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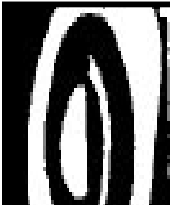
**Literacy and Establishing Churches in Melanesia**  
Jenny Fountain

**Nominalism in Papua New Guinea**  
Kewai Robin Kero

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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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# MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

*Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools*

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

The Christian church all over the world faces various and diverse problems as it seeks to bring acceptance and integration of the gospel into the lives of the people it encounters. Part of the task of the church is to identify these problems, and then attempt to discover, and implement, solutions designed to overcome them.

The church in Melanesia faces a number of such problems. Two that have been widely recognised, and addressed at various levels, are illiteracy and nominalism. In this edition of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, these issues are discussed.

In the first article, Jenny Fountain, a former missionary to Papua New Guinea, presents an historical study of the approach to non-literacy adopted by Christian Brethren missionaries. She notes that literacy work had a high priority, as one strategy for the establishment of an indigenous church, and outlines the ways that such a strategy helps to achieve this aim.

In the second article, Kewai Kero, a church worker with the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea, examines the problem of nominalism. In particular, he explores the influence that traditional cultures and religions have had in producing the high rate of nominalism in churches in Papua New Guinea. Recognising that a multi-faceted approach is needed to comprehensively address this issue, Kewai discusses in detail the role of biblical teaching, as one of these facets.

We trust that the material in both these articles provides some useful points of reflection. It is anticipated that the next edition of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* will be published shortly after this one. We take this opportunity to extend an invitation to people to submit articles they feel may be appropriate for publication. All submissions should preferably be typed.

**Jamie O'Brien**

# LITERACY AND ESTABLISHING CHURCHES IN MELANESIA

**Jenny Fountain**

*Jenny Fountain is a New Zealander. Jenny, and her husband, Ossie, were missionaries in Papua New Guinea (mainly at Anguganak and Koroba) from 1967 to 1984. Jenny has teaching qualifications, and is currently bridging towards a Master of Theological Studies at the Bible College of New Zealand. The following paper was written as part of those bridging studies.*

## **Introduction: Brethren Missionaries in PNG**

Brethren missionaries first began working in Papua New Guinea (PNG)<sup>1</sup> in 1951, under the name of “Christian Missions in Many Lands” (CMML).<sup>2</sup> Over the next few years, more CMML missionaries came, mainly from New Zealand. The 1950s were characterised by pioneering missionary work: language learning, making initial contact with groups of people, opening up new stations, building houses and airstrips, trekking around villages, giving regular systematic Bible teaching to build a foundation for understanding the Christian gospel, starting medical and literacy work, and English education.<sup>3</sup> By the beginning of 1960, eight mission stations had been opened up in Sandaun Province,<sup>4</sup> with a ninth in the process of being opened.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Until Independence in 1975, the northern part of the country was known as New Guinea, the whole country was known as The Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG).

<sup>2</sup> They were known as CMML until the early 1990s, when they came under the Christian Brethren Churches (CBC). From that time they have been known as CBC missionaries, or CBC Missionary Association (CBCMA).

<sup>3</sup> A report of four decades of Brethren missionary work in PNG was given at the reunion at Totara Springs, NZ, on 26-28 October, 1990. See Les Marsh’s report, “Consider the Past – Prepare for the Future”, *Treasury* (Dec 1990), 248-251.

<sup>4</sup> This was known by the name “West Sepik District” at that time.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis and Barbara Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea 1951-1995: How did it all happen?* (Auckland: Thorp, 1966), 67.

During the 1960s, the CMML work continued to grow. More missionaries came from overseas. More stations were opened up, this time in the Highlands. While some pioneering work was still going on, large number of conversions and baptisms were taking place, with infant churches being formed. The work was mushrooming. A major concern of the missionaries in the 1960s was to establish vibrant indigenous churches, which had mature spiritual leaders, and which would be able to edify themselves from the scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

The area, in which the CMML missionaries worked, was a rural society, where people were either semi-nomadic or subsistence farmers. They were part of an oral society, and had no need for reading and writing. And so they were non-literate. One of the ways, in which the missionaries prepared to establish the church, was through teaching literacy.

Before arriving in PNG, the majority of CMML missionaries, between 1952 and 1963, had undertaken a three months' linguistics course, run by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)<sup>7</sup> in Melbourne, Australia.<sup>8</sup> While SIL provided linguistics training for the missionaries, a major part of the syllabus was training in literacy methods. Their commitment to Bible translation was matched by a commitment to literacy. Consequently, CMML missionaries arrived in PNG with the expectation that literacy would be an integral part of their ministry.

The missionaries, themselves, taught literacy classes. Nationals, who had learned to read, were then encouraged to teach others to read.

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<sup>6</sup> K. W. Liddle, "The Kind of Churches Needed in New Guinea", *God at Work in New Guinea* (K. W. Liddle, J. M. Hitchen, L. Larking; Palmerston North: GPH Society, [1969]), 38-48.

<sup>7</sup> The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) could probably be described as the "professional face" of Wycliffe Bible Translators working overseas. It is an organisation, which works in countries by invitation, making scientific surveys, reducing languages to writing, producing grammars, primers, and other basic educational tools, as well as translating scriptures. SIL also trains linguists in USA, Britain, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand, and gives intensive linguistic training to many missionaries serving worldwide. See J. Herbert Kane, "Wycliffe Bible Translators", *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission* (Stephen Neill, Gerald H. Anderson, John Goodwin, eds; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 667-668.

<sup>8</sup> L. A. Marsh, *In His Name: A Record of Assembly Missionary Outreach from New Zealand* (Palmerston North: GPH Society, 1974), 308-342.

The missionaries trained national men to become literacy teachers, and set up literacy schools. Teaching literacy became an early priority in the work in each mission station area. Literacy was also closely associated with their Bible teaching programmes. The two activities often occurred side by side. There were “literacy Bible-schools” and “Bible literacy-schools”. Literacy was also a pre-requisite for acceptance into the central Bible school, established in 1967, for training Christian leaders, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Non-literate people did not qualify for entry into the school.

Since literacy had such a high profile in the CMML work in the 1960s, this paper will look at some of the strategies they used. It will investigate why they thought literacy was so important, and evaluate it as a strategy for establishing indigenous churches.

## **1. CMML’s Involvement in Literacy**

### **A. Literacy and Bible Teaching**

CMML missionaries believed that regular, systematic Bible teaching was important for providing a knowledge of God, from which faith could develop; for teaching new Christians the basics of the Christian faith prior to baptism; for the newly-formed churches, so that they could grow in the knowledge of God, and in the Christian life; for the leaders, so that they could learn what Christian leadership in the church was all about. Bible schools were one way of providing this systematic teaching. When a full-time Bible school, for the training of church workers, was first mooted, the missionaries felt that short-term Bible schools in each area would be of greater initial benefit.<sup>9</sup> However, there were two major roadblocks for a Bible-teaching programme to be carried out effectively. One of these was the lack of vernacular scriptures. The other was widespread illiteracy.<sup>10</sup>

CMML missionaries recognised these two roadblocks, and took active steps to overcome them. In an effort to provide scriptures, some of them began reducing vernacular languages to writing. Others translated,

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<sup>9</sup> CMML Committee minutes, July 1959, 6; CMML Conference minutes, July 1960, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 44.



and duplicated, selected portions of scripture, and Bible stories in Pidgin.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, they began producing primers, and teaching literacy. As we examine their involvement in literacy, two characteristics become evident. Firstly, literacy was rarely an end within itself, but a means to an end: for evangelism, for nurturing new Christians, for building up the leadership, and training for ministry in the church. And secondly, it pervaded every level of the Bible-teaching programme.

In earlier years, literacy was used as an evangelistic tool. Regular literacy classes gave opportunity for regular pre-evangelistic Bible instruction, through which it was hoped many would come to faith. Owen McKirdy ran a school at Nuku in 1961. His intention was that village representatives, who came to his school could be taught the gospel, and be sent back to evangelise their own people.<sup>12</sup> Neville Pethybridge used his literacy class at Yebil to disciple men, over a period of two years. He took in men from villages further afield to live on the station. His aim was to teach them to read Pidgin, and also to teach them God's Word daily. He reported that many of them had trusted the Lord, and that they were going back to teach their own people.<sup>13</sup>

As more people turned to the Lord, and infant churches were formed, literacy took on a new role of helping to establish new Christians in their faith. In the mid-1960s when large numbers of people in the Highlands responded to the Christian message, Kay Liddle stressed the need for adequate Bible teaching, and for literacy programmes to implement it.<sup>14</sup>

Inherent in this emphasis on literacy is the belief that every Christian should be able to read the scriptures for themselves and have personal devotions. Dennis Thorp came to PNG from a Navigator background, and believed that being able to read the scriptures was essential, if Christians were to pass on their faith effectively to their own people.<sup>15</sup> Alan Nicholson commented about a literacy class in Duna, at Kelabo, in 1966, "It is a thrill to hear adults reading. My prayer is that

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<sup>11</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> McKirdy, *Treasury* (Feb 1961), 54.

<sup>13</sup> Pethybridge, *Treasury* (Jan 1962), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Liddle, *Treasury* (Sept 1966), 17; *Treasury* (Oct 1970), 306.

<sup>15</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 20; personal correspondence, 3 March, 1998.

these people will read the scriptures for themselves.”<sup>16</sup> A similar comment was made by Rosalie Smith, from Auwi, some years later, when she wrote: “What advice would you give a new Christian? That he read the Bible for himself.” She then went on to talk about the need at Auwi to teach the Christians to read their own Duna language.<sup>17</sup> Kay Liddle, in writing about the kind of churches needed in PNG, said, “We need churches, which can edify themselves from the scriptures. This applies to the church, as a corporate body, as well as to the individual believer’s personal devotional life.”<sup>18</sup>

Literacy was considered essential for developing leadership. Bob Dobbie, in prioritising his work at Pori, among the Huli people, listed, as a high priority, the teaching of literacy to elders, so that they could read the scriptures.<sup>19</sup> Colin Cliffe initiated a regular “Bible and literacy” course at Anguganak, for leading Christian men in the area. It was held one week every month, with the purpose of developing competence in “handling the Word of God, and conducting the Work of God”.<sup>20</sup>

Fluency in Pidgin literacy was a pre-requisite for acceptance into the full-time Bible school, which started in 1967.<sup>21</sup> In the early years, the school struggled with low academic standards.<sup>22</sup> Missionaries were frequently reminded that prospective students needed help with literacy, so that they would be adequately prepared for Bible school.<sup>23</sup>

When the Bible school started, provision had to be made for wives. Those, who were already literate, did the full Bible-school course as students. Others had literacy classes, and studies relevant to women. In 1968, three wives were counted among the students, while the rest did literacy.<sup>24</sup> In 1972, five of the wives did the full course with their

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholson, *Treasury* (May 1966), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Rosalie Smith, “Literacy – a Priority”, *Treasury* (Aug 1974), 156.

<sup>18</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Marsh, *In His Name*, 320.

<sup>20</sup> Cliffe, *Treasury* (Dec. 1965), 22.

<sup>21</sup> CMML Conference minutes, July 1966, 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ol Minit bilong Komiti bilong Baibel Skul*, March 1967, (translated by JEAF); CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, 5.

<sup>23</sup> CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, 5; CMML Conference minutes, Aug. 1969, 3.

<sup>24</sup> CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, 5.

husbands, while the other eight attended classes in literacy, Bible study, and scripture memorisation.<sup>25</sup>

## B. Providing for Literacy as an Ongoing Ministry

CMML missionaries, working in PNG, engaged in a programme to train national Christians to teach literacy, greatly increasing the number of people learning to read and write. They also developed literacy materials, and participated in translation of scriptures, all of which contributed to the ongoing literacy programme.

The training of “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2) was a recurring theme in the CMML work. This text was quoted in a number of papers and publications relating to their training programmes, and was particularly true of literacy work.<sup>26</sup> Young literate men came specifically to train as literacy teachers, and then went back to their own areas to run literacy schools. Prior to 1960, Wally and Ruth Sim, of Eritei, took in young men from Green River, Inebu, and Yebil, and trained them, using small groups of pupils for teaching practice.<sup>27</sup> In 1963, Dennis Thorp and Bev Sundgren, together, ran the first Pidgin literacy teacher-training school at Yebil.<sup>28</sup> Later on, Bev Sundgren became a key person in Pidgin literacy teacher training, continuing this work until the late 1990s.<sup>29</sup>

The training of literacy teachers was accompanied by the development of literacy materials. By 1960, Wally and Ruth Sim had produced *Kowi na Sita* primers, for use in learning to read in Pidgin.<sup>30</sup> Later, the Sims and Bev Sundgren worked together to upgrade the literacy materials, for more effective teaching of adults.<sup>31</sup> The outcome

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<sup>25</sup> Crowther, *Tidings* (June 1972).

<sup>26</sup> John Hitchen, “Training Leaders for Melanesian Churches”, *God at Work in New Guinea* (Palmerston North: GPH Society, [1969]), 49; Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 28; Thorp, “Fruit of New Guinea Indigenes Faithful Witness”, *Treasury* (Aug 1966), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Marsh, *In His Name*, 330, 312, 333.

<sup>29</sup> Marsh, *In His Name*, 334.

<sup>30</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Treasury* (Nov 1967), 24.

of this was the *Kisim Save* Pidgin literacy course, with four primers and two teachers' manuals, which were being used by most missions throughout the country.<sup>32</sup>

Translation of scriptures into Pidgin was an early priority for CMML in the Sepik. Some missionaries made an effort to learn vernacular languages, and produce portions of scripture in those languages. David and Muriel Bailey worked in the Abau language at Green River, and Don McGregor worked in the Wapi language at Lumi.<sup>33</sup> However, much of the missionary work in the West Sepik was carried out in Pidgin, because there were small, isolated groups, each speaking a different language.<sup>34</sup> It was felt, therefore, that producing scriptures in Pidgin was more strategic.<sup>35</sup> In 1960, the Liddles, after attending a translation conference, reported that the four gospels in Pidgin were completed, and would be released the following year.<sup>36</sup> In 1963, Cecil Parish started doing Pidgin Bible translation, working, first of all, on the New Testament, which was released in 1968.<sup>37</sup> This was followed by Psalms and the Old Testament. He engaged in this work, until the completion of the whole Bible in 1988.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to the Sepik, in the Highlands there were two major tribes, Huli and Duna, for whom scriptures needed to be available in the vernacular.<sup>39</sup> Glenda Giles, a CMML missionary, who went to PNG in 1967, translated the Duna New Testament, which was published in 1976. Much of the translation of the Huli New Testament, published in 1983, was done by missionaries of APCM, with CMML missionaries helping in

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<sup>32</sup> [Wally and Ruth Sim, and Beverley Sundgren], *Kisim Save, Buk 1-4* (Wewak: Christian Books Melanesia, 1971); Beverley Sundgren, *Kisim Save, Buk Tisa 1 na 2* (Wewak: Christian Books Melanesia, 1971); "Papua New Guinea – Tribalism to Nationhood, *Treasury* (March 1972), 90-92.

<sup>33</sup> Liddle: "Tribalism to Nationhood", 91-92.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Johnstone in *Operation World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), p. 438 gives statistics of 1000 "peoples" and 862 languages. PNG is described as the world's most complex nation. Most of the language groups in the CMML area comprised of 1,000 to 5,000 speakers, according to Liddle, "New Guinea – A Survey of Assembly Missionary Work", *Treasury* (May 1960), 170.

