and where they are. His personal knowledge of the people, their language and culture, and his Christian witnessing, and empathy, and understanding is most important. In this way, man becomes prepared spiritually to accept the message of the word of the preacher. He is inwardly separated from his old status. The change over to Christianity should not be too smooth and gradual, though the actual separation must be prepared very carefully.

The traditional transitional rite is where the actual ritual is performed on the person going from one position to another. He is on the doorstep, neither in nor out, and, during this time, he has developed, mentally and spiritually, to fear the spirits or deity. In Christianity, an evangelistic stage is somewhat similar. We know people are well prepared, now, and are challenged, in this new stage, to come for true conversion. People will hear about God's revelation, His love for us, shown in Jesus Christ. The essence of the Christian message is proclaimed. The expected result of this confrontation is conversion. There is nothing magical about this stage,

though there is a deep mystery involved. The convert comes into personal contact with God, through Jesus Christ. Here, it is seen that the person has already left his previous status, but has not arrived, as yet, at his new status. He is neither in nor out.

Finally, there is the rite of resocialisation, in which the new status is formally confirmed or created. For example, the infant was to be seen and nursed for the first time; a young man or woman was welcomed back home, after a period of seclusion, with a feast of dancing and joy. However, that is not all; further teaching, caring, or supervision are maintained by the parents, elders, kinsman, and clan, until he or she is well fed, and becomes matured mentally, physically, and spiritually.

These rites of resocialisation can be seen as a parallel to the catechumenate stage in Christianity; that is, the one who is receiving instruction to prepare himself for baptism. For example, in the Methodist tradition, they used to run class meetings, as preparation before baptism. The Congregational tradition of the *Papua Ekelesia* have the “seekers’ class”, or “torch bearers”, to prepare people for baptism. Youth will arrive at a new status. The mystery has taken place, but they will still have to be instructed, and initiated, into a fuller Christian life and witness. We are building up their faith. They will have to respond more fully to the call of God in their lives. During this catechumenate stage, we develop the whole message in detail, always orientated to its core, and answering special difficulties arising in the Melanesian scene.

When these young people respond, they will be baptised, or else confirmed, to become members of the church. The rite of baptism will be a celebration of what has been there, of what the catechumens have gone through, as all sacraments are a celebration of life.

Contextual Theological Interpretation

It must have been a real challenge to the early missionaries to explain, in a concise way, what baptism was all about. It was, no doubt, frustrating, at times, for the missionaries, who were teaching the concepts and ideas behind

the symbolism of water baptism. However, they did build a stepping stone for us today. The task is still an integral part of Christian education in Melanesian churches.

As in the society of Keapara, and many others in Papua New Guinea, the theology of baptism can be understood, according to their education and social status. In response to the question, “What do you think baptism means?”, Keapara village people made the following comments:

- “Giving a child to God. Sometimes a baby is baptised. God has marked the child to be in His family.”
- “Children are baptised, so that they can be cared for, and blessed at the end. They will become future members of the church when they grow up.”
- “Bringing a child to God. It is the responsibility of the believing parents to bring the child up correctly. They must have a place in the church.”
- “Baptising a child means giving it to God, as thanksgiving for His many blessings upon the family. God cares and blesses those who continue to give.”
- “New life in the community needs to be dedicated to God. Giving to God makes us closer to Him.”

Some of the significance of baptism may be pointed out from these comments.

Firstly, ritual or ceremony is an important part of the life of the people of Keapara. Baptism, despite being an act symbolising one’s entry into the fellowship of the church, is considered as a protective means against sorcery and magic, or simply as a means to good health. Because of its connection with the power to protect, it is becoming a compulsory initiation for all children in the village. The theological meaning of the sacrament is not very important. What is important, is for the minister to drip water on the forehead of the child. By baptism, a child is said to have all the blessings that

will help him to resist whatever comes to him in life. When an unbaptised child is sick, the obvious reason for his sickness is due to his parents failing to baptise him. Children, who are born outside normal marriage, are taken into the church by relatives to be baptised. By baptism, the chance of encountering sickness, or death at an early age, becomes avoidable. It gives people the guarantee they will live longer, for death will only come at the time God has fixed, which, according to people, is at old age. Evidently, it is in viewing baptism, in the context of protective rituals against magic and sorcery, that the people mostly need the sacrament. They are less concerned for what it means theologically, as for the power that is believed to be in it.

Secondly, baptism, for them, seems to represent a spiritual belonging, when the child is given to God by parents and sponsors. The child (or adult) is marked by God to become His family. Dedicating a child to God seems to be drawing God closer to them, and it also signifies a sacrificial act to God, in the form of thanksgiving for His many blessings. God cares for, and blesses, those, who continue to give willingly. This kind of mentality, or concept, is seen in their cultural practices, and traditional beliefs. The cultural awareness of the fear of spirits, makes people emphasise the fear of God in a Christian community.

Furthermore, baptism makes the people aware of being a new person, initiated into a new life in the community. In Keapara, as in other societies, conversion means both joining, and becoming, a new group or clan, turning toward, and into, those people, who repent and believe. It means taking on a new identity: the people of God. In the New Testament, the outward mark of entrance into the people of God is baptism, which is regarded as the sacrament of incorporation. In passages dealing with the unity of the people of God, Paul invariably refers to baptism in this way, for example, in 1 Cor 12:13: "all of us have been baptised into the one body".

If the biblical concept of the people of God has links with the Melanesian understanding of the clan, then baptism relates to initiation. Conversion is incomplete without baptism, just as, traditionally, growth to maturity was incomplete without initiation. Baptism, as the sacrament of

initiation, signifies a new status. In the process of conversion, there must be the recognition that, in the eyes of God, they are also strangers, having no special status, in comparison with other groups, in His eyes. So, conversion means a change in the group's pride, which views others with condescension. But, at the same time, conversion also brings with it the realisation, and experience, of a new status, based not on any inherent, or achieved, superiority of the group, but on their acceptance by God in Christ. Conversion is a turning to accept this new God-given status.

This new status, signified by baptism, results, firstly, in a new relationship with other groups of people, and persons, who together form the people of God. In baptism, the individual and group affirm that the identity of the people of God extends far beyond the borders of their own group, and that their own identity, as a clan, is now secondary to their identity as the people of God. Paul's words, "In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptised into the one body, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13) could be contextualised, "all of us, whether coastals or highlanders, whether Chimbus or Keaparas, have been baptised into one tribal group or clan".

Such an affirmation must result in reconciliation with any Christian groups with whom the newly-converted has had a fractured relationship.

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

Becoming the people of God, through conversion, in Melanesia, means that the maintenance of right relationships, so important in village life, is carried across into the community of God. Jesus' command that His people should love one another (John 13:34) is, of course, the basis of this, and, indeed, Melanesians have always understood the importance of love between

brothers. Conversion adds new directions to the brotherly relationship, the dimension of forgiveness. Traditionally, relationships could only be kept in balance by the continuing fulfilment of obligations, or the application of retributive justice, when obligations were not met. The behaviour of God, in Christ, is the model for interpersonal and interclan relationships, and this means that Christians must turn to forgive one another, as God has forgiven them through Christ (Eph 5:1).

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

The theology of Christian baptism can be understood more clearly, only if it can be explained, according to the Melanesian cultural context. What we have noted, and discussed, theologically and biblically, can, perhaps, become a guiding light for this task.

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In Search of Peace for Bougainville

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[In the printed version, there were two footnotes numbered “1”. This has now been corrected. —Revising ed.]

This is an attempt to analyse the peace process that has been employed in the war-torn island since the beginning of the conflict on November 26, 1988. Since the conflict erupted seven years ago, a lot of time, effort, and money has been used in trying various means and strategies to achieve lasting peace and normalcy. However, up until now, none of the peace deals has really been successful. Time and time again, one or both parties have breached the agreements that were signed. Therefore, the road to peace has been a slippery and illusive one, with many oceans to cross and mountains to climb.

The Problem of the Paper

Previous materials that have been written on the current subject have been the works of people from outside the province and country. Mostly, they were written by people, who did not have any first-hand experience of the crisis at all, but were from people, especially journalists, who made it their business to report, and write up, anything that came up on the news. Another group was the so-called scholars, who were attached to universities, and other research institutions.

¹ This article is extracted from a sub-thesis presented at Rarongo Theological College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity degree. The entire work may be consulted in the College library.

It is, therefore, out of that context that this paper is being attempted. Thus, the author will grapple with the task of presenting issues, from the point of view of someone, who has actually experienced the crisis. And, furthermore, it is written by someone, who has felt the hardships of the people, has seen the type of atrocities that have befallen them, and has shed tears, and mourned, with the people.

Sir Michael Somare and Bernard Narokobi, after the signing of the *Endeavour Accord*, made the following confession: “We addressed it (the Bougainville crisis) as a mere law-and-order problem, and made the wrong diagnosis.” They admitted that the use of security forces, the appointment of various committees, the imposition of a curfew, and the declaration of a state of emergency, had not been based on proper analysis. They said that the issue became a protracted, bloody crisis, because of the initial, misguided attempts to resolve the problem.

The Western method, and type of peace, is quite different from the Melanesian way. The West tries to assure lasting peace, through various means, such as, diplomacy, international organisations, discernment, collective security, and improvement of international communication and trade. It is a method, which always requires, and demands, peace in black and white. The main types of instruments and documents used are: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Joint Statements, or Communiqués, and Peace Agreements, or Treaties. These have been employed by PNG, in the peace agreements it has entered into with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), and the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG). It has been a case of “my signature against yours”, whereas, in Melanesia, it needs to be “my word against yours, secured by the exchange of gifts”.

Another key aspect of the Western method is the use of high-powered, and high-levelled, consultant committees. Such committees are the advisers, offering professional and technical advice to the people seeking peace.

Examples of the use of these, so far, have been the engagement of Nicholas Etheridge, of the Canadian High Commission in Canberra, and Tony Brown, the Director of the New Zealand's Security Secretariat. Both of these gentlemen officiated as observers at the signing of the *Endeavour Accord* in 1990.

The Western method may seem awkward and unintelligible in a society, where payback killing is part and parcel of the peace process. However, it has gained acceptance, and popularity, in the wider world. Evidence of its use and effectiveness has been witnessed in various world trouble spots, such as Palestine and Bosnia.

The biblical method of peace is based on the teachings of the Bible. It contains the covenant of God, relayed through the prophets in the Old Testament, and the teaching of Jesus, and the Apostles, in the New Testament. The Old Testament word for peace (שָׁלוֹם = *shalom*) means “completeness”, “soundness”, “well-being”. Its parallel in the New Testament is the Greek εἰρήνη = *eirene*, which describes harmonious relationships between men (Matt 10:34; Rom 14:19), and between nations (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20). It also means “friendliness” (Acts 15:33), and “freedom from molestation” (Luke 11:21). Furthermore, it also refers to the harmonised relationship between God and man, accomplished through the gospel (Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17).

Peace, in biblical discussion, usually refers to a relationship between man and man, or between God and man, depending on the context. It is based on the love of God for man (John 3:16), and, also, on the biblical commands for man to love his neighbour, as he loves himself (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). Therefore, biblical peace begins from love. It highlights, or affirms, the fact that peace and love go together (Gal 5:22).

Another angle, or aspect, of biblical peace, is forgiveness. This is very important, because any peace without forgiveness will not really be a lasting one. Forgiveness means forgetting, or burying, the past, and

making a new beginning. In a deeper sense, it means admitting our failures, humbling ourselves, and seeking forgiveness from others. Ultimately, reconciliation and restoration come about, so that renewal of fellowship and relationship is the outcome.

Biblical peace does not mean highlighting others' faults, nor pointing fingers at others, nor justifying ourselves. But, it means only one thing: biblical peace means love, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

The Conception of Peace

Peace is previewed, seen, and interpreted in various different ways, by those, who have been involved, and affected, by the crisis, in one way or another. The author will discuss how each of the groups sees peace, and what peace means in the minds of these people.

(a) The Papua New Guinea National Government

The position of the PNG national government on peace in Bougainville has always been clear. It has been maintained, right through the years of the crisis, and perhaps will remain unchanged. The national government has always maintained that the foundation for a solution depended on a number of fundamental principles. These included:

(i) The National Constitution

Any peace discussion must be held within the framework of the National Constitution of Papua New Guinea. Successive governments have maintained this stand. For example, the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sir Michael Somare, on the *Implementation of the Honiara Declaration on Bougainville*, in 1991. He said, "Future political relationships will be, and must be, determined within the constitutional framework of the state."

The current Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chao, when he announced the lifting of the cease-fire in March this year, said, “above all else, the National Constitution of PNG must be upheld and respected”.

The National Constitution is the most sacred document in the country, and, as such, it is guarded vigorously at all times. Any abuse of the Constitution would be a recipe for disaster to the whole country.

Under the National Constitution, Bougainville is an integral part of PNG. It is not a colony of Papua New Guinea. At the all-Bougainville leader talks, held in Cairns in December, 1995, this fact was emphatically laid down by those who chaired the meeting. The Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat (political), Mr K. Srinivasan, said it would not pronounce itself on independence for Bougainville.

On the same note, Mr Frances Vendrell, Director for Political Affairs of the United Nations, said that self-determination was a principle, not a right. In so far as it was a right, it applied only to colonial countries, and people. “Resolution 1514 of the United Nations, on political affairs, contained a provision against disrupting the territorial integrity of a member state.”

(ii) Dialogue

The national government has always taken a position that secession is “not negotiable”, and that any dialogue has to be undertaken within an atmosphere of a compromise on this issue. At the same time, the BRA has taken up the converse position. When both sides are unwilling to give way, there will always be bloodshed. This has been the case for the last seven years, where security forces members, BRA members, and also civilians, have died unnecessarily.

The national government is consistently pursuing this avenue, as evidenced from the past agreements that have been signed. Despite those signings, normalcy, and permanent peace, have not been fully

realised, the reason being that both sides are accusing, and counter-accusing, each other for non-compliance with the terms of the agreements. This problem will be further discussed later in the paper.

Although the national government has, in the past, rejected the idea of meeting face to face with the BRA, it has slowly softened that stance, as evidenced by the past meetings that have taken place. While both sides differ on the agenda of future meetings, in the long run, this is more likely to be the most humanly-sensible way to go.

(iii) Internal Matter

As far as the national government is concerned, the Bougainville crisis is an internal matter. This has meant that any answer to the situation has to be found within the country, and not brought in from the outside. Any assistance and help is welcomed, provided it is coming through the proper channel. For example, in 1991, the then Prime Minister, Rabbie Namaliu, commented on this, at the height of the crisis:

From the very outset, we have made it totally clear that outside interference in any aspect of the problems on Bougainville will not be tolerated. This is an internal matter, between the government of Papua New Guinea, and rebel elements on Bougainville. If any organisation wants to offer medical or other supplies, it is welcome to do so through the government of Papua New Guinea.

In 1992, the Pacific Conference of Churches challenged the principle of non-interference in the internal matters of sovereign states, adding that this principle can be an alibi for doing nothing, or for committing unjust deeds.

(iv) Military Option

The national government has always been reluctant to use this method in searching for peace. Although quite a number of members of

Parliament have been pushing for this, it has not been implemented, until this year. The reason the government has not been keen on this, is because it means more people would die, without peace actually being realised.