<sup>35</sup> Liddle, "New Guinea Survey", 170.

<sup>36</sup> Liddle, *Treasury* (Dec 1960), 419.

<sup>37</sup> Sim, *Treasury* (Dec 1967), 30; Bielby and McCullough, *Treasury* (May 1969), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> The Huli tribe had approximately 80,000 speakers, and the Duna 30,000.

the checking process. Since the release of these New Testaments, the whole Pidgin Bible was published in 1989, and the completed Huli Bible is to be published in 1998-1999.

With the publication of these scriptures, the churches in the Sepik, and in the Huli and Duna tribes of the Highlands, now had the Word of God in either their own vernacular, or in Pidgin. Literacy was the means by which they had access to it.

### **C. Literacy, Translation, and Bible Teaching**

To sum up CMML's involvement in literacy, let us consider the views of two different missionaries working in the Highlands in the 1970s.

*Ossie Fountain* worked at Koroba, from 1971-1984, as a cross-cultural missionary and Bible teacher. In planning for a conference on Bible teaching programmes, he drafted a diagram, in which he listed evangelism, church planting, and church establishing, under "essential ministries" and Bible translation, literacy, and literature production and distribution under "support ministries".<sup>40</sup> In designating these as support ministries, he assumed that they might be needed at some stages, but not at others. This allowed for non-literate methods of teaching within an oral culture, or for the fact that, within a literate culture, scriptures may already be available, and the learners already literate. In this sense, his plan could be seen to be universal.

*Glenda Giles* was involved in both translation and literacy. She believed that they were not an optional extra, but an integral part of any Bible-teaching programme. At the CMML missionary conference in 1977, she presented a paper on their relationship.<sup>41</sup> She said,

As our belief is entirely Bible based, and the Bible is a book, this places literacy and Bible translation *bang* in the middle of any

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<sup>40</sup> E. C. Fountain, "A Strategy for Bible Teaching Programmes", unpublished draft paper for conference planning on Bible teaching programmes, [1976?].

<sup>41</sup> G. Giles, "Literacy and Bible Translation in the Bible Teaching Programme", unpublished paper presented at CMML Conference, 1977.

Bible-teaching programme . . . If [people] have the Book, and are able to adequately understand and apply its teachings, they have reached the source, and are as equipped as their missionaries.<sup>42</sup>

In terms of literacy itself, Glenda was convinced that, by helping people to become literate, the missionaries would be developing reading and study skills, and empowering them to have access to the very Word of God.<sup>43</sup> Her view could be seen as a universal approach to non-literate peoples.

Whether literacy is seen as a support ministry to the Bible-teaching programme, or as an integral part of it, the evidence is that there was a high priority given to it. We move on to consider the question, “Why literacy?”

## **2. Why Literacy?**

The scriptures refer to “listening” to the word, not to “reading” the word (James 1:22-23). Paul spoke of the word of God, “which you heard from us” (1 Thess 2:13), and “what you have heard from me, keep” (2 Tim 1:13), and again, “What you have heard from me . . . entrust to reliable men” (2 Tim 2:2). In Romans, faith comes through “hearing the message” (Rom 10:17). The references in scripture to “reading” are usually the public reading of the Word. Timothy was encouraged to devote himself “to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).

There is only one reference to a group of people, the Bereans, who “examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). But, even then, it is unlikely that each person had access to scriptures, and could individually examine them. The venue would have been the synagogue, in which there were scriptures available. The “readers” would have been literate males, over the age of 12, or, possibly, the teachers among them. After the public reading of the relevant scriptures, discussion probably went back and forth, as people grappled with the question under examination, and came to a combined decision.

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<sup>42</sup> Giles, “Literacy and Bible Translation”, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Giles, “Literacy and Bible Translation”, 2-3.

Andrew Walls explains that the early church began within the literary culture of the Graeco-Roman world, in which there was a relatively large literate community. Despite that, the Christian scriptures were intended for oral recital within that literate culture. He states that the public reading of scriptures was a natural continuation of synagogue practice, and that this was normative for the early Christian communities.<sup>44</sup>

The question needs to be asked, then, why did the CMML missionaries expend so much time and energy in teaching people to read? Was it because they, themselves, came from a literate culture, where the personal study of the scriptures is the norm, and, therefore, they assumed that this should be the norm elsewhere? When they entered a non-literate society, did they believe that teaching the people to read was the right thing to do? Did they consider the possibility of alternative methods being more relevant in an oral culture? Did they see literacy as a strategy for contacting and evangelising people, just as medical work, and formal education, was? Or is there a deeper, underlying principle, which motivated them to teach people to read?

Let us look, firstly, at the missionaries themselves, their assumptions and motivation, and the traditions, and history, that formed their worldview. Then, secondly, let us look at the Melanesians, their culture and worldview, and explore whether there could have been some other effective ways of building the church in PNG.

## **A. The Missionaries**

CMML missionaries went to PNG with certain assumptions and expectations. These were shaped, firstly, by their Western cultural background, and, secondly, by their Christian beliefs and practices, which had come down to them through the centuries of Christianity, through the reformation and 18th-century evangelical revivals, and experienced within their own particular denominational setting. This section will explore some of these assumptions and expectations.

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 36-37.

## **Their Assumptions**

First and foremost, all CMML missionaries went to PNG from a literate culture. This does not mean that they were merely able to read and write. Fundamental to a literate culture is the dependence upon, and the authority of, the written word. Information is recorded, and passed on, in written form. Learning is dependent upon seeing, as well as hearing.<sup>45</sup> Written statements, and written consent, have binding power. The recording of minutes of meetings, and constitutions of organisations, are examples of this. Lasting agreements, such as wills, and employment contracts, are made in written form, and written signatures have authority.<sup>46</sup> It was with this background of a literate culture, then, that CMML missionaries went to PNG, with the expectation that their converts needed to become literate. They, themselves, were probably less aware of their own cultural assumptions than they were of Melanesian assumptions!

## **Their Motivation**

In earlier missionary work in Africa and the South Pacific, there were deliberate attempts to “civilise the natives” by dressing them in European clothing, and teaching them to read. However, the emphasis in the developing, and soon-to-be independent, country of PNG, in the 1960s, was more on economic development, and building strong, independent, indigenous churches. Thus, missionaries were motivated to meet the specific needs of the PNG people, as well as carrying out the “great commission”.

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<sup>45</sup> The author, in teaching Maori language in an oral form, according to the philosophy of Te Ataarangi, to a group of European adults in NZ, found that the students needed to have the words written in front of them. Seeing the word was essential to their learning. Some of them seemed unable to hear and remember through purely aural methods.

<sup>46</sup> D. F. McKenzie wrote about the contact between European and Maori cultures in the 1830s and 1840s, and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. He commented on the absurdity of expecting Maori, within a few short years, to have so changed from their oral culture, and to have entered so fully into a literate culture that they were ready “to accept a signature as a sign of full comprehension and legal commitment”. *Oral Culture, Literacy & Print in Early New Zealand: the Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985), 10.



## a. Meeting Needs

One motive for missionaries, in teaching literacy, was to meet the needs of the people. A holistic worldview recognises that the spiritual, physical, social, and emotional aspects of a person's being are all inter-related. Some missionaries engaged in certain activities, because they met perceived "felt needs" among the people. Medical work and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) were two of these. Formal education, catering for children and young people, was another. Non-formal adult education was another activity, especially in the area of literacy. Practical projects, to develop skills in agriculture, building, and other trades, and running small businesses, was yet another. Some CMML missionaries were professionally trained as doctors and nurses, and as teachers. Others were skilled in trades and agriculture. They were involved in meeting some of the felt needs of the people.<sup>47</sup>

With PNG being a late-developing country, the government depended on the network of missions through the country for effective communication, for educational and health work. Without the involvement of Christian missions, the government would not have been able to achieve the level of development that it has to date.

In other parts of the world, the term "illiteracy" has been equated to ignorance, poverty, hunger, disease, paganism, fear, and oppression. David Mason<sup>48</sup> called illiteracy a "contagious malady".<sup>49</sup> He claimed that:

Adult literacy strikes at the grass roots of poverty. It destroys the vicious circle of ignorance-poverty-ignorance by striking at the weakest point of the circle – illiteracy. . . . New nations, as well as old, realise that literacy is a precondition to modernisation. Fighting a war on poverty, without adult literacy, is like fighting a shooting war without bullets.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> K. W. Liddle, "The Task in Perspective", *God at Work in New Guinea* (Palmerston North: GPH Society, [1969], 9, 10.

<sup>48</sup> David Mason was the executive director of Laubach Literacy, Inc., in the 1960s.

<sup>49</sup> David Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion: The Opportunity of Literacy Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, 15.

Mason goes on to say,

If you feed a man, he will be hungry again. If you clothe him, his clothes will wear out. If you heal him, and he returns to his old life, he may get sick again. But teach a man to read, and he can help himself. He can learn how to plant, and grow food. He can learn to earn enough to clothe his family. He can deal with disease, and learn how to help his village, or neighbourhood, to health. . . . One of the most far-reaching, and long-lasting, acts of service, Christians can perform, is to teach the world to read.<sup>51</sup>

## **b. A Bridge for Evangelism**

A second motive for missionaries, in teaching literacy, is to build a bridge for evangelism. This was true for a number of the early CMML missionaries. Pethybridge and McKirdy openly speak of this as a motive in the first section of this paper. This is also the experience of others on the wider world mission scene.

Mason, having talked about breaking the cycle of poverty, also saw literacy as opening people to evangelism. The title of his book, *Reaching the Silent Billion: The Opportunity of Literacy Missions*, is, in itself, a plea for literacy evangelism. His philosophy is, “by teaching an illiterate to read, one opens his heart, wins his love, and makes him good soil for sowing the seed of the Christian gospel”.<sup>52</sup>

Loewen wrote about his experiences with the Choco Indians, in the Darien of Panama, near the Colombian border.<sup>53</sup> His rationale was: “In pre-literate societies, the teaching of reading can serve as a perpetual communications bridge . . . not merely as a point of contact, but also in the development of a relationship between two individuals, which permits and fosters . . . meaningful conversation, and exchange of ideas”.<sup>54</sup> He

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<sup>51</sup> Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Jacob A. Loewen, “Literacy: Bridge in Choco Evangelism”, *Culture and Human Values: Christian and Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), 382.

<sup>54</sup> Loewen, “Bridge in Choco Evangelism”, 378-379.

goes on to describe how this “bridge” worked, and why it was considered a “perpetual” bridge. Many of the Choco Indians had attended Spanish schools, but were never able to master reading. Loewen, and a coworker, taught these same people to read in their own language. One immediate by-product was that they were also able to read Spanish. This program, “each-one-teach-one”, led to literacy for many people, and also became a tool, through which churches had been started.

After the student had completed the seven primers, he received his first reading book. This was a book of simple Bible stories [God’s Little Word] designed to provide the reader with a synopsis of scriptural truth. Reading this “news” from God soon led to many questions, and, before long, the teacher . . . found himself explaining the meaning of the items that had attracted the new reader’s attention.

As soon as one person had learned to read, then the new literate taught another, and introduced “God’s Little Book”, and so perpetuated the “bridge”.<sup>55</sup>

### **c. Reading scriptures is Essential for Nurture of New Christians**

A third motivation for missionaries to teach literacy was to nurture new Christians. This was evident among the CMML missionaries in PNG. Liddle, Thorp, Nicholson, and Smith are four, mentioned earlier in this paper, who specifically stated that literacy was important, so that new Christians could read the scriptures for themselves. Underlying this motive, was their belief that the Bible was central to faith, and that all Christians should have access to it.

Donald McGavran, in speaking of the “illiterate masses”, strongly urges that Christians be taught to read, so that they can read the Bible, as a religious duty. He believes that providing for believers to participate in the Word of God is just as important as providing for them to participate in the Lord’s Supper. He thinks that the Christian masses should become “bible-reading communities”, and that literacy classes should be in church buildings, and closely associated with church programmes. He

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<sup>55</sup> Loewen, “Bridge in Choco Evangelism”, 382-385.

advocates a “sharply-worded doctrine”, where Bible reading is recognised as a normal Christian duty.<sup>56</sup>

Mason, in his promotion of adult literacy education, sees it as essential for building a mature and stable church. He states that, “Because of the centrality of the Bible, a Christian, who cannot read, is a cripple.” According to him, when a church in an educationally-deprived area has a literacy campaign to upgrade its literacy level, it is invigorated; literacy education is a stabilising force in the church; a church with a literate membership is a stable, mature church. He comments that many African converts, who were not literate enough to continue reading their Bibles, drifted back into paganism: “Literacy is a powerful instrument in the preservation and the growth of a Christian outlook on life.”<sup>57</sup>

Paul Culley, in writing about the goal of world mission, discusses the educational objective. Making disciples includes instructing Christians. This is also a part of “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). And thus, “To teach them to read, and give them the Bible in their own language, must have a high priority in the missionary’s responsibility to his people.”<sup>58</sup>

#### **d. Building Churches which can Edify Themselves from scriptures**

A fourth motive for teaching literacy was to build churches, which could edify themselves from the scriptures. Liddle expressed this, when writing about “the kind of churches needed in New Guinea”.<sup>59</sup> We discussed, earlier, that illiteracy was a roadblock, both to the corporate life of the church, and to the individual’s personal devotional life. Liddle also talks about “the need for trained pastor-teachers to feed the flock of God”. He goes on to say, “As the pastor-teachers fulfil their ministries (part of which will be teaching others to read), so the churches will be

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<sup>56</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 266-267.

<sup>57</sup> Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, 19-20.

<sup>58</sup> Paul G. Culley, “The Motives and Goal of World Missions”, *Facing Facts In Modern Missions: a Symposium* (Milton Baker, Raymond Buker, et al; Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 30-31.

<sup>59</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 38-48.

edified, further gifts will be developed, and opportunities be provided for its [sic] exercise.”<sup>60</sup>

Culley, after talking about fulfilling the “educational objective” for new Christians, goes on to apply it to church leadership. He says, “Anything less than strong Christian leaders, able to teach others, is unacceptable as a goal for the missionary church” (Heb 5:12; 6:1). He points out that special attention needs to be given to the spiritual growth of leaders, whom God raises up in each local church. He reminds us of Paul’s word to Timothy that, what he has learned, he must, in turn, commit “to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).<sup>61</sup>

## **Their Evangelical Roots and Heritage**

Much of what CMML missionaries did in PNG had roots, not just in their culture, but also in their evangelical roots and heritage. Their theology, and the way in which it has come to them, right from the New Testament church, through church history, to the reformation and revival movement, to the Brethren Movement today, have all contributed to their beliefs, motives, and missionary methods. A consideration of these, helps us to understand why they put so much emphasis on the reading of scriptures, and, hence, the teaching of literacy.<sup>62</sup>

### **a. Evangelical Theology**

Fundamental to the question under investigation are four aspects of evangelical theology. These include the fact that God reveals Himself to men and women; the Bible is the word of God; the Holy Spirit indwells all believers, bringing about life changes, and gifting them for service in the church; and also the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers”.

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<sup>60</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 44-45.

<sup>61</sup> Culley, “Motives and Goal of World Mission”, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Two books, which have been formative in my understanding for this section, but not necessarily referred to, are: Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education: Theory and Practice in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), and Robert E. Clark, Lin Johnson, and Allyn K. Sloat, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

Firstly, we read, in the Bible, of God talking with our first parents, with Abraham, with Moses, and many others. In Hebrews 1:1, we read that, in the past, God spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets, then he spoke to us through His Son. John's gospel speaks of Jesus Christ being the "Word", which became flesh (John 1:1, 14). God wants to communicate with His people.

Secondly, the Bible is the Word of God. Because God has revealed Himself to His people through the ages, and because the Bible is the record of God's dealing with His people, God reveals Himself through the Bible to us today. The whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about God's plan of salvation, through His Son Jesus Christ. Through reading the scriptures, we come to know the Son, and hence we come to know the Father. Jesus, Himself, said that if we know Him, we know the Father (John 14:6). John, in his first epistle, claims that what he has written about Jesus is his own eyewitness account. He wrote it so that we, too, can share in it (1 John 1:1-4).

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the believer. Jesus, Himself, promised the Holy Spirit to live with, and in, those who follow Him (John 14:16). His role is to teach all things, and to remind us of everything that Jesus said to His disciples (John 14:26). It is the Spirit who brings conviction of sin, who makes known the truth, and brings glory to Christ (John 16:6-10, 13-15). As a person reads the Word of God, it is the Holy Spirit who brings about a change in that person's life. The Holy Spirit also gifts believers for works of service, so that the body of Christ maybe built up (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:11-12). All members of the Christian community, therefore, are expected to use their gifts, and be active in Christian service.

Fourthly, perhaps the greatest implication of "the priesthood of all believers", is that each person is able to relate to God directly. We do not need a priest, because Jesus Christ Himself is our mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Through faith, we have been justified, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1-2). Through Christ, we can enter into the very presence of God (Heb 4:14-16).<sup>63</sup> Another aspect of this

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<sup>63</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 4-5, 1085-1086.

doctrine, is that we are all to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5).<sup>64</sup> These include our bodies (Rom 12:1); our praise (Heb 13:15); doing good, and sharing with others (Heb 13:16); and our prayers (Rev 8:3).

Bebbington, in writing about Evangelicalism in modern Britain, writes about four characteristics, which have been the marks of Evangelical Christianity through the years.<sup>65</sup> These include: “*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross”.<sup>66</sup> These four characteristics are implied in the beliefs just discussed. While emphases have changed over different generations, the characteristics have remained much the same. Bebbington quotes two leading Evangelical scholars of our generation. In 1977, when John Stott was asked the question, “What is an Evangelical?”, he replied, “We Evangelicals are Bible people”. In 1979, J. I. Packer put the supremacy of scripture first in a list of six evangelical fundamentals.<sup>67</sup>

In the course of history, from the birth of Christianity, right up to the period of time of Brethren missionaries in Papua New Guinea, these four aspects of evangelical theology keep recurring. These beliefs underlie the premise that every Christian should have access to the Bible, and, therefore, the Bible should be made available to each new people group, through translation and literacy.

## **b. The Translation Principle in Christian History**

We should note that, whenever scriptures are translated, the assumption is that there will be readers. The readers could be members of a literate class, or of a wider, literate society. Where there are no, or very few, literates, there has been an effort to create a readership, through

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<sup>64</sup> P. E. Hughes, “Priesthood”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 876.

<sup>65</sup> Bebbington distinguishes between an Evangelical (the movement), and evangelical (as a description of certain characteristics).

<sup>66</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

<sup>67</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 4.

the teaching of literacy skills. Translation and literacy have been integrally related.

Walls traces a “translation principle” through Christian history. He begins with the fact that incarnation was a divine act of translation. When God in Christ became man, “divinity was translated into humanity”. Christ became a person in Jewish Palestine. Thus, whenever scriptures are translated into a new language and culture, Christ is incarnated into that culture. Walls claims that “Bible translation aims at releasing the word about Christ . . . so that Christ can live within that context, in the person of His followers”.<sup>68</sup> Thus, when scriptures are translated into Melanesian languages, it is so that Christ will live within Melanesian cultures. However, what is translated needs to be communicated, and this is the issue, which we are investigating.

Christianity was born into a long-established literary culture, with a Mediterranean history. As it spread north, into tribes, which bordered the Roman Empire, among the new Christians, there was “no indigenous literary culture, no large literate community, and no market-orientated book production”.<sup>69</sup> There were different attitudes to translation, as Christianity spread. Two examples show contrasting patterns, but the outcome of their strategies led to a similar phenomenon with regard to literacy.

*Ulfilas* (c311-c380) is credited with translating the Bible into Gothic. But, before he could produce his translation, he had to design an alphabet for Gothic. He then created a literate class within what was, otherwise, an oral culture, in order for the Bible to be read.<sup>70</sup>

Moving westwards, *Patrick of Ireland* (389-461) provided a different pattern. He made no attempt to translate the scriptures into the vernacular, but set about producing a small, literate community, who could read the scriptures in Latin. In so doing, he was establishing a common language medium for scripture and liturgy.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 27-29.

<sup>69</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 37-38.

<sup>71</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 40.



Both these patterns have been evident, over the centuries, in the spread of Christianity. In fact, both of these patterns can be seen in PNG. In the Sepik, where there were many small, isolated groups, each speaking a different language, making the scriptures available in Pidgin, rather than the many vernaculars, follows the “Patrick pattern”. Whereas, with the Huli and Duna tribes, the translation of the scriptures into both Huli and Duna, follows the “Ulfilas pattern”.

However, what is more significant to this paper, is that both patterns originally led to a literate, clerical elite within the church, and to the masses, who could neither read, nor had access to the scriptures, thus setting the stage for the Reformation.

### **c. The Reformation**

A number of key figures before, during, and after the Reformation, believed that the Bible was essential to Christianity, and that all Christians should have access to it. This led them to be involved, either in translating scriptures, or in promoting education of the masses, so that they could read scriptures for themselves, or both.

At the “Dawn of the Reformation”, *John Wycliffe* (1329-1384) declared the right of every Christian to know the Bible. This moved him to the logical conclusion of translating scriptures into English. He lived to see the first complete English translation of the Bible.<sup>72</sup>

*Erasmus* (1467-1536), known as the “Forerunner to the Reformation”, believed every Christian should discern the will of Christ for his or her own practical life, by paying attention to the scriptures. Therefore, all people must have access to the scriptures in their own language. He claimed that the scriptures were fit for “the farmer, the tailor, the mason, prostitutes, pimps, and Turks”.<sup>73</sup> He wanted schools to cater for both the growth of Christian faith in the learner, as well as

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<sup>72</sup> Donald L. Roberts, “John Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation”, *Christian History* 3, (1983), 10-13; Kenneth Scott Latourette: *A History of Christianity* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954), 662-664.

<sup>73</sup> Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 338-339, 342.

developing skills in speaking, writing, and living.<sup>74</sup> While there is no record of Erasmus translating scriptures into the vernacular, the first edition of the New Testament, published in Greek, was his translation.<sup>75</sup>

Known as “Father of the Reformation”, *Martin Luther* (1483-1546) was foremost in wanting the ordinary person to be able to read the Bible. He wanted common people to “feel” the words of scripture “in the heart”. He held a high view of the inspiration of the Bible, calling it “the Holy-Spirit book”. He believed that, in the Bible, a living God confronts His people.<sup>76</sup> Luther was also an advocate of education. He believed that Christians needed education, in order to have access to the scriptures, and that they needed to attain maturity in the scriptures, if his idea of the priesthood of all believers was to succeed.<sup>77</sup> Luther translated both the Old and New Testaments into German, and it became the basis of all other German translations.<sup>78</sup>

*William Tyndale* (1490-1536), known as the “Father of the English Bible”, observed, at first hand, the ignorance of the local clergy, and resolved to make the scriptures available to the common people, even to “a boy that driveth the plough”,<sup>79</sup> though it eventually cost him his life. He set out to translate the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek into English.<sup>80</sup> His New Testament was published in 1525. He also translated parts of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, before his death. His New Testament became the basis for the King James version and the Revised Standard version.<sup>81</sup>

The *development of printing* was a major influence during the 16th century, making possible the widespread ownership of copies of scriptures. Walls comments, “This opened the way for private, individual

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<sup>74</sup> Burgess, *Religious Education*, 45-46.

<sup>75</sup> Tony Lane, “A Flood of Bibles”, *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity* (Tim Dowley, et al, eds, Surry Hills: Anzea Books, 1977), 67.

<sup>76</sup> Timothy George, “Dr Luther’s Theology”, *Christian History* 34 (1992), 19; James M. Kittelson, “The Accidental Revolutionary”, *Christian History* 34 (1992), 17.

<sup>77</sup> Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers*, 384; Burgess, *Religious Education*, 47-48.

<sup>78</sup> Lane, “A Flood of Bibles”, 368.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Lane, “William Tyndale and the English Bible”, *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity* (Tim Dowley, et al, eds, Surry Hills: Anzea Books, 1977), 370.

<sup>80</sup> The Wycliffe Bible (which had been banned since 1408) had been translated from the Latin *Vulgate*, and so was inaccurate.

<sup>81</sup> Lane, “Tyndale and the English Bible”, 370.

study to supplement public reading in the congregation. For many more Christians than formerly, private, rather than public, reading became the principal and most-potent form of encounter with scripture.” This was a major force in the move from an oral to a literary relationship with scripture, and from a communal to an individual one.<sup>82</sup>

#### d. Evangelical Revivals and the Modern Missionary Movement

After a religious low in the later 17th century, Christianity was rejuvenated in the 18th century, by outbreaks of evangelical revivals, which started in Germany, and spread to Scandinavia, and Switzerland, and were also found in Britain and North America.<sup>83</sup>

*John Wesley* (1703-1791), had the experience of conversion on 24 May, 1738. The rest of his life was devoted to evangelism, and led to the Wesleyan Movement, and Methodist Revival.<sup>84</sup> According to Armstrong, the Methodist Revival flourished at the same time as the Industrial Revolution. Within this environment, it is argued that Wesley brought literacy to the lower orders, helping them to adjust to the problems of working in industry, and bringing them to a political consciousness.<sup>85</sup>

The *Modern Missionary Movement* was also born out of the 18th-century evangelical revivals.<sup>86</sup> A number of different mission societies were formed. The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), formed in 1792, was the first of many. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was formed in 1795, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799, and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804, just to mention a few.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 40-41.

<sup>83</sup> Robert D. Linder: “Introduction: The Christian Centuries”, *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity* (Tim Dowley, et al, eds, Surry Hills: Anzea Books, 1977), xviii.

<sup>84</sup> F. L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1446.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodists and Society 1700-1850* (London: University of London Press, 1973), 84.

<sup>86</sup> Linder, “The Christian Centuries”, xx.

<sup>87</sup> Linder, “The Christian Centuries”, xx;

*William Carey* (1761-1834), a Baptist missionary, from England, has been called the “Father of Modern Evangelical Missions”. He sailed to India in 1793, and spent the rest of his life there. He engaged in intensive study of oriental languages, and translated the New Testament into Bengali. He was also instrumental in a number of other translations.<sup>88</sup> It should be noted, however, that Carey worked with an already-literate culture, and, so, had a readership for his translations.

With this missionary movement, Christianity took hold in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the South Pacific, and some areas of Asia. The translation principle, applied repeatedly, as the Christian faith encountered new cultures. However, instead of creating literate classes, the emphasis changed to mass readership, because of the capacity to provide copies of scriptures in large numbers.<sup>89</sup>

#### **e. The Brethren Movement**

The other major factor, influencing the thinking of CMML missionaries in PNG, in the 1950s-1960s, is their Brethren background. Their emphasis on empowering all Christians to have access to the Bible is deeply rooted in their Brethren heritage.

The Brethren Movement was a latecomer to the evangelical revivals of the 18th century, yet followed in the footsteps of a long line of reformers. Rowdon, in describing the origins of the Brethren, between 1825 and 1850, states, “It was in Dublin that the first tentative steps were taken towards establishing a movement that looked to the Bible, and the Bible alone, for the solution of the ecclesiastical and religious problems of the day.”<sup>90</sup> Coad writes about the centrality of the Bible to some of the founders of the Brethren Movement: “The Bible . . . was at the heart of Grove’s movement of the soul. Darby, too, spoke of how, in the days after his riding accident near Dublin, the scriptures had gained ‘complete

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<sup>88</sup> Linder, “The Christian Centuries”, xx; also D. W. Bebbington, “William Carey”, *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity* (Tim Dowley, et al, eds, Surry Hills: Anzea Books, 1977), 548.

<sup>89</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 41-42.

<sup>90</sup> Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1925-1850* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1967), 37.

ascendency' over him. To the Bible, Müller and Craik also had gone, at each crisis in their church, and personal lives. In going back to the Bible for their inspiration and guidance, then, the Brethren were treading in the same path as a long line of illustrious reformers."<sup>91</sup>

The Brethren Movement arose in an endeavour to "recapture the outlook and beliefs of the church in its earliest days". It emerged in Britain, Switzerland, Germany, and other countries on the continent of Europe, at about the same time.<sup>92</sup> The founders wanted their communion service to be a means of fellowship, irrespective of denomination, expressing the priesthood of all believers.<sup>93</sup>

The most-distinctive characteristic of the Brethren is that the ministry and gifts of the church are distributed to all believers. This is most clearly demonstrated in the worship and communion service, which is led by different members of the congregation. The Brethren have drawn attention to the church, as the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, and equipped with spiritual gifts, distributed among the members.<sup>94</sup>

W. E. Vine, a classical scholar of note, and a Brethren theologian, listed nine characteristics of a "local church, formed according to the scriptures".<sup>95</sup> Four of these relate to our discussion. He stated that a local church is, first of all, "a company of believers, where Jesus Christ is acknowledged as Lord".<sup>96</sup> Secondly, the Holy Spirit presides over, and gives direction, to the church.<sup>97</sup> The third is the authority of the Word of God over any creed, or set of doctrines, or centralised authority.<sup>98</sup> The fourth characteristic is the recognition of the priesthood of all believers, in contrast to "the appointment of an order of human priests, acting in,

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<sup>91</sup> F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1968), 248.

<sup>92</sup> Harold H. Rowdon, "The Brethren", *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity* (Tim Dowley, et al, eds, Surry Hills: Anzea Books, 1977), 520.

<sup>93</sup> Rowdon, "The Brethren", 520.

<sup>94</sup> Rowdon, "The Brethren", 520-521.

<sup>95</sup> W. E. Vine, *The Church and the Churches* (Kilmarnock: John Ritchie, 3rd edn, 1964), 127.

<sup>96</sup> Vine, *The Church*, 127

<sup>97</sup> Vine, *The Church*, 127-128.

<sup>98</sup> Vine, *The Church*, 128.

and on behalf of, the church”.<sup>99</sup> From this, comes the emphasis on the laity participating in all aspects of church life.

As the result of migration, and a strong missionary emphasis, Brethren are now found in most parts of the world. New Zealand is just one country where Brethren are relatively numerous.<sup>100</sup> The NZ Brethren have made a major contribution to overseas mission, and have sent missionaries to many parts of the globe.<sup>101</sup> The opening up of PNG after the Second World War became a catalyst for renewed missionary endeavour.<sup>102</sup> Between 1951 and 1995, about 245 NZ Brethren were “commended” to work in PNG.<sup>103</sup>

Among the CMML missionaries, who went to PNG in the 1950s and early 1960s, were some, who had read widely, who were prepared to think through strategies, which would be appropriate in PNG, and who understood that New Testament principles needed to be applied in different ways to different cultures. They were committed to the dynamic principles, on which the Brethren Movement began, rather than to what it had become in many places. Their thinking was influenced by reports of Brethren conferences in England, where New Testament church principles were being reconsidered in relation to today’s society.<sup>104</sup> To help their missionary colleagues better understand some of the issues involved in PNG, they prepared discussion papers for their annual

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<sup>99</sup> Vine, *The Church*, 128-129.