(b) The Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Bougainville Interim Government

This group consisted of the hardcore, and diehard, BRA members, supporters, and sympathisers. Their approach is that “we have come this far, there is no turning back. This is a golden opportunity to press ahead, and determine our own future.”

(i) Secession

The BRA says that there will be peace, when independence is achieved. They have no middle position, but have persistently advocated the extreme. Both the national government and BRA have employed the argument that secession was “not negotiable”. The national government says that secession will not be entertained in any peace talks. The BRA maintains the position that there will not be any peace talks unless secession is on the agenda. With these two extremes being emphasised, there has been an impasse in any peace negotiation.

To go back to their roots, independence is something, which the BRA sees as a means to an end. Furthermore, they argue that they were never consulted on their wish, whether they should stay within PNG or not. In 1975, this matter surfaced, but a compromise was reached, giving birth to the Organic Law on Provincial Government.

In the all-Bougainville talks, Joseph Kabui, leader of the Bougainville Interim Government, said: “while it (the BRA/BIG) did not want to achieve independence through force of arms, it would maintain the right, by force, if necessary”.

(ii) PNG Defence Force Withdrawal

Another common cliché, which has been employed by the BRA/BIG hierarchy, is the demand for the withdrawal of the security forces. They believe that the fighting continues because of their presence. However, at the all-Bougainville talks, Theodore Miriung, Premier and leader of the BTG (Bougainville Traditional Government) delegation, said that “the demand was unrealistic, without suggesting anything to fill the void”.

(iii) Referendum

Although the PNG national constitution does not have any provision for a referendum, the BRA/BIG have continued to push for the idea regardless. Their belief is that there is a silent majority in favour of this, living in fear to express their wish. Therefore, a referendum would prove, once and for all, who was telling the truth.

While the national government has maintained its position, at the height of the crisis, in 1990, it indicated that it was the wish of the people for Bougainville to break away. Commenting on the subject, in September, 1990, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Ted Diro, said: “The question of a referendum will be considered by cabinet, if the situation gets that far. Whether we accept the verdict is another thing. That is a separate decision. I am praying that the BRA will not pursue the question of secession too hard.”

In the past, other commentators, too, have referred to the subject. For example, Don Woolford said, “Bougainville has the genesis of a government, and there is much better evidence that most of its people support separation”. Also, another person to have made some comments was John Griffith. He said; “Only Bougainville had the potential, and the possible impetus, to attempt a full-scale breakaway.” Earlier, Leo Hannett had warned; “The peoples’ aspirations might have to be realised through bloodshed.”

Just recently, Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chao, in an interview with the Seven Network of Australia, said, “the government might consider autonomy or self-government for Bougainville. We will look at that (autonomy), look at it constructively, and positively. It depends on parliament. I mean I’m prepared to try it.”

(iv) Dialogue

In the past, the BRA has not been very keen on dialogue, although it has entered into various agreements. Yet, the author has not seen a time, where they have come out, and called for such a meeting. All past meetings and negotiations have been the attempt of other parties. For example, the *Endeavour Accord* was arranged and organised by the national government, with the assistance of the New Zealand government. Again, the *Honiara Declaration* was the initiative of the Solomon Islands national government and the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA).

The BRA has always been more interested in political autonomy than peace and normalcy. Their argument is that there cannot be any peace and normalcy until the question of a political self-determination is answered.

The national government, on the other hand, has embarked on a programme, as per the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Honiara Declaration*, which stipulates that services should be restored in Bougainville.

(c) The Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG)

The Bougainville Transitional Government is the legally-instituted body that was created in place of the previous provincial government, which was suspended during the crisis. There are two main objectives, which they want to execute, in order to find a lasting solution.

(i) The Return of Peace and Normalcy

This is the first goal, towards which the BTG is working. Peace must be restored to society, and people enabled to live normal lives: lives that are free from fear, anger, hatred, sorrow, and mourning. They want to achieve this, through the work of the security forces, in areas which are already secured, peace committees have been established, and their work will lead to peace and normalcy, as is already happening in some parts of the island. For example, in Buka, and some parts of North Bougainville, people are now again living normal lives. This has not been an easy task, and it will take time to be realised.

(ii) Political Autonomy

The BTG wants to negotiate with the national government for a new political settlement, based on *A New Deal for Bougainville*. After peace and normalcy have been secured, it wants to embark on this strategy, because it believes that the solution to the Bougainville crisis lies here. It has already had a series of meetings with the national government regarding this matter. However, before any permanent and concrete plan takes place, the Bougainvillean leaders and people must all be united. This is the reason why the all-Bougainville talks have been taking place, to try and find a common understanding. This process will take time, because of all the problems involved, like communication, transportation, and freedom of movement between the leaders (BRA/BIG and BTG).

The BTG believes that succession and independence will not be possible, therefore, it wants to take a middle road. It wants Bougainville to be given the highest political autonomy, under the political framework of a united Papua New Guinea. James Togel, the provincial peace coordinator, during an interview, said: “whatever that highest political autonomy is, is not clear, but it won’t certainly be the same old provincial government system”. The BTG is looking at something higher than the current political system of provincial governments. It does not want to fall in line with the new reforms on

provincial governments, and third-level local government, that have been passed by the national parliament.

(d) Churches

The church in Bougainville has been very quiet, to the point where people have often questioned, and wondered, whether it was alive or dead. This was to be expected, because there is a war going on, and the leaders live in fear. Although the church neither supported the security forces, nor the BRA, it had a duty to perform, which it failed to do. The church is very passive and naive, even though people looked for a voice, and guidance. In an interview, which the author had with the United church bishop of the Bougainville Region, Bishop Revd Samson Mangung, he said: “the United church does not really have any concrete plan, but we are working closely with the security forces. When an area is secured, we move in with spiritual rehabilitation programmes.”

The Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) has also, in the past, tried to help find ways and means to end the conflict in Bougainville. In March, 1993, the PNGCC called on the government of Papua New Guinea to allow the international community to help find a solution to the long-standing conflict on Bougainville. The PNG government’s response to these types of requests usually takes months, and, even if eventually given, would not be recognised by the PNGDF.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary, Revd Konrad Raiser, during his visit here in February/March, 1996, conceded that the churches have failed to find a solution to the eight-year-old conflict. There is a need for a new approach by the churches, especially to search for a new sense of purpose, to ensure that peace and stability return to Bougainville. Whatever that new approach is, remains to be seen.

The church certainly has the mandate to engage in dialogue with the security forces (national government) and the BRA, but it never rose

up to the challenge. It always took the backstage, and never really made any attempt to go out into the pasture, which it owned.

What is happening in the Bougainville church could be compared to what happened in Rwanda. The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, leader of 70 million Anglicans worldwide, said, on his return from a pastoral visit to this central-African country: "The church in Rwanda lost an opportunity to be prophetic. It should have been calling out for justice. It should have been pointing out some of the atrocities that were being done, but, by and large, its voice was silent." This is also true of the church in Bougainville.

Why Have Previous Peace Attempts Failed?

In this section, the author will discuss why previous attempts, through the peace agreements, signed in the past, have failed. Due to the limitation of space, not all of them will be discussed.

(a) The *Endeavour Accord*

The *Endeavour Accord* was signed on August 5, 1990, between the PNG delegation, led by Sir Michael Somare, and the Bougainville delegation, led by Joseph Kabui. It was signed aboard the New Zealand ship, *HMNZS Endeavour*. Being the first agreement to be signed between the national government and the BRA, it was designed to establish dialogue, and the return of services to Bougainville.

It was disappointing, both, in what it said, and in what it did not say. The text did not specify when the promised goods and services would begin to arrive, and, for the Bougainvillians, the ever-lengthening delay in arrival increased their mistrust and anger towards the PNG government.