<sup>100</sup> At the International Brethren Conference on Mission in Rome, in June 1996, there were representatives from 52 countries. The author attended this conference, along with her husband, who was one of the plenary speakers.

<sup>101</sup> Brethren missionaries, who have gone from NZ to other countries are recorded in L. A. Marsh, *In His Name* (1974), and also L. A. Marsh, and Harry D. Erlam, *In His Name* (1987). Both need to be referred to, because the 1987 edition does not include missionaries who had completed their overseas service prior to the publishing of the 1974 edition.

<sup>102</sup> George Trew, *Looking Back/Forging Ahead: A Century of Participation in Overseas Mission by New Zealand Brethren Assemblies* (Palmerston North: Missionary Services NZ, 1996), 16.

<sup>103</sup> Trew, *Looking Back/Forging Ahead*, 124-125.

<sup>104</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 28.

conferences. The book *God at Work in New Guinea* reflects much of their thinking at the time.<sup>105</sup>

## B. The Melanesians

The people, among whom the CMML missionaries first started working, belonged to a non-literate culture. I would like to distinguish here between the terms “non-literate” and “illiterate”. A non-literate person is a member of an oral society, which has highly developed forms of communication, not dependent upon the written word.<sup>106</sup> Information is passed on, through storytelling, and other oral means; education is through the ear; listening and memorisation skills are highly developed; memory and oratory skills are far more important than reading skills; remembered facts, rather than written, are important facts; decisions are by oral consensus, rather than by motions recorded in minutes; and lasting agreements are made in other than written form.<sup>107</sup>

An illiterate person, by contrast, is a member of a literate society, in which literacy is a basic life skill. It is within this context that one might equate illiteracy to ignorance and poverty, as Mason does in his book.<sup>108</sup> To describe all people, who are unable to read, as illiterate, is to show one’s ignorance about oral cultures.

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<sup>105</sup> *God at Work in New Guinea* was published in 1969, as an outcome of a number of weekend seminars in NZ, led by Kay Liddle, Max Tuck, John Hitchen, and Lewis Larking.

<sup>106</sup> An example of this is the New Zealand Maori. Their art forms – carvings, rafter patterns, and plaited wall panels – all communicate messages about their history and worldview. Their history is recited in genealogies, and in traditional prayers, and chanted in traditional songs. Their beliefs and values are passed on through their myths and legends, and lived out in the communal gatherings on the Marae. Their values and words of wisdom are also passed on through their many proverbs.

<sup>107</sup> For discussion on oral societies, see McKenzie, *Oral Culture*, 9-10, 46; also Peter J. Lineham, *Bible and Society: A Sesquicentennial History of the Bible Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bible Society in NZ, 1996), 14-16; Kevin G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions! A Manual for Cross-Cultural Christians* (Brisbane: Harvest Publications, 1986), 212-213; Lynette Bay, “Communicating the gospel in an African Context to the Illiterate and Semi-literate People”, unpublished paper for BCNZ, 1995, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, 10.

## **Their Needs**

Melanesian “needs” can be seen from two perspectives. The needs, as we perceive them, are what Hovey calls the “selling points” of literacy – letter writing, handling official business, keeping abreast of government politics, and development.<sup>109</sup> However, from a Melanesian perspective, these “needs” can be fulfilled, quite satisfactorily, by having just one literate member per family, or even per village, in smaller communities. Therefore, few adults are sufficiently motivated to learn and maintain literacy skills.<sup>110</sup>

The missionary believes that the people “need” to be able to read the scriptures. Shaw, himself a Bible translator, says, “part of every Bible translation project includes a concerted effort to teach people to read and write their own language. The motivation is to have readers for the translated scriptures. From a people’s perspective, however, there is far less motivation, as most societies can manage quite happily with less than 15% of the population literate.”<sup>111</sup>

## **Their motivation**

It often appeared to missionaries that Melanesians were motivated to accept Christianity, and other benefits brought by Europeans, in order to obtain the material possessions, and “power”, that Europeans seemed to have.<sup>112</sup>

Whiteman<sup>113</sup> wrote, “To many Melanesians, it was the European’s ability to read and write that seemed to be the key that unlocked the

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<sup>109</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 214

<sup>110</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 214.

<sup>111</sup> R. Daniel Shaw, *Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and Other Communication Tasks* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1988), 188.

<sup>112</sup> The problem of cargo cults was discussed at the CMML conference in 1962, and is recorded in *Treasury* (Sept 1962), 315. Max Tuck wrote about his experience, and understanding, of a cargo cult in the Sibilanga area in *Treasury* (Jan 1966), 28-29.

<sup>113</sup> Darrell Whiteman was a Christian anthropologist, working in PNG, and based at the Melanesian Institute, in Goroka, PNG, when the author and her husband met him.



secret to his vast stores of material well-being.”<sup>114</sup> This was not restricted to PNG. Parsonson, in writing about the literate revolution in Polynesia, says “The Polynesians had plainly believed that the art of reading and writing was the real source, not merely the technological capacity, of the European, but also of his military and political strength, his *mana*, and that they need only master these skills to secure a like pre-eminence.”<sup>115</sup>

Much has been written about “cargo cults” in Melanesia.<sup>116</sup> Walls explains “cargo cults” to be adjustment movements, as Melanesians have attempted to adjust their worldview to incorporate all the new phenomena they have encountered since the Second World War.<sup>117</sup>

However, many Melanesians were motivated by a real desire to know God and His Word. Shaw, in discussing motivation for people to learn literacy, thinks that, ideally, a people’s response to the gospel should come first. Out of this response, comes a desire to have access to God’s Word, and, thus, the need for vernacular scriptures. This, in turn, creates a need to be able to read, and people want to learn. This is the stage, according to Shaw, that literacy should be introduced, and in such a way that the people can use it, and adapt it as their own.<sup>118</sup>

*James Agiru*, from Kundugu, in the Southern Highlands of PNG, in telling his testimony, demonstrated this principle at work. He wanted to be free from worshipping the spirits, and so responded to the Christian message, when missionaries came to his valley.<sup>119</sup> After that, he learned to read and write, went away for Bible training, and came back to his own area. He has been a significant Christian leader in the Koroba area for many years.

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<sup>114</sup> Darrell Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1983), 189.

<sup>115</sup> G. S. Parsonson: “The Literate Revolution in Polynesia”, *The Journal of Pacific History* 11 (1967), 44.

<sup>116</sup> Recent works include: Carl Loeliger and Garry Trompf, eds, *New Religious Movements in Melanesia* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1985); Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today, Point 2-4* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1983-1984).

<sup>117</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 136.

<sup>118</sup> Shaw, *Transculturation*, 189.

<sup>119</sup> James Agiru, taped interview, May 1997 (translated from Pidgin by JEAF).

Another person, who demonstrated this principle, was *Elara Alendo*, from the Koroba valley in the Southern Highlands of PNG. Elara had risen to be a *big man*, or traditional leader, in his community, through his prowess as a *fight leader*, and his subsequent economic partnerships.<sup>120</sup> In 1963, he experienced the healing power of God's Spirit, and learned that God was more powerful than all the spirits.<sup>121</sup> He led his people into following Jesus, and remained a key Christian leader in the valley, until his death, 30 years later. He recognised the need to have access to God's Word, and, therefore, the need for literacy. While he, himself, never learned to read, he sponsored, and supported, the missionaries in their endeavours, and encouraged younger people to learn to read, and to contribute to church life through it. This illustrates Shaw's point that, when a people's response to the gospel comes first, out of it comes the desire to learn to read, in order to have access to God's Word.

Whatever the initial motivation may have been to learn to read, or to accept Christianity, the outcome was that many did learn to read the scriptures, and came to faith in Jesus Christ.

## Meaningful Communication in Oral Cultures

It has already been noted that oral societies have highly-developed forms of communication, other than the written word. Shaw claims that "oral communication forms . . . are no less effective, as a means to present the gospel. In fact, the scriptures, themselves, were, for much of their history, communicated orally, using poetry, song, and dance, to involve the people, who received the message."<sup>122</sup> He goes on to say, "We need to explore relevant communication styles, and note how the gospel can be presented, so that it appears appropriate."<sup>123</sup>

Let us explore some, which are appropriate to Melanesia.

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<sup>120</sup> For further discussion on *big-man* traditional leadership, see M. John Paul Chao, "Leadership", *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, Point 5* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984), 134-135.

<sup>121</sup> Elara's story is recorded by Ossie Fountain in "The Religious Experience of the Koroba Huli", *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 2 (1986), 190-191.

<sup>122</sup> Shaw, *Transculturation*, 188.

<sup>123</sup> Shaw, *Transculturation*, 188.

## a. Storytelling

Some CMML missionaries made use of storytelling, in the early stages, as a means to communicate the Christian gospel. Liddle recalls giving pre-evangelistic teaching, by means of “a matrix of Bible stories, on which faith would be born”.<sup>124</sup> In drawing up the aims for the first full-time Bible school, the learning outcomes included, “to be able to teach Bible stories consecutively for baptismal instruction”.<sup>125</sup> The curriculum was planned “to cover 60 significant [Old Testament] stories . . . to give a clear chronological outline of Bible history”, and “to present each story as an example of “the Bible storytelling method” of preaching”.<sup>126</sup>

Hovey<sup>127</sup> experimented in training non-literate church leaders, using oral skills. He writes about the place of stories, myths, and legends in PNG culture. He explains that the clan stories are equivalent to “the title deeds” to property, such as land rights, clan name, and access to ancestors. They also contain the village regulations for marriage, and other relationships, and help the people to make sense of the world around them. And so, these stories record, in oral form, the philosophy of the culture. Hovey goes on to talk about the role of the person, who knows the stories: “A man, who knows the stories, is considered to be very important, while the man, who doesn’t know the background stories of a particular matter, would never consider taking a leading role in the exercise of that matter.”<sup>128</sup>

The implication of this, according to Hovey, is that the older men, who would normally take a leading role in their community, “would feel terribly ashamed in taking a leadership role in [church] services unless they knew the Bible stories that would give them the necessary background”.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, it was important, within his training programme, to make Bible stories a major part of the curriculum. Within the teaching of Bible stories, he built in other techniques, which enabled

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<sup>124</sup> Liddle, “Tribalism to Nationhood”, 90-92.

<sup>125</sup> CMML Conference minutes, July 1966, 3.

<sup>126</sup> CMML Conference minutes, July 1966, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Kevin Hovey has been working with the Assemblies of God Mission on the Sepik River since 1968.

<sup>128</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 215-216.

<sup>129</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 216.

the essential details to be retained, and biblical significance to be understood, and the communication culturally relevant.<sup>130</sup>

## **b. Use of Pictures<sup>131</sup>**

A method used by Dennis Thorp at Yebil was “picture stories”. He developed a set of pictures which illustrated a story and which could be easily copied. During the week the students in the literacy-Bible school were taught and practised the story, then they went out and passed it on in the same way to the village people.<sup>132</sup> Bev Sundgren, who observed this process, spoke of Dennis having a “very fascinating way of telling stories and illustrates them well on the blackboard. They are simple yet get across great truths.”<sup>133</sup>

Bruce Cook spent five months in 1975 in PNG conducting field research in picture communication. He set out to answer the question, “What kinds of pictures communicate most effectively with people who have little or no picture experience?”<sup>134</sup> We can summarise his finding by saying: the style of picture is important for people who cannot read, pictures need to be culturally relevant; and pictures of people, colour, and realistic art are most easily understood in non-literate cultures.<sup>135</sup>

## **c. Repetition and Memorisation**

At Green River, the Liddles did much of the early teaching by catechism, to ensure that the essentials of the faith were learned and memorised. “Converts, many of whom could not read, were taught in

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<sup>130</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 216-217.

<sup>131</sup> The author, and her husband, used simple blackboard drawings in a Marriage and Family Life seminar in the early 1980s. The response of the participants was, “These pictures are speaking to us. We want you to put them in a book, so that we can use them.” The outcome was a book, *Skulim ol long Marit*, with text on one page and picture on the facing page, for village pastors to use with non-literates (Wewak: Christian Books Melanesia, 1985).

<sup>132</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 21.

<sup>133</sup> Sundgren, *Treasury* (Oct, 1962), 380.

<sup>134</sup> Bruce L. Cook, *Understanding Pictures in Papua New Guinea* (Elgin: David C. Cook Foundation, 1981), 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> Cook, *Understanding Pictures*, 79-85.

catechism classes, memorising questions and answers about the nature and works of God, the great good Spirit, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>136</sup>

Hovey wrote of his experience of training non-literate leaders by getting them to memorise the Shorter Catechism in Pidgin. This provided them with a basic theology, and enabled them to repel false teaching.<sup>137</sup>

McGavran writes of caring for non-literate people movements. He advocates the frequent use of memorised passages in worship. He claims that this, then, becomes part of the “spiritual equipment” of a Christian. “He can quote it at any time, night or day. He leans on it in times of stress, and teaches it to new converts. . . . Village Christians . . . rejoice in its familiarity, comfort, and certainty.”<sup>138</sup>

Even when literacy has been taught, in an oral culture, the ability to read words may not indicate that a person is effectively literate. *McKenzie*, in writing about the Maori, claims that the teaching of elementary reading is “primarily oral/aural, not visual, because it involves the pronouncing and repetition of letters, syllables, and words (a practice reinforced, where there are few books, fewer texts, and group teaching). We can appreciate how oral repetition from memory might masquerade as reading; and the Maori – used to an oral tradition – had a most retentive memory.”<sup>139</sup>

#### **d. Listening**

One characteristic of oral cultures is that listening skills are highly developed. Sir Apirana Ngata, an outstanding Maori leader in the early 20th century, said that his own people still preferred to hear things read to them, because that is what they were used to. He said that, in his boyhood days, for every one who owned a copy of the scriptures or

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<sup>136</sup> Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, 28.

<sup>137</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 219-220

<sup>138</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 326-327.

<sup>139</sup> McKenzie, *Oral Culture*, 17.

prayer book, there were 50 or more content to listen to, and memorise, the words, which were read to them.<sup>140</sup>

*Gospel Recordings* (GR) was an organisation, whose ministry depended on the listening skills of non-literate people. GR aimed to record the gospel in as many different languages as possible, using native speakers. The recordings were then made available on record or cassette for people to listen to. In 1969, GR teams worked in the Nuku area, where there were about 20 different languages, enabling people to hear the gospel in their own language.<sup>141</sup>

In a personal testimony, James Agiru, from Kundugu, related how, in 1959, he went and listened to a “black thing that went round and round, and had a voice, and talked”. As he watched and listened he heard the voice saying, “You shall not worship the spirits”, and “There is only one God”. He returned often to hear more. By the time the CMML missionaries went to Koroba in 1962, he was ready to follow God’s way.<sup>142</sup>

### e. Group Devotions

Another characteristic of oral cultures, including Christian communities in New Testament times, is that many activities are communal, rather than individual. This is true of devotions. Liddle described the development of this practice in some areas of PNG: “People meet daily . . . for devotions. They sing, pray, memorise scripture, and listen to the . . . Bible story, told from memory. If someone is literate the scriptures will be read. This practice of group devotions falls naturally into the indigenous mould of group activity, and will, no doubt, continue and develop in the rural communities.”<sup>143</sup>

McGavran advocates daily worship after the evening meal as being highly beneficial for non-literates living in villages. He believes that “regular evening worship for the whole new Christian community . . . is

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<sup>140</sup> McKenzie, *Oral Culture*, 18.