What proved more divisive was the clause stating that the Papua New Guinea government would take all practical steps to bring about the return of goods and services, consistent with the Constitution of Papua New Guinea. This was given dramatically different meanings by

both sides. The BRA charged the national government with violating the *Endeavour Accord* by sending patrol boats with supply vessels. The PNG government countered by saying that security forces did not use force to clear their way before landing. Also the “defence force” involvement was made, in accordance with the national constitution. This disagreement exemplified the understandable differences in interpretation of the blurry wording of the *Endeavour Accord*.

Generally speaking, the biggest hurdle to the successful implementation of the *Endeavour Accord* was the different interpretations that were applied to the agreement. All the hard work that was done, in good faith, was undone, with both sides justifying their courses of actions. It brought into question the spirit in which the accord was signed, and also, whether future signings could be honoured.

(b) The *Honiara Declaration*

The *Honiara Declaration* on Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation on Bougainville was signed on January 23, 1991. It incorporated a lot of aspects from the *Endeavour Accord* and the *Kavieng Agreement*. This latter was signed in Kavieng on October 5, 1990, between the community leaders of Buka and the national government, and referred mostly to the people of Buka. The *Honiara Declaration*, however, was to formulate a common strategy and programme for the restoration of services, to enhance peace, reconciliation, and rehabilitation on Bougainville.

One of the main components of the *Honiara Declaration* was the establishment of a “Task Force”. Mr John Momis was appointed to the role of implementing the *Declaration*, but was thwarted in implementing it by other government agencies, including the defence force on the ground. On the formation of the “Task Force”, it was to be

a joint effort, with members coming from both the national government and the BRA. Its members comprised the following:²

- (i) Kepas Wetenge (Chairman/PNG government)
- (ii) Patrick Itta (Co-chairman/BRA)
- (iii) Bernard Simiha – PNG
- (iv) Steven Burain – PNG
- (v) Theresa Jaintong – BRA

Their terms of reference included the following:

- Planning, coordination, and implementation of the programme for the restoration of services;
- Monitoring and supervision of the programme;
- Investigating, and determining the scope, and components of, the projects under the programme;
- Investigating, mobilising, and securing all financial avenues at its disposal, to finance the programme;
- Developing a detailed timetable, to implement the programme, which must be submitted to the Minister for Provincial Affairs for final approval, as soon as practicable, following their appointments.

Although the “Task Force” was assigned the task of implementing the restoration programme, they faced problems with differences in interpretation of the *Declaration*. They also lacked financial support to get the programme actually going. And to make matters worse, they were not free to carry out their task to the full capacity, because most of the time they were under suspicion.

² The author could not establish the full list, due to the unavailability of material.

(c) Pan-Bougainville Peace Conference

The Pan-Bougainville Peace Conference was held in Arawa for three days, beginning on October 10, 1994. It was supervised by the *Pacific Peace-Keeping Force*, which comprised Pacific Island nations, including Australia.

This was one of the most-crucial meetings that has been held, because it was here that the people clearly indicated their desire for peace. This meeting paved the way for further dialogue held between the national government and the Bougainville leaders. This culminated in the *Mirigina Charter*, which gave the mandate for the creation of the BTG.

The failure of this conference was that the BRA delegates did not attend (for unknown reasons, but, perhaps, out of fear for their safety). Because of the BRA non-attendance, there was fear of trouble, so that the meeting ended before scheduled.

Conclusion

To conclude here, the road to peace is not an easy one, but we can thank those who have tried in the past, because we can learn from their mistakes and experience. This will provide a background for future peace endeavours.

There are no easy answers, solutions, and fast conclusions, to the Bougainville conflict, but it has continued to be the biggest problem, with which the national government has had to grapple. In social and economic terms, it has been very expensive: thousands of lives have been lost, and millions of Kina have been expended, since the conflict began seven years ago. Quantitatively, the number of lives lost is estimated to be between 10,000 to 15,000, and, in monetary terms, it is estimated to have cost over K800 million.

The Prime Minister, at the beginning of 1996, during the lifting of the cease-fire, said: "For the last 18 months, the government has left no

stone unturned, travelled down every path . . . tried every legal means at its disposal, to resolve this conflict to find peace.” The author believes that the statement made by the Prime Minister is inconclusive, because it can be solved, if addressed properly, and in the following manner:

1. Peace Makers

There is a great need to have real “peace makers” solving conflicts like this. For too long now, both the national government and the BRA/BIG have handled this conflict haphazardly. Neutral bodies should be invited to play this role, such as the United Nations, or the Commonwealth Secretariat. This strategy has not been seriously pursued in the past, because of the “internal matter” policy, which the PNG government has adopted.

National sovereignty, and national pride, can sometimes become a stumbling block to clear thinking, and doing what is right. This conflict now demands this strategy be taken seriously, and given priority. I remember what joy there was when New Zealand participated in the *Endeavour Accord*. People in the province were overjoyed for the help a neutral country offered. The BRA/BIG have been in support of the idea, while the PNG government has been against it, because it did not want to internationalise the conflict. Despite the many calls that have been made along this line, nothing had been done.

2. A Political Solution

An answer to this conflict lies with this strategy: the government would be kidding itself if it does not address the question of a new political autonomy. As a Bougainvillean, this is the general feeling that the majority of the people have within themselves. Although they want peace, normalcy, and the return of services, the political structure must be addressed, so that the struggle, and those who have died in the conflict, were not in vain.

This struggle for a new political autonomy is now something, which is already in the blood of the people, especially the youth, who

have gone through this nightmare. Moreover, the BTG has been working overtime, trying to complete all the necessary paperwork, in preparation for this change. In fact, under the *Mirigina Charter*, the BTG has until the coming election next year to come up with a future political and administrative arrangement for Bougainville. It will have to a type, which meets the needs of the people, and also, it will have to take into account the changes in the circumstances, which have resulted in the crisis. Furthermore, it must be capable of managing the major changes that must be expected in Bougainville in the next 20 years.

Although the BRA/BIG might not be in favour of a political compromise, I think they will, grudgingly, accept it, in the long run.

3. The Church

The church in Bougainville is now coming out with a strategy of reaching the people with the gospel. Where the government has failed, the church can step in, and really make its mark on the crisis. What has been done, and what it should be doing now, is to go out, where the people are, and reach them. Spiritual and psychological healing is mostly needed. The church should be on the offensive, carrying out evangelism crusades, rallies, Bible studies, and fellowships, in the care centres, and other places, which are accessible. This strategy will help reform, and transform, the minds, attitudes, characters, and behaviour of those, who have been involved in the crisis.

New generations, which are coming up, have undergone tremendous stress, hardship, and problems, in trying to cope with the crisis, and to now adapt properly back into normal lives.

The churches' message should be "peace", not victory. The full-time vocation, and comprehensive calling of Christians, is to be "peacemakers". US President, Woodrow Wilson, during the First World War, said, "peace without victory, so that all parties will feel they are victorious. There must be no victor, nor victim, triumphant, or defeated. This is victory for peace."

These are words of wisdom, indeed, and the church in Bougainville will make an impact in adopting the same melody.

4. The Future

For the political analyst, and strategist, of PNG, the future of peace lies in how much the national government is willing to give in, and make concessions to the Bougainville people. For the sake of peace, the national government must make a forecast of what will happen in the next 20 years, taking into account the temperature, and the pulse, of secession, which is in the blood of the people. Experience shows that secessionist movements do not die, but only lie dormant.

Vision in God's Mission

Vasi Gadiki

Vasi Gadiki is a Koitabuan, and was Principal of Rarongo Theological College from 1990-1996, during which time he also served as the Secretary/Treasurer of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools. He holds a Masters degree in Pacific church history.