<sup>141</sup> Marsh, *In His Name*, 341.

<sup>142</sup> James Agiru, taped interview, May 1997.

<sup>143</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 44.

not only feasible, but comes to be a cherished experience, and is influential in developing true Christian character”.<sup>144</sup>

#### **f. Training Programmes for Traditional Leaders**

Hovey has some interesting insights into training respected community leaders for leadership the church. He explains that a leadership-training programme for men, who are already recognised as leaders in their village, or community, is training leaders to meet the immediate needs. Because such men are mostly non-literate, training courses should be based on non-literate communication skills. Such training programmes recognise and respect the traditional culture.<sup>145</sup> There is a danger in having training programmes based on literacy only. They train younger men who may, one day, become leaders. They do not yet have the respect of the community as a whole, and so, churches are attended largely by women and children.<sup>146</sup>

Related to this, is the need to recognise traditional values. Hovey explains that, within Melanesian culture, traditional legends and myths are at the very core of the belief and value system. Likewise, familiar communication forms and language are at the heart of their culture. Thus, when a new belief-and-value system is introduced, based on a new form of communication, namely literacy, there is so much that is new that it threatens the very existence of that society. This may contribute to the rejection of Christianity by the older generation, and village leaders, or to the alienation of those same leaders from the church.<sup>147</sup>

I have not explored all the different ways in which people in oral cultures learn. The place of drama and music, for example, has not been investigated. The role of “events” in an event-orientated society has not been discussed. Hovey experimented in the East Sepik with what he called “the stick which talks”, or the genealogy stick, to which the older people could immediately relate.<sup>148</sup> Bruce Olsen, in Colombia, witnessed

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<sup>144</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 326-327.

<sup>145</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 209-210.

<sup>146</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 209-210.

<sup>147</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 213.

<sup>148</sup> Hovey, *Read the Instructions!* 156-157.

the Motilone presenting the gospel through a “song duel”, through which God spoke, and the hearers turned to Christ.<sup>149</sup> The methods investigated are those which CMML missionaries used. While there was a big drive on literacy, there is evidence that some used oral methods of communication and teaching.

### **3. The Role of Literacy in Establishing Churches**

Finally, let us evaluate the role of literacy in establishing indigenous churches in PNG. Was this an effective strategy? If CMML missionaries worked within non-literate societies, should they have concentrated more on oral methods of teaching? What is the outcome today?

#### **A. Evaluating Missionary Strategies**

Let us look first at the strategies missionaries used in the 1960s, and see whether they were effective. First, while teaching adult literacy may have met some immediate social needs, it did not keep pace with other factors in the community, and so the needs still exist. On a national scale, the level of literacy in PNG in 1997 stood at about 45% of the adult population.<sup>150</sup> In many of the rural areas, it is much lower. There has been formal education over the years, but it has not been universal. Thus, many young people, even in the 1990s, are reaching adulthood illiterate, contributing to the low level of literacy.

Secondly, using literacy as a bridge for evangelism, was successful. According to Thorp, “it worked”. Through his literacy-Bible school, young men came to Christian faith. They, in turn, went back to their own areas, and taught their own people, many of whom came to faith.<sup>151</sup> McKirdy also reported a number of people, who came to faith through teacher-evangelists.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Shaw, *Transculturation*, 188.

<sup>150</sup> GPH Society, *New Zealand Assembly Missionary Prayer Handbook 1998* (Palmerston North: GPH Society, 1998).

<sup>151</sup> Thorp, *Treasury* (Aug 1966), 29.

<sup>152</sup> McKirdy, *Treasury* (Jan 1964), 23.



Thirdly the number of rural Christians who, as a result of literacy alone, became sufficiently literate to read the Bible for themselves, and have a daily “quiet-time” is debatable. It actually takes a high level of comprehension to interact with the written word. According to Kraft, learning “to carry on a conversation with a book” is a difficult skill to learn, and many do not develop it.<sup>153</sup> While this may have been a motivating force, and a goal of literacy, the real value for nurturing may have been in the process, rather than in the end result. Literacy learning was done in classes as a group activity. The students met together with their teachers daily, with devotions as part of the programme.

Of much greater influence, in enabling people to read the Bible, are the training programmes, which they attended, after learning to read. The majority of people we know of who are literate, and are able to derive benefit for themselves through reading the Bible, are those who have attended one of the Bible schools for a time. This has led to consolidation of literacy skills, as well as a familiarity with the scriptures.<sup>154</sup>

Fourthly, in order to build churches, which could edify themselves from scriptures, recognition was given in the 1960s that, contrary to the practice of the Brethren at that time, trained pastor-teachers were needed to build up the church, and “feed the flock of God”.<sup>155</sup> At Koroba, nine young, literate couples were selected, in consultation with the church elders, and sent to the Huli-language Bible school at Tari. They returned home, and began working with the Koroba churches in 1969, with the support of the elders, and have been the backbone of the church over the years. The fact that the traditional leaders were involved in the selection, and appointment, of these couples meant that the decision was theirs, and that their leadership was being respected. The young men and their wives were still very much part of the traditional culture, and worked within its parameters, and in cooperation with the elders. When revival swept through the valley in 1975-1976, it was this group of men, who, with the

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<sup>153</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity and Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 263.

<sup>154</sup> At Yimbrasi Bible School, which started up in 1973, emphasis was placed on consolidating literacy skills. The students received Bible teaching, in the form of reading, printing, and comprehension, using the Bible as their text book. Bob Davis, “Bible School at Yimbrasi, PNG” *Treasury* (Jan/Feb 1980), 45.

<sup>155</sup> Liddle, “Churches Needed in New Guinea”, 45.

knowledge of their own culture and people, on the one hand, and access to the Bible on the other, were able to guide the churches, and give corrective teaching where needed. The early literacy teaching, followed by consolidation of literacy skills through Bible training, yet with recognition and respect of the traditional leaders, ensured that the churches were able to “edify themselves from the scriptures”.

## **B. The Role of Literacy in the Koroba Churches**

What role does literacy now have in the Christian Brethren Churches (CBC)?<sup>156</sup> To answer this question, let us look at the experience of the Huli churches in the Koroba Valley.<sup>157</sup>

### **Establishing Indigenous Churches**

The pioneer missionary in this area was Kay Liddle. Some of the strategies, which he initiated, set the patterns for church practice. The Huli tribe was a non-literate society. Kay used oral methods of communication and teaching to share the gospel with them. By doing this, he included leaders of the community, some of whom became leaders in the church.

When the churches were first established in the valley, a weekly preachers’ class was put in place to enable non-literate men to participate in the teaching programme. Men came in from the various churches to hear and discuss the message, and learn the memory verse, then went back and shared that same message on Sunday.

Elara, who had come to know God through the ministry of Kay, and had led his people into Christianity, was not only a key community leader, but he also became a wise Christian leader. After the church in

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<sup>156</sup> The Christian Brethren Churches (CBC) are the group of churches established by CMML missionaries. In 1969, there were 75 churches. Almost 30 years later, there were 346 churches, according to the statistics held by the CBC Coordinating Committee, in March, 1998.

<sup>157</sup> The author, and her husband, worked with the Huli churches from 1971 to 1984, then visited back in 1990 and 1997. Many of the observations made in this section are from an “observer-participant” status.

his area was established, Elara was selected by his own people to be one of the elders in his church. He remained non-literate, but regularly attended the weekly “preachers’ class” through the years, and frequently exhorted the Christians in Sunday services. He mentored younger, literate men, and encouraged them preach. When our own son asked to be baptised in 1983, it was Elara who counselled him (through an interpreter).

## **The Role of Literacy in the Church**

By the 1970s, teaching of vernacular literacy was well established. Literacy had become a ministry of the churches in the community. Classes were held several times a week, and were open to the wider community. It became a group activity for people who traditionally worked together.

Literacy teaching became a testing ground for other ministries. It was mainly young men who became literacy teachers. The elders would observe their Christian life and commitment, and, on that basis, recommend them for Bible training.

Within church services, there was accommodation of the new skills offered by literacy. In the communion service, for example, the older, non-literate men dispensed the emblems with great solemnity. Yet they invariably asked a literate person to read the Bible verses relating to the emblems. In the teaching service, they would look around and invite a literate person to read the scriptures, and to give the Bible message. But when there was no suitable literate person there, a non-literate elder would give the message he had heard at the Friday preachers’ class, or tell a Bible story, and draw some applications from it. Church services remained largely oral in nature.

The role of group devotions was discussed earlier in this paper. This was very much a characteristic of church life at Koroba: an extended family grouping, a clan, a local community, meeting together in the evening (and sometimes in the morning), to sing, pray, give testimonies, and share Bible verses. If there was a literate person present, they would have opportunity to read God’s Word. Another practice, frequently

observed while waiting for a service to begin, was the women sitting in small groups, reading scriptures, or hymnbooks, together.

The Huli churches functioned basically within traditional and oral patterns, yet incorporated literacy into church life, in a way which suited them, and which did not threaten the fabric of their society. The older, non-literate leaders were respected. They, in turn, were open to accepting innovation, and they mentored younger, literate men. They used literacy to serve the needs of the church, rather than allowing it to dominate, or become separate, from the church.

Finally, let us meet Samuel Angalu. He is currently the Executive Office of the Plantation Fellowships Ministries in the Western Highlands. He trained as a Pidgin literacy teacher at Koroba in 1980. Now he is a literacy advisor to three provinces in the Highlands. This includes 12 districts, 114 literacy teachers, and 50 schools. Samuel's role is to provide advice, guidance, ideas, and technical assistance. Samuel believes that literacy is essential to the growth of the church. He claims that when literacy declines, church life declines. When literacy grows, church life grows.<sup>158</sup> He is committed to literacy as an ongoing church ministry.

## **Conclusion**

The teaching of literacy was an integral part of the strategy of the CMML missionaries working in PNG in the 1960s. There were some educationists, who specialised in adult literacy, and who developed primers, trained literacy teachers, and coordinated literacy programmes. They set up a literacy programme, which was accepted nationwide in PNG, and continues today in the 1990s. They did this, in their professional capacity, to meet the ongoing social and educational needs of non-literate adults within rural communities of a developing nation, just as schoolteachers engaged in education, and doctors and nurses engaged in medical work.

However, many of those who taught literacy in the early years, did so in their capacity as pioneer missionaries, and church planters. They

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<sup>158</sup> Samuel Angalu, taped interview, April 1997.

used it as a strategy for contacting and evangelising people, and for discipling and nurturing new Christians. Literacy permeated the various levels of Bible teaching, from pre-evangelism to the training of pastor-teachers.

Much of this paper has gone into investigating the question, “Why literacy?” An examination of the motivation, and the evangelical heritage of the CMML missionaries, has shown us that literacy has not been an end point in itself, but a means to an end. The goal has not been, purely, to achieve a level of fluency in literacy skills to equip the learners to participate within a literate society.

One factor, which has become obvious, is that translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, and teaching of literacy, go hand-in-hand. Those who translate scriptures, do so for a particular audience. If there are no readers in that audience, then their efforts are in vain. The same motivation for translating scriptures applies to teaching literacy. Thus, SIL, in teaching linguistics to missionaries, also gives training in teaching literacy. Glenda Giles, who translated the Duna New Testament, emphasised that *both* translation *and* literacy were integral to any Bible-teaching programme within PNG. However, like literacy teaching, Bible translation is not an end in itself. It is also a means to an end.

The goal of both is making the Bible accessible to the people. Many missionaries aimed at empowering Christians to read the Bible for themselves. Churches, able to edify themselves from the scriptures, was a desirable end point. Leading figures through Christian history, such as Wycliffe, Erasmus, Luther, and Tyndale, have all worked towards making the Bible available, and accessible, to the common people. McGavran, Mason, and Culley, all emphasise the centrality of the Bible in modern mission, and the importance for people to have it in their own hands, and to be able to read it. Leading Evangelical scholars in our times, such as John Stott and J. I. Packer, rank the centrality of the Bible foremost over other evangelical characteristics. The founders of the Brethren Movement, likewise, put top priority on the centrality of the Bible. Therefore, the more fundamental question is, “Why the Bible?”

The centrality of the Bible stems from the evangelical belief that the Bible is *the Word of God*. Through the Bible, God reveals Himself, and His will, to His people. His plan of salvation, through His Son, Jesus Christ, is contained in the Bible. Our theology, our Christian ethics and values, along with many of our church practices, are derived from the Bible. The Holy Spirit illumines spiritual truths, as we meditate upon its words. The Bible is also life changing. Walls talks about the translation principle, which releases the word about Christ to the people, so that He might life within the lives of His followers, within that environment. As scriptures are translated into a new language, and the people of that language have access to the translated scriptures, so Christ is incarnate in their culture. Thus, when people are able to read the Bible for themselves, they have the resources to make the Christian faith their own, and to grow to spiritual maturity.

The Bible also gives guidance for establishing churches. Reference has been made throughout this paper to establishing *indigenous* churches. When we speak of *indigenous* churches, we are not talking about imported Western church patterns, but about those, which reflect the culture, thought patterns, and modes of expression, of Melanesian peoples. CMML missionaries grappled with this question. Some believed that the New Testament gave a specific pattern to follow, and that their home churches followed that pattern. Therefore, there was biblical justification for importing that pattern from “home”. Others recognised that the New Testament contains principles, which apply differently in different cultures. They believed that it was important for Melanesian Christians to have access to the Bible, because, as they grew spiritually, it was for them to decide how to apply these principles in such a way that their churches would be both true to scripture, and culturally relevant.

To CMML missionaries in PNG, the obvious way for the people to have access to scriptures, once they were available, was for them to learn to read. They, themselves, came from a literate culture, where everyone has a basic education. Within this literate, Christian culture, it is assumed that everyone is able to read the Bible. Not only that, but Western culture puts a high value on personal autonomy, and so, it is expected that each would have their own personal daily quiet time. So, the missionaries went to PNG with the expectation that their converts would also have

their own personal quiet time. However, a high level of comprehension is required for people to read, and interact with, the text in a book. Completing a set of readers or primers does not automatically make people competent to read and comprehend scriptures. Further training, such as a Bible school course, is necessary to consolidate literacy skills, and improve comprehension.

In contrast, the Melanesian people were part of a non-literate, communal society. Some missionaries were sufficiently alert to recognise that there were oral ways of communicating, and teaching, within PNG. Story-telling techniques, memorisation of catechism and Bible verses, and group devotions, were some of the means used to evangelise, and nurture, new Christians. Early efforts were made to set up processes, by which non-literate leaders could be regularly taught, so that they, themselves, could participate in teaching, and leading their own people.

Key to this chain of teaching is the teacher. In the early stages of the work, this was the missionary. In the soon-to-become-independent country of PNG, it was not satisfactory to have the missionary continuously at the helm. It was essential for the ongoing life of the church that national people were trained to read, understand, and teach the Word of God.

History shows us that one way to do this is by taking selected people and giving them in-depth training, and thus create a “literate elite”, who, in turn, minister to the needs of the “illiterate masses”. But the whole thrust of the Reformation, and subsequent revival movements, was to make the scriptures accessible to the masses. The Brethren Movement strongly resists the creation of a clerical class, and autocratic styles of church government. It holds very strongly to the “priesthood of all believers”. It is essential that sound Bible teaching is given by competent teachers. But it is also the right of every believer to relate to God directly, through access to the scriptures. Thus, even working within the parameters of an oral culture, the teaching of literacy was unavoidable.