For 1993, the United church Assembly adopted the theme: "Vision in God's Mission", and this paper attempts to discuss this theme, from the standpoint of the United church. I shall introduce the discussion, with a brief reference to the history of Christian mission, in order to focus our attention on the vision of God. There follows a discussion of God in mission, and of the United church in mission, leading into a consideration of the purpose of the mission of the church. The concluding remarks will discuss who benefits from the vision in God's mission.

The title is an important object for the universal church, since Christendom's attempt to understand the inspired word of God in the scriptures, is to grasp the vision of God, in His mission to, and in, the world. The leaders, and people of God, in worship, endeavour to know the mind of God in the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church interprets the coming of Christ into the world, and His leaving of it, as the core of the grace of God. Christ has been classified as being both human and divine, yet it is His humanity that leads men to believe, and accept His divine nature.

The mission of the church is to proclaim what God has done in Christ for the world. The core of the gospel, is the grace of God, revealed by Christ on the cross, and, in mission, the church attempts to reach the many people who have yet to hear its message. At the same time, the church continues to nurture, and care for, those who have accepted the gospel, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that they may grow to maturity in their faith.

The mission of the Christian church has often been defined primarily as evangelism, under the following points:

- (a) Mission, as the proclamation of the Word.
- (b) Mission, as the task of sending missionaries overseas.
- (c) Mission, as the act of saving the souls of neglected peoples.
- (d) Mission, as the social responsibility of the church to the world.

The object of mission, as been seen, as is the conversion, and the civilising, of the heathen. To achieve their conversion, the missionaries embarked on the following means for evangelism:

- (a) Educating the heathen;
- (b) Providing health services;
- (c) Developing the converted, so that they, themselves, proclaim the gospel to their own people;
- (d) Translating the scriptures into the local languages.

In more recent times, the concept of mission was narrowed down to three basic points:

- (a) Teaching and instruction, to develop the faith of the converted to maturity and responsibility.
- (b) The development of facilities, from which to administer the functions of the church.
- (c) The development of human resources, to manage the affairs of the church in the local environment, so as to foster the growth of the church.

Mission has been understood as sending people out from their own country to witness the gospel to peoples of other cultures. The message

proclaimed needs to be related to the new cultural context, so that the emphasis in mission has been the contextualisation of the gospel message. The fast changes, and developments, in modern times, require adaptations in the strategies for mission, whereby modern man may be able to understand, and accept, the message in the pluralistic, or secularised, world.

The cultures of the peoples, with whom the gospel has to be shared, have gone through many changes. Culture is the total way of life, the norms of the society, the religious forms, beliefs, practices, and the methods of survival in the society. Culture conditions the styles of dress, the forms of music, art, and languages, as well as the peoples' ideas and values. Culture is the code of ethics, and influences the peoples' view of the world. It creates a sense of order in the environment, and influences the learning experiences and the skills of each generation.

This means that the gospel is not proclaimed in a vacuum, but in a ready and fertile ground of religious beliefs and practices. Culture has created a fertile environment, in which the gospel may be planted, and the mission of God established. This is similar to the context of Matt 5:17, where the Lord Jesus stated: "Do not think that I have come to do away with the law of Moses, and the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teaching come true." This verse needs to be applied to the Melanesian context as: "I have not come to do away with the Melanesian, or Pacific, cultures, but to make their teachings come true."

The similarity, indicated above, teaches us that religious experience, with its ethical nature, expresses the importance of culture in the mission of the church. There seems to be an urgent need for the contextualisation of the gospel message, in order for it to become a living reality in the lives of those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. This thought brings us back to the concept of the vision of God.

Vision of God

Christendom understands the vision of God in the preaching of Christ. Jesus called a few people out of the crowd to stay close to Him, observing His words, actions, and relationships with people. These elected, or called, people learnt much from the example of Christ; and the vision of the church must be to understand His mission strategies.

These can be clearly seen in the temptations, where the Lord struggled against the misuse of power to turn stones into bread. The second temptation (to fall from the top of the temple) was to adopt an easy way, where miracles may be used to gather people easily. The third temptation was to gain the whole world by worshipping the devil (Matt 4:1-11).

The temptations were the Lord's struggle against adopting an easy method for mission. The decision, in the end, was to keep to the plan of God for mission, even though, at times, the task was difficult, and beyond human strength. The Lord Jesus also outlined the task of mission, by quoting from Is 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has chosen me to bring the good news to the poor . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, and announce that the time has come, when the Lord will save His people (Luke 4:18-19).

There are several important points, expressed above, which need some brief discussion.

1. The Lord Jesus was making a public claim that the Spirit of the Lord God Almighty was upon Him. This may also be taken as being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord inspires mission activity.
2. Jesus claimed that He was chosen by God to carry out the vision of mission. Christ clarified that the participants in the

mission of God are selected by God to fulfil His vision in the world.

3. The function of the chosen was, and is, to take the message to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. The most important task of mission is to proclaim a message of liberty, recovery of sight, and freedom.
4. The theology of the proclamation of the good news is salvation for the people, who have accepted, believed, and lived the message of Christ in their daily lives.

The vision of God is that people may accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The teaching ministry of the church enables them to follow the example of Christ, in order that there is love of neighbour, and of self, thus fostering harmony in the society.

In the scriptures, the concept of a vision from Almighty God to prophets is mentioned 79 times. The prophet had a vision, whereby God conveyed a message directly, or through another channel (either an angel, or other means), to warn or remind the people of God. Visions are often revelations from God, dealing with immediate situations (e.g., Gen 15:1f), and often with a promise of reward (e.g., Acts 12:7, the release of Peter from prison). On the other hand, in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah, Daniel, and John, the visions dealt with more distant events, in regard to the development of the kingdom. Visions, in both the Old and New Testaments, were means, whereby God made Himself known, with the granting of a vision being dependent entirely upon His divine will. Thus, there is no indication in the scriptures that those who do not have visions are lower in spiritual category than those to whom they have been granted.

The vision of God was, and is, the message God had intended to reveal to mankind in the world. Human beings were expected to grasp the plan of God, through the visions that lead people to realise His purpose in their lives.

God in Mission

The mission of God in the world, through the elect, was to proclaim the message of God's justice and righteousness. The Lord worked through the elect to achieve His own purpose for His glory. The servants were not expected to claim the glory that belonged to God. In the Old Testament, prophets were selected to convey God's message to the people in the form of reminder, direction, or warning, to lead, and direct, people back to the road they were meant to follow. In the New Testament, the disciples were commanded to participate in the mission of God. The task of the servants was to proclaim the righteousness of God, to baptise, and to make more disciples, in which ministry the Lord Jesus Christ promised to be ever-present (Matt 28:19, 20). There was the promise of the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct them in the mission task.

The mission of God was well discussed in *Mission and Evangelism: an Ecumenical Affirmation*, in which emphasis was placed on the call to evangelisation. In the document, seven points were discussed, as the ecumenical convictions for mission:

1. **Conversion.** The gospel proclamation includes an invitation to recognise, and accept, in a personal decision, the saving Lordship of Christ.
2. **The gospel relates to all realms of life.** The scripture never limited religious life to the temple, nor isolated it from the total daily life of the individual.
3. **The church and its unity in God's mission.** The churches are to be a sign to the world. They are to pray and serve as Christ did in His ministry. They are to celebrate the eucharist, as a proclamation of the death of the Lord, until He comes. There is a call for renewal and transformation of the churches, specifically including the call to unity.
4. **Mission in Christ's way.** "As the Father sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). To participate in mission requires Christian obedience to the pattern of the ministry and

teaching of Jesus. The task of mission is simply following the example of Christ in his earthly ministry.