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# NOMINALISM IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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## **Introduction**

The Christian faith has been in the country for almost 200 years, tracing back as early as the 18th century. A lot of missionary efforts have been put into the country, in the form of money and human resources. Papua New Guinea can be proud, in the sense that it is listed as one of the nations in the world, which is classified as a Christian nation.

However, despite being classed as a Christian nation, it is sad to note that PNG enjoys a comfortable placing as having one of the highest rates of nominalism in the Christian world. According to a report by L. M. Douglas, PNG has about 96.6% nominals in the church.<sup>1</sup> This is a frightening thing, but it is a bare reality. The questions now are: Why do we have this rate of nominalism? How do we combat it?

Others have written in this area, and have suggested that it is due to people not being converted at the worldview level, while others suggest different reasons. These are equally true, too, but I have presented, in this thesis, the influence that traditional cultures and religions have on our Christian experience.

I have analysed some aspects of both traditional religions and cultural elements, which are hindrances to the Christian faith. I have suggested one of the many possible ways of counteracting nominalism. This must, in no way, be seen as being exhaustive, for there are other

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<sup>1</sup> L. M. Douglas, *World Christianity* (Oceania: MARC Publications, 1986) 117.



possible remedies, which are equally valid. I have presented only one, out of the many possibilities.

## **1. Some Causes of Nominalism**

### **A. Traditional Religion**

Traditional religion can be seen as one of the major causes of nominalism in Papua New Guinea. When a person gets converted to Christianity, he or she does so from a traditional religious background, which has the following elements and experience.

#### **I. Dynamic Religion**

Our traditional religion is very dynamic, and it is open to change. In this religion, rituals play an important part, because they are seen as a means to an end. This end was life, i.e., peace, harmony, wealth, children, and a good relationship with the spirits.

Traditionally, trading with one another was a common thing. It was during these events that ideas, beliefs, and rituals were enquired of, and exchanged. If certain rituals would bring life for a person in another area, obviously they would be tried out. In the minds of many people, there is a connection between rituals and life. Rituals bring life. This is why, when certain rituals did not bring about desired results, they were seen as inadequate, and were done away with. Traditional religion is dynamic, as Roderic Lacey comments:

“The historic context, and substance, of religious life, belief, and ritual, in pre-colonial Papua New Guinea, was a situation of change, fluidity, and movement.”<sup>2</sup>

It is to this background that the Christian message is being proclaimed, and from which Christians are converted. Any rituals, so

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<sup>2</sup> R. Lacey, “Religious Change in a Pre-colonial Era: Some Perspectives on Movement and Change in the Pre-colonial Era”, *Point: Challenges and Possibilities for the Study of Religion in Melanesia* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1978) 178.

long as they meet longings and desires, are cherished. Darrell Whiteman makes a very interesting point, when he says:

“Undoubtedly, one of the effects of European contact was to lead Melanesians to believe that, if they adopted European religious rituals, Christian rituals, they would also obtain access to European life; a life, scarcely imagined before, with its superior technology of steel tools, luxury goods, such as tobacco, tea, sugar, calico, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

However, much to their disappointment, the Christian rituals, at most times, did not fulfil their hopes and aspirations. This is further developed in the other elements of traditional religion in this paper, but, in the meantime, this openness to change makes the introduction of other religions rather easy, be it a religion, or a cultic group. Traditional religion is dynamic, and is open to change, for the good of those who adhere to it, in belief and in practice.

How does this affect the Christian, in relation to being an active Christian? Traditional religion, being a dynamic religion, contributes to nominalism in this way. When the Christian faith does not meet the needs and aspirations of a person, he/she is on the look-out for other religious groups that will meet the desired needs.

This makes the Papua New Guinean Christian, with such a religious background, vulnerable to other religions. He/she can easily switch sides or allegiance. For example, this is one of the reasons why, in Port Moresby, the Mormons are becoming very popular. One of their strategies is to make available large funds to their adherents. They are getting a large following, because Papua New Guineans are continuously trying out something that can work for them. Even with the churches in PNG, we have people leaving one denomination for another, every now and then. When one carefully explores why this happens, one will find that the churches that preach a lot on prosperity doctrine, and those that emphasise freedom from trouble, sickness, etc., tend to have a larger following than those churches that don't. A lot of the time, people who

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<sup>3</sup> D. Whiteman, “Melanesian Religions: an Overview”, *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* (E. Mantovani, ed.; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984) 95.

follow, because of these types of teaching, get disappointed when they don't experience what they expect.

For example, in my area, for almost 30 years, the Evangelical Church of PNG (ECPNG) has been the only denomination besides the Catholic church. Recently, in 1989, another denomination, which is a non-Evangelical Alliance member, has made inroads into our area. In order to win converts, it majors on the prosperity doctrine, and has a lot of converts, both Christian and non-Christian, alike. However, after some time, when the desired results did not come about, members of this new group gave up. In most cases, those who still stayed in the new group were, more or less, nominal followers, rather than adherents to true Christianity. One of the things promised to members was that some young people would be sent away for training, either here in the country, or overseas. When this did not take place, members gave up. The people who left the church couldn't come back, because they were ashamed. They are still members, but most are nominal. Others have turned their backs on Christianity.

This abandoning of one set of beliefs for another (in the examples given), because it doesn't work, is consistent with, or, rather, is a characteristic of, underlying traditional religious beliefs, which are more dynamic, as pointed out earlier. This is one reason why we see instability in the religious commitment of PNG church-goers.

## **II. Pragmatic Religion**

Another key element of traditional religion in PNG is that it is a practical religion, which envisages results. These two elements (i.e., pragmatism and dynamic aspects) overlap each other very much, because "pragmatism" is concerned with the expectations of results, and Melanesians are often willing to try out new ideas, to find something that does give results ("dynamic").

I started this paper by saying that Papua New Guineans traditionally, and even today, pursue that life, which is called the "abundant life", which, in Pidgin, is known as *gutpela sindaun*. This life is experienced by gardens producing many crops, there are healthy pigs,

the absence of sickness or warfare. These are experienced when relationships with the spirits are maintained. For most times, when there is a decline in *gutpela sindaun*, it is said to be that the spirits are offended, so correct rituals are performed, as a remedy. For us Papua New Guineans, our beliefs are equated with our experiences. It is a living religious experience in our stomachs, in our livers, and in our mouths. What we feel, smell, taste, and hear, is translated into what we see, i.e., the “abundant life”. This is what Darrell Whiteman says:

“Melanesian religion is pragmatic, and concerned with material results. That is, the performance of rituals bring results that are empirically verified. A large harvest, successful hunting, good fishing, plenty of children, success in warfare, etc., are all results that can be verified empirically. A Melanesian is concerned with empirical, pragmatic proof that his religious system is working.”<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, Papua New Guineans expect to see things: proofs. Does it work? If it works, then it must be true. If it is not working, then it is discarded.

It is to people, with these backgrounds, that the gospel is presented. The essential factor in conversion is allegiance. The Papua New Guinea worldview is based on spirits, and allegiance is given to these spirits. The definition for worldview, as given by Hiebert, is:

“The basis for evaluating their experiences, values, ethics, morals, and allegiance, that binds their community life together.”<sup>5</sup>

Our traditional life revolved around the belief in spirits. Intimacy with the spirits resulted in good hunting, health, and material wealth.

When a person is converted, his/her allegiance is switched from the spirits to Christ. He/she does so with the understanding that if there was anything he/she needed, he/she would turn to Christ, rather than the spirits. What happens when a Christian does not experience the “abundant life” that he/she is most often used, to or expecting?

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<sup>4</sup> Whiteman, 97.

<sup>5</sup> P. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insight to Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982) 24.

When this life is not experienced, a Christian is inclined to think that God may be angry. In that case he/she tries to please God through good works. Perhaps he/she will give more offerings, or do other things that will please God. A second thing that a Christian might do is to give up hope in God. This results in nominalism, or worse. He/she does this, because he/she has come into Christianity with a Melanesian presupposition that one's needs are met by the one to whom one gives allegiance. When this happens (i.e., that expectations are not met), they continue their search for any belief system that will bring about results. This results from the deep-seated religious background, which is present.

Here is an example of a person, who turned away from the Lord, after giving his allegiance to the Lord. Iamu was man from a village close to ours. This man, prior to conversion, was a sorcerer.<sup>6</sup> Being a sorcerer is a prestigious position in traditional PNG, for it means power, resulting in wealth, etc. Iamu was aware of the results of his conversion to Christianity, i.e., he would lose this popularity, and the privileges of a sorcerer. Despite not having these, he seemed to be enjoying his life as a Christian.

A couple of years later, Iamu was appointed a deacon in the church, upon the testimony of his life. However, some years later, testing came, when he had cancer, which would not be healed, despite continuous medical treatment, and consistent prayer by Christians. There was nothing much that medicine could do, and the doctors said that it could not be healed. It appeared that, when healing was not forthcoming from God, he recalled how he helped people as a sorcerer, and resorted to seeking help from sorcery again. However, when he went to the new sorcerer or magician, he was told that, had he gone earlier, he may have been able to help him. But now it was too late to do anything.

Some days later, Iamu died. His death shocked the church, for his search for help from the sorcerer was done in secret, and found out later by the church. His death also brought despair and hopelessness in his family, who were mostly Christians. The family were thinking that, had the father sought help from the medicine man, instead of seeking medical therapy and prayer, he wouldn't have died. This created doubts, and eventually led to unbelief of the Christian faith within the family.

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<sup>6</sup> A sorcerer can also be a magician and a medicine man in my society.

The point I want to make from this example is that, because Christianity didn't bring about the desired result, it was, therefore, abandoned. As a result, scepticism and despair crept into the minds of the family members, as their adherence to the Christian faith didn't bring about the positive results they expected, i.e., healing. Some members of Iamu's family, today, are Christians, but most are nominal at best. A lot of this is due to Iamu's death.

Melanesian religion is pragmatic, as the people always look for results. We walk into Christianity with this understanding, and this influences our understanding and acceptance of Christianity.

### **III. Rituals**

Rituals have a very important role in PNG, and they are an important element of Melanesian religion. Rituals express the worldview of the people, their values and aspirations. By rituals, I mean celebrations, ceremonies, initiations, or anything, which is done to commemorate an event.

Rituals can be performed privately or publicly, collectively or individually. Rituals are an expression of ideas and key values, and, when performed, they make the ideas long-lasting, honourable, and accepted by those that perform them, and their family members. For example, a particular clan has been at war with another clan, and has realised heavy casualties. They agree to end the fight, and, when this agreement is reached, it is followed by a big feast. During this feast, songs are sung, dances performed, and the "cease-fire" becomes legally binding. The very fact that a ritual has taken place makes the "cease-fire" a reality. Words alone are not enough, they have no value; but the slaughtering of many pigs is very valuable.

An anthropologist, Monica Wilson, analysing the Nyakyusa people in Africa, said the following:

“To exclude the discussion of rituals in talking of Nyakyusa religion is comparable to excluding a reference to the devil in his discussion of Christianity.”<sup>7</sup>

What Wilson says of rituals to the Nyakyusa people, is equally true to us in PNG traditional religion. In the absence of rituals, any ideas, values, or worldview are just illusions. Removal of rituals, or giving less attention to them, results in beliefs, ideas, and even worldview, ceasing to exist. Rituals are the visible expressions of these things. We PNG people, being practical people, require actions, rather than purely intellectual concepts.

## **Baptism and Eucharist**

In baptism, we symbolise a reality that takes place in the life of a person. In PNG, any change of significance is celebrated. In baptism, a person is dying to his/her old self, together with Christ. Together with Christ, he/she rises, and a new life begins. This new life is a big thing, and needs celebrating with a big feast. This is consistent with our understanding of rituals. When no celebration takes place, the event is taken as having less significance.

In the eucharist, we partake of the bread, as a symbol of the Lord’s body broken, and of the blood, as the means of salvation. This occasion needs to be celebrated, not only in the form of a drop of water and a piece of bread, but also by adding the Melanesian form of celebration, e.g., a *mumu*, etc. This may seem an excessive exercise, but we are capable of giving big *mumus* every now and then, and I’m sure we can afford it. After all, the Corinthians celebrated with real meals. By celebrating these events in our own style, it indicates, firstly, that something of value is involved, and it is something worth noting. Secondly, our understanding of a ritual is that it is equal to the concept or idea it represents. There is no difference in the concept and the ritual, which expresses this concept.

These casual approaches (at least in the Melanesian perspective) to Christian rituals make the whole concept they represent as being

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<sup>7</sup> M. Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyak* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) 3.

something of less value. When a person comes to the Lord's supper, or the baptism service, it is not attended with seriousness, in Melanesian thinking. These elements of Melanesian religion cause nominalism. The reality that the ritual represents has not taken a Melanesian form, i.e., celebrating with songs, dancing, and feasting.

#### **IV. Abundant Life is Merited**

The concept of reciprocity, basically, means doing one thing in exchange for another. This give and take is an important concept in Melanesia. This concept develops relationships between those who practice it. What is a principle, on the physical level, is equally true on the spiritual plane, says Darrell Whiteman:

“The relationship between human beings and spiritual beings in the universe must also be one of harmony and reciprocity. When there is harmony between human beings and ancestral spirits, there is peace and prosperity.”<sup>8</sup>

When a person doesn't experience the “abundant life”, the first question he/she asks is “What did I do to offend the spirits?” To please the spirits, he/she goes into the performance of rituals, to restore the relationship. This understanding can be wrongly brought into Christianity. When I don't experience good health and good garden produce, it is because I have offended God. So I, therefore, try to do the right things (works) to merit God's favour. When I still don't do better in physical blessings, despite all the good works I do, I give up hope and my trust in God. My commitment to God is, therefore, nominal.

The traditional religious presupposition that, to experience the “abundant life”, one must merit it, is read into Christianity. This attitude makes people think that the ones who are blessed physically and spiritually are ones who are walking right with God. This rules out the grace of God in provision. No one merits God's favours. He gives rain and sunshine to the Christian and the non-Christian alike. Traditional PNG religion has trained him to think that God will only bless those who

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<sup>8</sup> Whiteman, 110.



do good, and curse those who do not do good. This is consistent with the principle of reciprocity that is prevalent in our society.

## **B. Cultural Influences on Christianity**

During a soccer tournament some years ago, a goal by one team was disputed by the opposing team. This developed into a heated argument, resulting in the use of abusive words. In no time, spectators invaded the field throwing missiles here and there. The brawl eventually ended up leaving one player dead. Upon seeing the death of the person, another person, who happened to be the brother of the deceased, retaliated, killing another person, who was from the opposing team. The person who took revenge was the pastor of one of the congregations in the area.

After witnessing the event, one is confronted with questions like these: Why would someone, who is the leader of a congregation renounce his faith by his action? Why not leave the fight to his non-Christian relatives? To answer these questions, certain characteristics of PNG culture need analysing, so that the incident can be put into proper perspective.

## **I. Clan Solidarity**

The fundamental basis of organisation in PNG society is that of kinship. Anyone who is not a relative of mine is a potential enemy. In our society, anyone who has the same ancestral father as me is seen as a blood brother. While Westerners could distinguish relationships by the use of words such as uncle, aunty, or cousins, this is not the case in PNG. This importance of kinship relationships is noted by Marie de Lepervance, in her analysis of the social structures of PNG.<sup>9</sup> A person does not have to be my biological brother or sister to be called a brother. Why must clan solidarity be maintained? The following are some of the reasons:

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<sup>9</sup> M. de Lepervance, "Social Structure", *Anthropology in Papua New Guinea* (Ian Hogbin, ed.; Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1977).

## **a. Warfare**

Even today, in some areas, a characteristic of life is warfare. The survival of any clan depends on their solidarity, in the event of an attack by any enemy tribe. There must never, at anytime, be factions with the clan. Any factions that are within the group could be fatal, and taken advantage of, by the enemy clan.

## **b. Compensation**

In the case where a compensation payment is to be made, the contribution of all members of the clan helps in meeting the demands. It is important to note that, when two groups meet together for arbitration, it is the elders that preside over whatever case requires compensation. The principal offender may not even be present, as required by the Western legal system. The uncles (also know as fathers) talk on the offender's behalf. This shows the intimacy that lies between relatives. When some things happen to one member, every other member is in it.<sup>10</sup>

## **c. Feasts**

In some PNG societies, the success of a particular clan is seen in the number of pigs killed, and the display of other things of value. It is during these times that the help of other people, who are non-members, is acknowledged, in the form of money, shell kina, pigs, etc. These people may have helped them in fighting, or any other thing requiring outside help.<sup>11</sup> Again it requires the cooperative efforts of many, rather than just a few.

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<sup>10</sup> K. McElhanon, and D. Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom", *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures* (D. L. Whiteman, ed.; Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> It has been a normal thing to hire men for fighting tribal warfare.

**d. Funerals**

It is important that the dead should be honoured. Many people, who come to attend the funeral, which can take many days, need to be fed. Some may have come from far-off places. This, again, requires the cooperation of the whole group.

These are some of the reasons why clan solidarity is a necessity.

**II. Reciprocal Society**

Most societies in PNG are organised by what anthropologists call the *Principles of Reciprocity*. Reciprocity is the custom: “you help me, I help you”, or “you fight me, I fight you”, or “you destroy my property, I destroy your property”. The following are some examples of this principle at work.

**a. Gifts**

In our society, nothing is seen as a gift. For example, if a person gives me some money as a gift, the person puts me under an obligation. I will expect to see the person come to me for help, anytime he needs help.

**b. Payback (Revenge)**

Just as the principle of reciprocity is displayed positively, in giving and taking of gifts, it can equally be displayed negatively.<sup>12</sup> If a person is killed, whether it is by accident, or a premeditated act, there is a need for retaliation. This is underlined by the following statements by anthropologist Paula Brown, in her analysis of the structures of the highlands people of PNG:

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<sup>12</sup> M. Kteng, *Compensation as Reciprocity* (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1992).

“Payback, on principle of reciprocity, is seen as the basic social responsibility in most cultures of Papua New Guinea.”<sup>13</sup>

It is very important culturally, that payback must be carried out. A person, who does not react angrily, is displaying a social weakness, and may be taken advantage of by rival clans. According to Michael Kteng, the infliction of pain, death, and other efforts, don't deserve a positive attitude.<sup>14</sup> This implies that any human act that harms and humiliates another person is to be dealt with in the manner that it was received.

These examples are used to explain the principle of reciprocity in PNG.

### **III. The Values in a Society**

There are certain values in PNG societies, of which some are mentioned here briefly:

#### **a. Wealth**

This is the most important value, alongside land and kinship relationships in PNG. The accumulation of wealth is very important. According to Don McGregor, who says it very well, wealth has these two messages:

1. Wealth, if used and enjoyed for its immediate benefits, e.g., for consumption, and for the things it can purchase.
2. Wealth is used to obtain social status, authority, prestige, and security.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> P. Brown, *The Highlands People of PNG* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980) 179.

<sup>14</sup> Kteng, 93.

<sup>15</sup> D. McGregor, *New Guinea Basic Assumptions*, unpublished paper, presented to ABMS Conference in 1969.

## **b. Prestige and Pride**

The amount of wealth a person has determines his prestige, and this gives him status. If a person can give more things out, then he receives more back. The self-esteem of a person is very important. This also makes a person very proud, and prestige must be maintained. This is because, in our societies, where rivalry is life, the pride of a person, and his self-esteem, are seen as power. To see one's self as lowly, and to seek forgiveness for anything wrong one has done, is a sign of weakness.

## **c. Abundant Life**

When a person is experiencing good health, good harmonious relationships, plenty of wealth, this is the ideal situation for him. This "life" is mentioned in part A of this paper. This "life" is referred to in Pidgin as *gutpela sindaun*. A person tries to maintain this, if he can.

These, basically, are the values of our society.

## **IV. Influential Elements of the Christian Life**

### **a. Humility and Meekness**

The Bible advocates the virtues of humility and meekness. My culture advocates pride and superiority. This pride compels a person to retaliate if he/she feels offended. If I back off, I not only lost my integrity, in the eyes of my people, but I also represent my clan. My backing off will be a point of reference to my rival clansmen, who will think we are weak. This, of course, is not true for some societies in PNG. However, where it is the case, then it is something Christians have to live through.

### **b. Forgiving and Forgetting**

If a person offends me, there is no way I will forgive him, on the cultural level. My immediate response is to retaliate. That is intuitive. I

have already mentioned the principle of reciprocity. Not to retaliate is a sign of weakness, and forgiveness is acting like a woman. I may forgive, as a Christian, but the forgiveness may be a deception. For any future offence by the person, or his clan, will be interpreted in the context of the first offence. Forgiveness does not exist in most of our cultures.

### **c. Love**

Traditional Melanesian culture confines love to one from within your clan. Anyone from outside is a potential enemy. Even if you are on good terms with someone other than your clansmen, this relationship must be seen as secondary to your allegiance and loyalty to your clansmen. In an event, where you and your friend's clan clash in warfare, your friend is no longer your friend, but an enemy. Clan solidarity, and the principles of reciprocity, dictate your reaction to your friend.

Our love for others compels us into doing things as Christians. If I can give something to another brother, who is in need, the Bible tells me that I am to help – and not just because I expect a return. However, even in Christian circles, the principles of reciprocity are still evident. Even if the person, in the first place, gives help without expecting a return, the receiver still feels that he/she is obligated to the giver. He/she does this, because culture has conditioned him/her to do so.

### **d. Tribal Congregations**

In some villages throughout PNG, we can see that congregations in villages, or even on mission stations, are predominantly from one particular ethnic group. This church, even though it is a church of Christ, is seen in the context of its culture. If it belongs to the people of the clan, it is seen to be a symbol of prestige, and this connotes competition. That is, it tries to be the best church, in terms of its building, money given to it, and trying to send its workers to the best Bible schools. This is done, not so much in order to give wholeheartedly to God, but with the motive of meeting the culture's demands, i.e., pride, prestige, competition, and rivalry.

## **e. Church Discipline**

Church discipline is another area our culture has influenced. When a person, as head of a fellowship, disciplines a relative, he is thrown into a conflict: that of giving the right discipline, as demanded by the Bible, as opposed to giving a lesser punishment, or none at all. In some cases, the latter is often seen as taking place. When this happens, it results in members not being strong, because of the fact that sin has not been dealt with properly. This often causes nominalism within the church in PNG.

Sometimes, when a person is disciplined, he/she doesn't comply with the discipline given. Instead he/she tries to leave the fellowship, and join another fellowship. For, to be submissive to discipline, is to be showing a sign of weakness, culturally. When a person, out of pride, leaves, in some cases, his/her immediate family members leave also. This sometimes results in the forming of a new fellowship. When this happens, there is competition with the former fellowship, and their motives will be for reasons other than those for which the churches exist. This kind of church meets only in name, but it doesn't reflect the ideals of biblically-based churches.

After the soccer game incident, I asked why the pastor, who was supposed to be living out the Bible in life, didn't do so. He had responded negatively to the incident, because of the culture he was born into. He is born into a culture, which advocates clan solidarity, and a culture, which operates on the principle of reciprocity. His response was only natural, culturally.

## **3. Solid Biblical Teaching to Counteract Nominalism**

I have identified traditional religion, and culture influences, as two of the many factors influencing the Christians of PNG towards nominalism. In this part of the paper, I will discuss one of the ways, in which nominalism can be minimised.

While I want to emphasise teaching, there is another point I want to touch on, which is related to teaching. This is the problem one faces in regard to teaching. This problem is that of teaching methods: the

selection of words and phrases that one uses in teaching. This part of the paper is divided into two parts. They are: A. Communication, and B. Teaching. Firstly, I will talk a little about communication, and then on teaching later.

## **A. Communication**

When we are communicating, including the case of teaching, we need to understand our listeners. This is because the listener interprets our message in terms of his/her own experience of reality, i.e., language, values, and worldview. Marguerite Kraft, in regard to communication, says this:

“Perception plays a central role in the communication process. One reacts, as he has been trained in his culture: he finds what he has been trained to look for, he sees what he has been taught to expect, and in a way that he has been trained to see. He perceives reality, in short, in terms of his worldview.”<sup>16</sup>

As Dr Kraft says, the message, intended by the sender, will be understood the way the receiver sees and interprets all that is around him/her. It is important, in this regard, when we are using phrases, words, and concepts, that we use those that convey the intended meaning. Let us consider, for example, the meaning of the baptism ritual.

The meaning behind baptism is that a person is dying to self, identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection in the new life. He/she is now united into fellowship with other believers. This new life is not his/hers, but that of Christ. This is the correct meaning, but some people see it the way they have been trained to see rituals, culturally. As mentioned in the earlier section on rituals, there is no separation between the reality and the ritual. So, a PNG person’s understanding of baptism is that he/she already has access to this new life in Christ. Whether a person follows the Lord’s commands, or not, is not the question. The big thing is that, as long as he/she is baptised, then he/she is okay (i.e., saved).

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<sup>16</sup> M. Kraft, *Worldview and Communication of the gospel* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978) 83.



Therefore, to avoid this misconception, proper biblical teaching on the rituals is important, so that they are seen with the intended meaning, and not in the way that people are trained to see them, by their culture.

Another example is the word *kiss*. In the New Testament, believers are told to greet one another with a “holy kiss”. Our understanding of the word connotes an erotic feeling, something reserved for marriage partners. The word used in the New Testament has the meaning of greeting, or farewelling, depending on the context. Rather than taking the meaning literally, words must be found, which translate the idea of greeting one another, etc. When applied literally, it is embarrassing, and the communicator (teacher) will lose his/her audience, or not get the message across properly.

The point here is that the teacher needs to use words, concepts, and phrases that convey the intended meaning to the listener, rather than use words the teacher himself/herself understands, but mean nothing to the audience. There is also another important aspect of teaching that teachers need to note, namely, the methods of teaching. This will be dealt with in the next section.

## **B. Teaching**

To be more effective communicators, the best way of communicating the gospel is to use existing cultural forms of teaching, to get the meaning across. How is this possible? The concept of contextualising is very helpful, and can be used in teaching.

### **I. Contextualising**

#### **a. Teaching Methods**

The teachings, sermons, and lectures, received in the church, are nearly always centred on the teacher. The listeners are there for the entire period, to take in what the teacher says. This kind of teaching is good, perhaps in the West, but is not appealing to Melanesian audiences.

Michael Jelliffe, a missionary with the Evangelical Church of PNG, once said the following:

“Therefore, I can only suspect that one reason for the poor results I found in my early Bible classes, for example, was that the Western, conceptual form of presentation used was, in fact, not communicating much at all, at least not holding people’s attention.”<sup>17</sup>

This form of teaching (i.e., the classroom setting) poses several problems. One, that Mr Jelliffe later develops in his paper, is that a monologue approach (e.g., the Western-style sermon) was used traditionally at night, when people wanted to sleep. This explained why some people were falling asleep in the sermon, as Jelliffe says. Another problem, this also caused, is that people’s concentration level will drop after the first 20 to 25 minutes. When no allowance is made for interaction, the time factor needs to be taken note of. This kind of teaching can become only an intellectual exercise. That is, it provides knowledge only, and does little or nothing that will stimulate a response.

In PNG societies, learning has to do with everyday living. It is not only accumulation of knowledge. It involved much demonstration and practice. In our country today, a lot of teachers say one thing in the pulpit, or classroom, yet, in daily life, do another thing, which is not consistent with their teaching. When people see this in the lives of the teachers, it means that really they have no message to preach.

In the Bible, we read that the Lord Jesus demonstrated what He taught, lived it, and even died for it. How much different the situation in PNG would be if only leaders and teachers lived out what they teach. David Sitton, former missionary in the Sepik area with the Every Tribe Mission, once said this:

“Children learn gardening, as they copy-cat their parents in the sweet potato fields. Young men are exposed to weapon and hunting as they trail their fathers on hunting excursions. Young women acquire cooking expertise by observing, and participating, alongside their mothers and aunties . . . tribal people are not

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<sup>17</sup> M. Jelliffe, *Contextual Communication* (Asia-Pacific Rim Publication) 6.

ignorant. In fact, they are gifted with great natural intelligence, but they are not accustomed to learning in classrooms.”<sup>18</sup>

The assessments of both Jelliffe and Sitton are valid, and speak well for how teaching and learning are to be done in PNG. They imply that teaching must be contextualised (Jelliffe), and the methods of teaching be culturally relevant (Sitton). The only point, where I don't agree with them, is that they seem to completely disregard any place for classroom teaching, which, to me, does have some advantages.

### **b. Music, Song, and Instruments**

PNG people are lovers of music and songs. This is reflected in the diversity of songs and dances throughout the country. Music in the church today must have some Melanesian beat and rhythm to be really meaningful. According to Ellison Suri (Solomon Islander), God speaks to us, using culture, in songs and dances that are Melanesian in form. Where these are not used, a church is not a true Melanesian church. He says, further, that the use of indigenous music and art in the whole life of a Christian church is bound up with true conversion.<sup>19</sup>

I agree with Mr Suri in that a person can only worship God meaningfully using his/her cultural forms. He/she cannot do, so using other forms and expressions foreign to him/her.

### **c. Rituals**

PNG traditional life is full of rituals. Coming from this background, the Christian rituals of baptism, the Lord's supper, and the Christmas and Easter periods, must be celebrated with songs, dances, and feasts, just as we celebrate important events in Melanesia. The Melanesian touch to these events is often missing. There is no celebration, no feasting, no singing, and no dancing. This means that the Melanesian flavour of these important Christian rituals is missing. To the Melanesian mind, anything that is not celebrated is insignificant. If it is

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<sup>18</sup> D. Sitton, "Searching Together", *New Tribes Publications*, Vol 20 (1992), No 4, 96.

<sup>19</sup> E. Suri, *Christ in South Pacific Cultures* (Fiji, 1990).

to mean something, it must be contextualised, which means giving the same kind of treatment to it that we give to every Melanesian ritual.

Contextualising our teaching and learning methods, our songs and music, and giving a Melanesian touch and flavour to our Christian rituals, makes the church in PNG an authentically Melanesian church. Where these expressions are lacking, it is still a foreign church. Nominalism can be minimised if Christianity really touches the person, using his/her cultural forms and practice, while giving them a Christian meaning.

## **II. Proper Biblical Teaching**

In the previous section, I talked about the concept of contextualising, and how it helps in the life of the church. In this section, I will talk about solid teaching of the word of God to minimise the two main contributing factors to nominalism, i.e., traditional religion and cultural influences.

### **a. Proper Biblical Training**

All those entering ministry as teachers, pastors and preachers must be qualified, as 2 Timothy 2:2 says:

“Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also” (GNB).