5. **Good news to the poor.** Christ, who was Himself incarnated as poor, gave more attention to the poor and marginalised of the society. The message of Christ was to liberate the poor and the oppressed in society, where there was a growing gap between the wealthy and the poor.
6. **Mission in, and to, six continents.** Churches, everywhere, are in a missionary situation, to encourage Christian values, in the age of secularism, and loss of morals.
7. **Witnessing among people of different faiths.** The Christian message of God's salvation needs to be offered to other religions of the world.

The above points give clarification of God's work in mission through the church. Their mission task is to proclaim the message of God, revealed in the ministry of Christ, to convert and liberate, in order to achieve salvation.

The United church in Mission

The mission of the United church in Melanesia, is to fulfil the missionary task, stipulated in the scriptures. The proclamation of the gospel of salvation to the people of Melanesia requires Christian values to be shown in the church here.

The United church's participation in mission, is through the human resources, developed to be the channels, through whom the Almighty God may reach people. There is a great deal of evangelisation in the United church, in the following aspects: mass evangelism, or crusades, child evangelism, and personal evangelism. The object of these evangelistic activities is for conversion, or recommitment in faith. The converted require nurturing and caring to enable them to grow into maturity in faith. This implies faithfulness and obedience to the commands of Christ, taking up their own responsibility for continued mission of the Christian church.

The converted need teaching, or education, to understand the expectation of God for man's participation in the ministry of the church.

During the early days of the United church, the challenge was for conversion from heathenism and paganism. However, that stage of our development is now over, and the more-recent challenge to the church has been the need for participation in ecumenism, to which the United church is contributing much, in both Melanesia and the Pacific.

Other challenges to the United church are now the various new religious movements, especially fundamentalism, and the Pentecostal, or pietistic, emphasis, with its lack of responsibility in the community. Equally, there are the challenges of secularisation, and the loss of self-identity, through alienation from our own cultures. The concept of contextualisation of the gospel is, therefore, a new trend in the proclamation of the word of God.

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Administration in the United Church

Lohia Auda

Lohia Auda, a Koitabuan, worked for a number of years in government administration before studying for church ministry. He graduated from Rarongo Theological College in 1995, with a Diploma of Theology. He is now serving in Papua as a minister of the United church.

Within the United church, today, there are some weaknesses in administration that need to be overcome. The two main failings I see, especially in regard to our Melanesian context, are in planning, and in stewardship. These are great tasks, and the church will not achieve its potential for growth unless its leaders fully appreciate, understand, and implement the management process. Management is crucial to the health of the church, with its diverse needs and complexity.

The cause of these problems seems to be the lack of training in management among church leaders, who, therefore, find it hard to take control of such issues. Hence, they only try to keep the church continuing on in its established ways, maintaining things, much as they are. Ideally, of course, there should be progressive adjustments made to tune the church's administration to operate more effectively.

In the general understanding of planning and stewardship, life may not be reduced to a formula, but needs a strategy for living. This involves setting goals, establishing priorities, working out plans to reach those goals, and then measuring the situation against those goals. In this presentation, I will be focusing on weaknesses and failings in planning and stewardship (including the management of time), as I have observed in the United church.

Planning

In church administration, planning is one of the important factors in leadership. In order to understand the present patterns of church leadership, one needs first to examine leadership in Melanesian social structures. Many Melanesian societies developed some degree of social and political ranking, which was transmitted through heredity. And this same pattern is a common practice for church leadership today, instead of choosing people with a modern understanding of management. This, inevitably, creates weakness in some of our church administration.

Planning is inseparable from purpose. We need to have clear-cut objectives, which must also be measurable. Achieving excellence is impossible when people are unsure about why they do things, or what they are trying to accomplish. To plan without purpose is futile. Since planning is related to purpose, a pastor, who initiates the management process, will spend a good deal of his time thinking about the future. Many pastors, in our church, find themselves so busy planning and coordinating at a lower level that they have no time to do creative planning. This is a danger signal. If the larger issues are not dealt with, and planned for, the church will probably not grow.

A minister needs to work towards freeing himself to plan creatively. He is not uninterested in, or isolated from, active ministry, but, if the church is to move towards fulfilling its objectives and purposes, he must give attention to matters that pertain to the whole church. If he does not, no one will, and the result will be stagnation.

The successful approach to overcoming this weakness in planning within the church should be based on training programmes to upgrade the standard of management, and to develop knowledge of how to plan for the future. Vision, of course, is the ability to see. We speak of being short-sighted, when we do not anticipate what will, or could, happen, based on what is already happening. Sometimes, we are so used to seeing things in a certain way, we cannot see what is really

there. Mounds of rocks and vegetation close in our minds. We have not opened ourselves to see the world in new ways, often because it is more comfortable and secure to maintain an old pattern. We know what to expect, and so, we resist change. But the world continues to change, despite our best efforts, and so we continually need to see life anew.

Teaching is not necessarily the act of imparting knowledge. Rather, it is changing lives. And, for this, it is better to teach people to find the truth for themselves. We have to recognise, and admit, that many of our present church-teaching programmes are not very effective, with the result that the weaknesses and failings continue. The church should understand the development of leadership skills as a never-ending process. It is a continuous activity, which flows like a swollen river. The person, who, seemingly, has achieved leadership, must realise that he never “arrives” simply through learning some basic skills. Other things also need to be learnt.

Training courses do not always bring the best results, unless participants recognise that basic changes are sometimes required. A leader may be faced with the fact that he will need to revise his attitudes, and change his ambitions. The development of skills for leadership is judged successfully by the overall performance. This lies not only in what a leader gets done, but also in the satisfaction rendered, the sustained enthusiasm, and effort, put forth by the followers, and the depth of loyalty manifested by the members.

Stewardship

Stewardship is the other common failing, or weakness, in the United church. This is very important, especially in terms of finance, since the church’s resources come from its members’ pockets. If there is misappropriation, or poor stewardship, it will result in arguments, conflict, and backsliding. People will complain about giving, and the church will become weak.

But, along with questions of financial administration, we should consider, also, the use of time and physical resources.

Many ministers seem to misuse time, in doing their work. Often there is apparently no opportunity for important church activities, because most of their time has been spent on other unnecessary activities. But we can release pressure, if we schedule times to plan and to evaluate. For this, we need a chart to gauge what we must do to prepare for an event or activity, and to make sure all of the steps are placed on the calendar in advance. Each item must have a date beside it. This insures that the preliminary work will be done, and done on time. Without this, some of our ministers find that their workload overruns the available time, and is left undone.

Similarly, there often seems to be difficulties in stewardship of church property. It is the normal practice that anything belonging to the church is under the management of the pastor concerned: a vehicle, motor, dinghy, house, and so forth. This becomes a critical issue, if there is mismanagement of this property, and it has to be admitted that this is an area, where some pastors become dishonest and untrustworthy. Because they see themselves as the overall manager of the property, they may not use it in a way the church wants. And again, when there is dissatisfaction among members, there is often conflict with the pastor.

But it is stewardship of finance, which has become the most common, and major, problem in church administration today. Nearly all regions in the United church claim that this particular issue is a difficulty, which they are struggling very hard to solve. When money is given to the church, somehow it does not follow the proposed allocations, but is used somewhere else. This becomes the greatest obstacle for the flow of contributions to the church, and is, at times, the cause of loss of members.

To overcome these problems, once again, I say that it is a lack of training in such responsibilities. Training is an integral part of discipline. It is the process by which Christ-like behaviour and character become a way of life, through repeated, consistent application of God's truth. Training aims at developing the habitually-right response. It is an activity, which, by its nature, involves repetition and practice, repeating an exercise or technique, until the skills developed become second nature, and a way of life.

All the churches have positions that need people to fill them, but, for some reason, we cannot find the perfect people for the job. There are jobs in the church that need to be done, but we are not doing them, because there is no one suitably qualified. The church, which consistently has unmet training needs, probably has reached a growth plateau, and needs additional staff. Sometimes the problem is that we do not have a way to find the right people.