The idea of Paul, here, is that Christian teaching must be passed on from one to another, and so forth. The people involved in teaching must be reliable people. The NIV translation had “*qualified*” people. By being reliable and qualified, one has the idea that:

1. The person teaching must be experiencing what he is teaching. Dr Howard Hendricks says the following in this regard:

“If I know something thoroughly, I feel it deeply, and am doing it consistently, I have great potential for being an excellent communicator.”<sup>20</sup>

Mr Hendricks here, basically, is saying that a person, who does what he/she is teaching, can be relied upon, for his/her actions are consistent with his/her teaching, and can be believed.

2. The person teaching must be experiencing what he/she is teaching, and must know his/her area of study. A person, having no knowledge of his/her field, is not qualified to teach.

Bible-school teachers must be qualified people, meeting these two criteria. A poorly equipped person, whose life is a question mark, should not be teaching. A person, who is teaching, must have good theological training, with a corresponding quality of life. An ill-prepared teacher, or an ill-trained one, will give improper teaching, and, therefore, will not prepare his/her people to resist any serious attacks on the church, which may come through trials, temptations, and heresies. Poor preparation can cause nominalism, too.

### **b. Strong Teaching against Bad Religion and Cultural Values**

There needs to be a lot of teaching given, to break through the strongholds of cultural influences, and of the traditional religious presuppositions we bring with us into the Christian faith. The following areas need to be dealt with, through a lot of prayer and fasting.

### **Love**

One characteristic of PNG society, as mentioned earlier, is that we operate solidly on the principles of reciprocity. This system sees a person return good for good, and bad for bad. Teaching more on the concept of love helps us to do away with the bad aspects of this principle. For, in

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<sup>20</sup> H. G. Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Portland: Multnomah Books, 1987) 10.

God, there is no payback, when one is offended. Our culture expects to payback, but true love produces forgiveness, and forgetting of the offence. The Bible is very strong and clear about the importance of forgiving.

When the apostle Peter asked Christ how many times a person must forgive, Christ's answer was 70 times seven, meaning there is no end to forgiveness (Matt 18:21-22). When we give to others, we must try not to put that brother or sister under an obligation. When we give, we give without expecting a return. True love is giving sacrificially. This is demonstrated by God through the gift of Christ (John 3:16).

Whenever we are hurt by another person, our Melanesian pride would want us to retaliate, but humility and weakness, springboarded by love, must prevail. We must teach our people that, even though we will lose face in the eyes of our people, we would rather serve God than man, as we read in Acts 5:29. The greatest example of humility and meekness is presented to us in the life of Christ Jesus, when He washes the feet of His disciples in John 13. We learn from this that to love another brother covers all the feelings that are negative. Love breeds forgiveness, humility, and meekness, and these are not expressed or taught enough. The most effective method is demonstration. It is a real fact that, how we respond to these cultural pressures, will be a very effective witness to those that are non-believers.

We need to preach and teach more on love, and demonstrate it, as well, in our lives. Christianity must be caught in our lives, more than taught by mere words. The onus is on us, as Christian teachers and pastors.

### **God's Prerogative to Bring Results**

The understanding of our traditional religion has always been that of bringing results. We were taught to believe that, whenever I want to grow the best crops or pigs, I must make the right rituals. When these things happened, I would believe.

We need to teach our people that, to bring about healing of sickness, and bring prosperity, is something that God has in control. We need to teach that we don't buy favours from God. God is impartial, and He brings healing to the Christian and non-Christian, also. We need not manipulate God, to heal our sickness, bring prosperity, etc. This is in contrast to our traditional religion, which is aimed at manipulation for our benefit.

We need to teach strongly against the idea that God always reacts negatively to those who offend Him. This also is a characteristic of our culture, where the principle of reciprocity is at play. Of course, God, at times, punishes people, to show them their state of sin – like the case of Ananias and Sapphira. However, this is not often the case. This overlooks the love of God, even though God doesn't approve the sin.

Whenever a person is sick, we can ask God for healing, but we also need to go to the hospital as well. If God wants to heal, He will; if not it is His prerogative. If God doesn't heal, it doesn't mean that God is not aware of it. The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:8, asks God three times for healing, but God doesn't heal him of what he calls a "thorn in the flesh". He, nevertheless, is happy, because he understands that it is Christ who gives him strength.

A similar case is that of Job, and his experience. Job cries his heart out to God, but God does not heal him immediately. The theology of Job, and the idea of Paul in sickness, is that God is in control.

Jesus, too, begged God to save Him from suffering on the cross. But God had other plans for Christ, and He had to go through the cross. Just as with the cross, God may have some deeper purpose He is working out when He doesn't heal us immediately, or does not heal us at all.

We need to teach our people that, just because God doesn't heal, does not mean that He is not present. Likewise, we need to teach, also, that just because a person is sick doesn't necessarily reflect his level of spirituality. For sickness comes to the Christian as well as the non-Christian. Being a Christian does not make a person immune from sickness.

## **Not by Sight, But by Faith**

In John 20:19-21, we read of Jesus appearing to His disciples after the resurrection. The disciples tell Thomas later, but he will not believe it unless he sees it himself (v 24). Some days later, Jesus appears to His disciples again. This time Thomas is present. Jesus tells Thomas to touch Him, and feel Him (v 27), which results in Thomas confessing that Jesus is Lord and God (v 28). In verse 29, Christ says “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Traditional religion has moulded us into expecting results, but, in the Bible, we read, through Thomas’ unbelief, that we are to trust God, even though we don’t always see desired results. For such is faith.

Christianity is a practical religion. Our faith in the Lord is transformed into our daily walk, our faith in action. The mentality that to see before believing must be counteracted by proper teaching. Doubting-Thomas’ experience is very clear for us, in that, going by results, and insisting on seeing first then believing, is not faith, but lack of it. Even though, at times, God understands our weakness, and does demonstrate His reality to people who trust Him, this should not be used as an excuse for not believing God’s word.

## **Who are our Brothers?**

Our culture advocates clan solidarity, for the reasons I gave earlier. But who should our real brothers be, or rather, whose company should we mostly be in? In Matthew 12:46-50, it is reported to Christ that His mother and brothers are looking for Him. He replies, saying that those who do the will of God are His relatives. This clearly tells us that, even though we are to love our brothers and sisters, and help them when we can, there are limits, where our help ends – that is when our obligation to them is in conflict with the teaching of Christ.

The more we are in fellowship with our brothers in Christ, the more our relationship will be. In Acts 2, we read of the fellowship, and the sharing of resources, which was one of the bases of a strong and influential church. When Christians are in fellowship regularly, this



strengthens them as a group. Church life grows, both in quality and in quantity, i.e., it results in a strong and growing church. When this happens, nominalism is minimised.

Our brothers and sisters are those who love the Lord. We are to love our biological relatives, too, but this has limits – whereas our loving of those who love God is unlimited. When I say limits, I mean there are certain things we can do for them, but not do other things.

### **III. Teaching the Churches Responsibility**

We also experience nominalism, because the church is not really sure of its responsibilities in regard to the use of spiritual gifts. This misunderstanding is both by the pastor and members of the church. I will discuss the failures of the pastor, and later discuss the members' failures.

#### **a. The Ministry of the Pastor**

Pastors, for too long, have been trying to run the congregation all on their own, in most churches throughout PNG. The reasons for this are varied. It could be because members think that the pastor is the only spiritual person, and he/she is the only anointed one, so let him/her do everything. To this kind of thinking, Peter Wagner says that it is not only an outmoded view, but is equally unbiblical.<sup>21</sup>

Mr Wagner is correct, because the ministry of the church is a corporate work, each doing his/her part, on the basis of the diversity of spiritual gifts. The idea of leaving everything to the pastor is unbiblical.

Another reason may be that the pastor might purposely want to do everything himself/herself. This would, in turn, mean that the laity could become a threat to his/her job. To this kind of thinking, we must teach strongly that the pastor is only one member of the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4, we read a list of gifts that are mentioned. Not many people

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<sup>21</sup> P. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts can Help your Church Grow* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1979) 141.

in the body of Christ have the same spiritual gifts, and no one person has all the gifts. This is also true of a pastor.

Mr Stedman's comment is valid, in that a pastor cannot do his/her very best if his/her time is divided among the many things he/she must do. Very importantly, the effectiveness of a ministry depends on the area of spiritual gifts. Pastors never have all the gifts. He/she must only spend time on the area of his/her calling.<sup>22</sup>

The work of the pastor is to prepare the members of the church for ministry, in and out of the church. This is so as to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12-13) into maturity. It is his/her job to identify and develop spiritual gifts in the church. Where we don't see this happening, we see a struggling church, which is cold and nominal. A pastor may not have the gift of hospitality, but a member will have it; he/she may not have the gift of evangelism, but a member will have it.

We must give a lot of teaching in the church that pastors are not the only members in the body of Christ. Therefore, they are not to do everything themselves.

Finally, the pastor will not adequately minister to each member, for each member has different needs, which can only be ministered to by the totality of the gifted members. A pastor, who doesn't encourage ministry by members, will have a weak and nominal church. However, one, who does encourage ministry by members, will have a strong and mature church; one that is not easily blown backwards and forwards, like leaves, by false teaching, and the cares of this world (Eph 4:14).

## **b. The Ministry of the Laity**

The members of the congregation also have a part in the spiritual vitality of the church. In Ephesians 4:3-16, we read the purpose of the spiritual gifts. They are for edifying the body of Christ, so that it may reach maturity in the faith and the knowledge of Christ. The church exists for the strengthening of fellow believers. For example, if a brother needs counselling, the person, who has the gifts and skills, is called to

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<sup>22</sup> R. Stedman, *The Church Comes Alive* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1972) 79.

help out. When a person is discouraged, those that have the gifts of encouragement minister to him/her. When new converts come into the church, those who have the gift of discipling, teaching, and nurturing help out. Most often, the discipling does not take place, and new converts go out of the church as quick as they came in.

These are the jobs of the church members as a whole, and not for the pastor only. This area of ministry (i.e., ministry to each other) is often lacking in the churches of Melanesia. This results in immature, static, and nominal membership. The purpose of these gifts is for the church to be a vibrant and mature church.

The church must also minister to the outside world. If members do what they are supposed to be doing, there will be harmony and unity in the fellowship. This, when seen from the outside, is a very powerful witness for evangelism. This was the case in the early church (Acts 2:42-44). When they met in fellowship, their lives became a powerful testimony, and new converts were added into the fellowship daily.

When new converts come in, it is very important that they be discipled by those that are mature. These people must be nurtured, and basic teaching given. The various members, with their different gifts, must help these new converts.

In teaching and discipling, the apprenticeship model that is used by Christ is appropriate for PNG. This model is one that is culturally relevant, i.e., those I'm discipling, or teaching, catch from me, and from my life and good practices, and try not to follow the bad ones. Our churches' discipling programmes are inadequate, and yet this is the most important aspect of our ministry.

The disciples of Jesus, when they become His followers, stayed under Christ, learnt from His teaching, but, most importantly, learnt from His life. When there is no nurturing, the church becomes weak, and nominalism is its fruit.

To counteract nominalism, we need to encourage ministry by the laity, and provide a job description for the pastor, based on the scriptures. A strong church is one, which is clear about its role in the church, and in

society. We need to teach the leaders of the church what their responsibilities are. When we don't give clear teaching, Christians do not know what is required of them. This becomes the job for those of us, who are given the responsibilities of teaching.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **Causes of Nominalism**

In the first part of the thesis, I have suggested that one thing that contributes to nominalism in PNG is the traditional religious influence. Elements of these traditional religions have been very prominent in my mind.

Melanesian religion, being dynamic, makes provision for changes. A particular ritual is cherished, if it brings about desired results, and discarded, and a new one tried out (where possible), if the desired results do not come. Just because they accept a new set of teachings or beliefs, doesn't necessarily mean they will stick to it. Traditional religions have conditioned them to switching sides, when convenient. This, I said, is one reason why cults have a lot of followers in PNG today.

The religion, being a dynamic one, conditions PNG people into wanting to see results from what they believe. Any set of beliefs is seen concretely, rather than theologically, or philosophically. When results are not experienced now, scepticism creeps into the belief system. The "abundant life" is not a future eschatological hope, but a current reality.

Rituals express the worldview, the values, and the aspirations, of our people. I have said that there is no difference between rituals, and the ideas they express. Any Christian ritual must be given this value, i.e., it is important, and, therefore, is celebrated like any ritual we perform in our society. Christian rituals must receive the value and dignity they deserve, rather than the casual approach we take now. These casual approaches create doubts as to the seriousness of one's faith.

Melanesians see the "abundant life" as being merited. This is based on the principle of reciprocity that is prevalent in PNG societies. A

person, to receive blessings from the spirits, must merit it. If he/she doesn't, he/she won't be blessed. This thinking carries over into Christianity: a person, to receive blessing, even as a Christian, must earn it from Christ. This is presupposed, when he/she comes into Christianity, based on traditional religion. He/she understands that, to be blessed by God, he/she works for it. A person who doesn't get blessed, despite being good, holds onto Christianity loosely. This contributes to nominalism in PNG.

After the soccer game incident, I asked why the pastor, who was supposed to be living out the Bible in life, failed. He had responded negatively to the incident, because of the culture, into which he was born. This culture advocates clan solidarity, and operates on a principal of reciprocity. The culture also teaches (or is intuitive in the life of a person) that clan solidarity, and reciprocity, must take place. I have touched on reasons why this must be so.

This system also sees no place for weakness, as expressed in submissiveness, for, to do so, is against the pride of Melanesians. The dignity of a person is maintained by not submitting at all, and by not making apologies for any action done.

Finally, I wrote about how these values of our society are having their toll in the lives of Christians. They are torn between two worlds: whether to submit to discipline, or to go their own way, thereby reflecting pride and superiority. He/she has to choose between forgiveness, and forgetting, or retaliation. Does he/she give out of love, or does he/she give with expectation of reciprocity? These are the realities of a Christian in PNG, and the choices he/she needs to make. Such are the cultural contributions to nominalism in PNG.

### **Suggestions to Minimise Nominalism**

To minimise nominalism, I have suggested that one of the remedies to it is solid biblical teaching in the church.

As a way of teaching the church, our communicational approaches are not always good. I said that, when we are teaching, preaching, etc.,

we need to be very selective in the use of our words, phrases, concepts, and refine them to the level of our audience. Many times, this is a major weakness in our attempts at teaching, etc. When people are not clear, the teaching is not good, and people are vulnerable to their own interpretations, and this causes no growth at all in the knowledge of the word.

Further, we need to contextualise our teaching methods, using the methods of teaching and learning used in our societies. This will enable teaching to be of maximum benefit. We also need to contextualise our music, songs, and instruments, giving a Melanesian touch and flavour. Also, our Christian rituals will need to be contextualised, in order to make the church in Melanesia an authentically Melanesian church.

Thus, we need good, qualified, reliable teachers. Criteria they need to meet are: he/she must live out what he/she teaches. I have pointed out the effects of a teacher living a double standard of life. I have also said that strong teaching, after meeting these criteria, above, must be given in the areas of traditional religion and culture. Those traditional values, not helpful for Christians, must be counteracted with biblical material. Where this teaching is not given, we will still face these traditional pressures.

A further area of teaching that must be emphasised is that the roles of the pastor and the member of the church must be defined. In this area, I have spoken strongly on the use of spiritual gifts, for the purpose of building a strong and vibrant church. When each member contributes to the life of the church, as required by the Bible, the church will stand very strong, and grow, both in quality and in quantity. For too long, churches have been static and weak, because pastors seem to run the church all on their own, rather than having a shared ministry, based on the collective gifts, as given by the Holy Spirit.

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