Specialists in various areas of ministry can take responsibility for training leaders. We may also be able to utilise other training resources outside the church, through the various seminars, institutes, and other training resources, to which people can be sent. Also, it can be very helpful to determine where a particular ministry is being done well, and to send the untrained person to that location, to observe, and learn, from people, who are already doing it. This may be the best way to develop leaders, and let them learn by doing.

Conclusion

These are the common, and basic, weaknesses and failures that I observe in the United church today. In the long-range process of developing leadership, several factors have been suggested as helpful. Leadership develops, in the context of involvement. Some structure must exist for recruitment and involvement. Some way must be found to discern interests, gifts, and skills. A survey can be helpful, but preaching, or seminars about using spiritual gifts, through involvement in ministry, are crucial. If the church tries to develop its leaders in

these ways, it will have a significant effect upon her spiritual vitality. Today, the church needs to evaluate its work, and make changes, to be effective in its duties.

Developing Curriculum for Ministerial Formation¹

David Vincent

David Vincent is from England, and has served as a minister of the United church in PNG since 1979. He has been a member of the Faculty at Rarongo Theological College since 1993, and is currently its Dean of Studies. He holds a Masters degree from Cambridge University.

The founding Principal of Rarongo Theological College pursued, with dedication, his vision for ministerial formation in such a way as to shape this College to become one of the leading church institutions in the Pacific region. His ideas were certainly forward looking, and encouraged fresh thinking about the task of preparing clergy for their ministries. The present faculty is, therefore, being faithful to the founder's intentions, by their continuing development of Rarongo's life and studies.

In July, 1993, the faculty held a major review of the College curriculum, and its process of preparing people for ministry. As the present Dean of Studies, it is my intention, and privilege, to highlight the main proposals and resolutions of that review, and to evaluate the progress, which has been made in implementing them.

In-depth Study and Learning

Probably the most obvious change that has followed from the curriculum review has been the move from having three College terms each academic year, to now having two semesters. This was not

¹ This paper is a slightly-edited version of a lecture given at Rarongo Theological College, Rabaul, in January, 1997, in honour of the founding Principal, Revd Dr Ronald Williams.

simply for convenience in timing; rather, there were several educational reasons behind the change.

It was not (let me state!) a matter of the faculty being lazy, in wanting to have a shorter teaching year. In point of fact, the two semesters provide exactly the same amount of teaching as the three terms: two semesters each, with 15 weeks of class teaching, as compared to three terms each, with ten weeks of classes.

One advantage of semesters has been to have only two sets of examinations each year, instead of the previous three sets at the end of each term. The primary purpose of examinations (and perhaps the only lasting value of them), is as a means of assessment of student learning. Since there is some discussion, and doubt, about the value, appropriateness, and fairness of examinations, as a means of assessment, in theological education, it must now be a good move to spend less time and energy each year, simply on examinations. (In passing, we may note here that, along with many other theological colleges, Rarongo had formerly used a method of “continuous assessment” of student assignments, instead of examinations, which were reintroduced only in the early 1990s).

A more important advantage of the semester system is to allow, and encourage, further in-depth study and learning. The longer, 15-week courses, give the opportunity for teachers to cover their topics in greater detail, and allow more time for students to wrestle with the issues that are being raised. This latter point is particularly important in theological education, since students will have to deal with certain questions, not only on an academic level, but also as matters of personal faith. For example, the “critical” academic approach to the Bible often creates real difficulties for students, as they begin their theological studies. Or again, it may take students considerable time to come to terms with the on-going hermeneutical challenge of applying the biblical message across centuries and cultures.

The aim of in-depth learning is, of course, an excellent one. But it is not yet clear whether or not semesters are the best way for Rarongo to achieve this. There are several questions, both educationally, and in practice, which need still to be proved, in the way that the College is implementing the semesters.

- (a) Firstly, there is the question of whether or not longer courses are the most suitable way for Melanesians to study and learn? Some studies of adult education in African cultures suggest that the majority of Africans learn best with relatively short blocks of material.² Longer blocks and courses may be more appropriate in Western cultures than in Africa. At the very least, this raises the question of whether longer semester courses are a move in the right direction for a Melanesian college.
- (b) Secondly, the opportunity that semesters provide for more in-depth teaching is a challenge, and a demand, on faculty members, both academically and educationally. Their own knowledge of the subject matter needs to be wider, and more up to date, if they are to teach more thoroughly. And equally, of course, a longer block of classes requires (and is an opportunity for) more variety and creativity in teaching methods.

At Rarongo, we are taking a number of positive steps in response to these challenges, to assist all of the faculty members, but particularly the “teaching fellows”, since they are relatively new to the work of theological education. We have been able to reduce, somewhat, the teaching load of the faculty members, so that they have more time for detailed preparation of classes, as well as for their own wider reading and study. The College has

² See, for example, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 25-3 (July 1989), pp. 271f.

also been able to increase the personal book grant, which is made annually to each faculty member.

In regard to the professional development of the faculty, as educators (although we still refer to them as “lecturers”!), last year, two of our number attended a week’s course on tertiary education methods, which has provided the basis for discussion of these issues in the whole faculty. This has raised awareness of the need for further professional development, and of the importance of providing for it.³

- (c) The third question, concerning our implementation of the semester system, relates to the workload required of students, and the balance between formal classes and the students’ own study-time. Unfortunately, the changes that have been made here, were taken, essentially, out of administrative necessity, while the educational factors were not given sufficient consideration.

The introduction of semesters has meant that the number of formal classes each student is expected to attend has increased, while the number of required assignments has decreased. This happened, primarily, as a matter of the logistics involved in restructuring the entire range of courses, from terms into semesters. In reality, the increase in the number of classes, and the decrease in assignments, is perhaps not very great, but we may well consider that this move is in the wrong direction, if we are, indeed, looking for more in-depth learning, through

³ In common with many other theological colleges, Rarongo’s senior faculty members have each undertaken Master’s degree studies, in their own academic discipline, but have not been given the specific opportunity to develop their teaching skills. Future faculty development programmes should give serious consideration to this need.

students, themselves, wrestling with the issues raised in their studies.⁴

Integrated Study

A second main purpose, in the changes to Rarongo's curriculum, has been to create the opportunity for some inter-departmental teaching, across the boundaries of the established disciplines of biblical studies, theology, church history, ministry, and "religion, culture, and society". The restructuring of teaching into longer courses, naturally, gave this possibility, which has been taken up, primarily, by encouraging the ministry department to draw upon other teachers for parts of its courses. Our success here has been somewhat limited, perhaps, because one person (the ministry teacher) has basically done the course planning, rather than more-openly attempting an integrated approach.

Perhaps, then, it is more significant that 1997 will see the reintroduction of a "theme study" course, in which a particular topic is discussed from the perspective of the different academic disciplines. In the past, for example, the themes of "conflict", and of "sacraments", had been studied in this way, and a new suggestion for this year is to take up "gender issues" with this approach. Whichever theme is chosen, it will be essential for the various faculty members involved to do detailed planning together, so that the course may indeed be "integrated".

Choice of Courses

A third aim of the curriculum changes, was to introduce the new feature of "electives" to studies at Rarongo. This was piloted during

⁴ The actual average figures are as follows: In the terms' system, a student would have 13 classes per week, with five study periods, and had to produce 18 major assignments per year. For semesters, a student has 15 classes per week, with three study periods, and has to produce 14 major assignments per year.

1996, with reasonable success, and the experiment will be considerably extended for the 1997 academic year.⁵

Students are required to take the foundation courses in each department, but are then given some choice over the more advanced, or specialised, courses. This effectively means that students' first residential year of study is made up of required courses, while, in the second and third residential years, a significant number of choices become open to them.

For example, in biblical studies, electives are being offered in wisdom literature, biblical laws and Melanesian norms, as well as in advanced Hebrew, and advanced Greek. Similarly, in ministry studies, there are various foundational courses, after which, electives are offered in (among others): health and healing, communication, and youth ministry.

The arrangements for these electives mean that, in the second semester of their second residential year, students will be required to elect four courses out of a total of ten that are offered by all of the departments together. And, then again, in the second semester of the third year, they will take four other electives, out of ten different courses being offered.

This plan has been generally welcomed, as it obviously attempts to recognise, and respect, the needs, interests, and ministry gifts of the individual students. The year, 1997, is the first year, in which these electives are being fully implemented, after which, a careful evaluation of the programme will be made.

Wider Opportunities for Study

A further recommendation of the curriculum review was that the resources of the College should be made available to a wider

⁵ The introduction of "electives" is not specifically tied to the semester system, and could equally well have been developed with the previous structure of terms.

group of people than only the residential students (whose number is limited, by accommodation, to approximately 90 at any one time). It was also specifically suggested that lay people should be given more access to the College learning programmes.

The faculty have responded to these recommendations, by giving further attention to the extension studies programme, and also to the possibility of holding Christmas holiday courses, both of which had previously been given less emphasis. These two programmes are separate, and yet, closely related, in that people undertaking extension studies are encouraged to take the opportunity of face-to-face teaching in the Christmas courses. Both of these programmes were originally offered only to clergy (as a means of continuing education, to upgrade their theological qualifications), but they have each now been opened to lay people, who have attained grade 12 education, or its equivalent.

Again, these are, clearly, positive developments, and there has been an encouraging response to the publicity of these programmes. But inevitably, turning such ideas into fruitful reality, demands a good deal of work and the availability of extra resources. At present, all of this work (i.e., both the administration, and, especially, the preparation, of the extension materials) is being carried out as an extra responsibility of the regular faculty members, which, naturally, means that progress is rather slow. If the interest, and enrolment, for these courses continues to grow, then we shall need to look seriously at the creation of a special position, to undertake responsibility for them.

Each of the aspects, discussed up to this point, is primarily academic matter, relating mainly to study and formal teaching. But the curriculum review also highlighted “practical ministry”, and “personal formation”, as two non-academic aspects of the College’s educational process, which are central to preparation for ministry.

Practical Ministry

Along with many other theological colleges, Rarongo has, at times, been criticised for producing good students, but poor ministers, scholars, but not pastors. Naturally, we recognise that ministry is an essentially active, practical, and people-oriented calling, and profession. Knowledge and understanding are certainly important, but ministers must be able to use, and apply, that knowledge, so that it is meaningful and helpful in daily life.

In assessing the practical aspects of our ministerial training (which includes a whole year of supervised pastoral work before entry to the College), the curriculum review recommended the development of further ministry opportunities, throughout the three years of residential study. In previous years, there have naturally been various practical requirements for ministry courses in counselling, Christian education, worship, and preaching, and the arrangements for these have been a regular part of College life. In addition to these, and certainly as important, Rarongo's community life-style is, itself, an opportunity for pastoral caring, and the exercise of leadership, in various capacities.

Further, practicals have recently been arranged in some other ministry courses, which have given extra experience to students. A week's placement in a local congregation is now organised, in conjunction with the course in pastoral theology. The students are supervised by, and work alongside, an established pastor, and then reflect upon the experience, by making a written assessment of pastoral care in that congregation. And again, assisting the chaplains in the Kerevat prison, the Nonga base hospital, and in the Kerevat national high school, have provided experience in these special ministries. All these have proved to be worthwhile opportunities, in spite of the language barriers that are at times encountered.

In a more general way, the semi-rural setting of the College, and the emphasis upon self-reliance, through food gardens, fishing

(and some chickens), all require the use, and development, of a person's practical skills. In previous years, one special week, dedicated to the learning of such skills, was included in the calendar, but, for various reasons, this opportunity has recently lapsed, which is something of a loss for an overall balance in College programmes.

Personal Formation

Lastly, the curriculum review emphasised that “students should study, closely, the questions of their own personal and cultural identity, conscience, and moral character, and spiritual formation”. Arguably, this is the most important of these recommendations, in that ministry is ultimately less about what a person may know, or is able to do, as about who we are; about how we live in relation to God, and to our fellow human beings.

This, of course, is one reason why theological colleges exist at all, with the intention that, living within a Christian community, for several years, will accelerate the personal development of the students. And, in a Melanesian setting, at least, this is surely true, because of the natural sharing of life with people from the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (and, perhaps also, from different church traditions, as we have here in Rarongo).

Since 1993, the College has emphasised the importance of personal formation, by taking the bold step of giving “life and witness” assessment equal weight with academic results. The final grade, awarded to graduating students, is calculated as a simple average of their study performance, on the one hand, and of their “life and witness” grade, on the other. This latter is assessed by all of the faculty members, on the basis of 15 different categories, under the main headings of College life, ministerial performance, and Christian maturity.

This policy is intended as an encouragement to the personal life of students, although, at times, it seems to have created an unhelpful

atmosphere and attitude, by seeming to set the faculty up as “spiritual policemen”, and judges. Perhaps the hoped-for encouragement, and value of this assessment, could better be brought out in two ways:

- (a) The “life and witness” assessment should be done, not only shortly before graduation, but also, half way through the residential studies. In this way, students would be given some guidance, and help, towards growth, over the second half of their time in College, and not simply wait for a “judgment” at the end.
- (b) And, secondly, this assessment could be done, in the first place, by the students, themselves, each writing a report on their own sense of strengths and weaknesses, and of personal growth. This would enable the process to be shared, in a more pastoral manner, instead of being received as an external verdict.

As a final example of developments towards personal formation, I would refer to the introduction of student “retreats” over the last few years. For some time, the week of “orientation” for new students has been structured for continuing students, as an opportunity to reflect upon their own sense of calling to ministry. In 1993, we arranged a further week of retreat (away from the College), for the final-year students, as a personal preparation for their graduation. The success of this retreat has meant that it is now a regular feature of the annual calendar, and that their wives (separately) now also have a similar weekend away.

Naturally, there is no perfect plan, which will be timeless in its suitability as ministerial formation. There remains a continuing need to develop the College’s curriculum and life so as to be most helpful to students, both academically and personally.

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Book Review

John Leman, lecturer, CLTC

Semisi Nau, *The Story of My Life: A Tongan Missionary at Ontong Java*, edited, and with an introduction, by Allan K. Davidson (Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1996).

Mission histories and biographies of missionaries have tended to focus on the role of the white missionaries, and to overlook the vital part played by Pacific Islanders themselves. Alan Tippett's well-known book, *The Deep Sea Canoe* (1997), was written to help correct this imbalance, by focusing on the role of the Pacific Islanders in spreading the gospel throughout the Pacific.

Story follows the tradition of *The Deep Sea Canoe*. It describes the career of Semisi Nau, a Tongan missionary at Ontong Java, from 1905 to 1919. Ontong Java, is a low-lying atoll, in the northern part of the Solomon Islands.

Semisi Nau's own story is actually a very small part of the book, less than 40 pages. Unfortunately, the story is not complete, but stops abruptly in mid-sentence, somewhere in 1914. This is because the latter part of Semisi's manuscript is missing. Although the story is very interesting, the reader may feel frustrated at not being able to read the whole account.

The introduction, written by Allan Davidson, of New Zealand, actually forms the biggest part of the book, about 80 pages. This provides some of the background details, so the reader can get a better understanding of Semisi's story. He writes in a fairly scholarly way, with extensive use of endnotes, which might appeal to the student of Pacific mission history.

My guess is that the book will be of greatest interest to the people of Ontong Java, to the church in Tonga, and to students of mission history in general.