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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

A Christian Response to Suffering – with Reference to the Imbongu People
Penga Nimbo

A Christian Youth Life in Buang Tradition
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Cultural Anthropology, Teaching Methodology, and Theological Education
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Towards the Celebration of a Pacific Love Meal
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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.

The opinions expressed in the articles, book reviews, etc., are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the member colleges of MATS.

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EDITORIAL

I must apologise that the fourth essay, promised in the last issue of the journal, has not materialised in this issue. Unfortunately, the hard disk drive of the computer, on which it was stored, decided that it no longer wanted to work. We hope to have it available for the next issue of the journal, but there was insufficient time to do the recovery and editorial work necessary before the publication of this issue.

The first three articles have been provided by the Lutheran Highlands Seminary at Ogelbeng, one of the member colleges of MATS. Two articles are by graduates of the college; the third is by one of the faculty members. Each deals with a different aspect of Melanesian life:

Penga Nimbo explores the fact of suffering, from a background of his own tribe. He considers the traditional understanding of suffering among his people, and asks how that compares with the teaching of the scriptures. He then addresses the issue of how a Christian pastor should encourage those who are suffering.

Sakaria Malelak discusses the nature of youth work in the Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea. In this emerging nation, young people have faced, and continue to face, many difficulties. They have been educated, but many of them are unsure of what to do with that education. Some of these difficulties have flowed over into youth groups. Sakaria considers the traditional way in which young people were incorporated into the tribe. He compares that with the approach of the church to youth work. He suggests some ways in which the youth work of the church may be improved, by paying attention to some of the traditional ways of training.

Greg Schiller wrestles with the nature of theological education in this country. Many, if not all, of the theological colleges in Papua New Guinea use Western formats and styles of teaching. He asks whether this is appropriate within the Melanesian setting, and summarises the findings of various cultural anthropologists in relation to the learning styles of "field-sensitive" learners. He reviews his own teaching

methods in the light of this research from cultural anthropologists, and makes some suggestions as to ways of improving the theological education situation.

The final article comes from Theo Aerts. Feasts form a significant part of traditional Melanesian culture. They are an important expression of friendship between people. Father Aerts briefly explores the various ways in which the different denominations of the South Pacific celebrate the eucharist. He gives consideration to the biblical background for these variations. He then suggests some possibilities for finding a way forward, to enable the Melanesian churches to come together for the celebration of a "Pacific love meal".

So, the four articles are quite varied. Two are written by Melanesians, and two by expatriates. The thing they share in common is that they seek to apply Christian principles within a Melanesian context. All cultures of the world are challenged by the truth of God's word. What does the Bible say about the things that we do within our cultures? Some things, within culture, the Bible praises; some things, it condemns, and some appear to be neutral. We struggle to work out which cultural practices fall into which category.

Melanesian culture is no exception. Each of these four articles touches on an aspect of Melanesian culture. Each of the authors wrestles with what the Bible has to say about that aspect of culture. Each suggests some conclusions in the area discussed. Sometimes, it is suggested that the cultural understandings need to be corrected, sometimes, that they be given further consideration; and, sometimes, that they be endorsed.

As is usual, not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you wrestle through these issues, that the thoughts of the authors will help you to grow in your understanding of God's word, and what it may say to your culture.

Rodney Macready.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SUFFERING – WITH REFERENCE TO THE IMBONGU PEOPLE

Penga Nimbo

Pengo Nimbo graduated with a Diploma in Theology from the Lutheran Seminary, Ogelbeng (in Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea), in 1998. He is from Marapugl, near Ialibu, in Southern Highlands Province. He now serves as pastor at the Kauwo Lutheran Parish, Pangia, Southern Highlands Province.

Introduction

The Imbongu people, in the Ialibu area in the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, were involved with spirits. Their everyday life was connected somehow with the spirits. There were laws and conditions set aside by the Imbongu people with the spirits they worshipped and respected. If the laws and conditions were broken, there was a problem affecting their society and environment. They believed that suffering, or disaster, came when they offended the spirits.

Today, these ideas about spirits are still in the minds and hearts of the Imbongu Christian people. But today, Christians substitute God for spirits, and they believe that suffering, disaster, and evil affect the lives of the people, because of their relationship problems with God. The beliefs and practices they had with the spirits are still practised within their Christian beliefs. This means that, when suffering and disaster enter their lives, they believe that it comes from God, because of their sins. Some examples include, when the waves destroyed villages and people around Aitape, many people around the country suggested that, because of their sinful songs and actions, God sent the waves to destroy them. Similar statements were made when the volcano erupted in Rabaul and destroyed the township. They said, "Rabaul people sing a lot of dirty songs concerning women, so that's why God punished them."

Are these beliefs and statements true? Does suffering and evil come from God? These are some questions that we have to explore in the Bible to clarify the beliefs of the Imbongu people. These questions influenced me to write about suffering. Imbongu Christians today still have this idea that suffering is caused by their sinful actions against God. When a Christian suffers from sickness, or other problems in their life, they go to see the pastor or elder in the congregation, confessing their sins to them. After all this, they cook some meat, showing that their sins are forgiven. Then they expect healing. Their beliefs don't allow for a continuing experience of suffering or sickness.

I will write about the beliefs of the Imbongu people towards suffering. I am going to find out what the Bible says about suffering, and, therefore, what we, as Lutherans, teach and believe about suffering – especially looking at Martin Luther's teaching about suffering. In this paper, I will try to help the Imbongu people understand the meaning of suffering, within the biblical concept.

1. Suffering in Traditional Times

A. Causes of Suffering

My father, Nimbo Taru, was very sick when he was four years old. He had a terrible sickness that nearly ended his life. His father, Tamu, had to look for some ways to heal his poor son's serious sickness.

He had one option – to bring his son's sickness before the spirits around his area. In his area were plenty of spirits, with different roles within the community. Therefore, Tamu had to go to all those spirits, asking for their help in curing his son's sickness. Tamu believed the spirits caused his son's sickness. He knew that there was something wrong between him and the spirits. There was something wrong with the relationship between him and the spirits. Tamu had to investigate his life and his relationship with the spirits.

After finding out the cause of the sickness, he went directly to the spirits, saying, "Sorry, I beg you to forgive my wrong doings, and to spare my son's life." After the repentance prayers and rituals, his son's

sickness was healed. Showing his satisfaction and happiness, Tamu killed a red-hair pig as a sacrifice to the spirit.

Imbongu people lived with spirits, worked with them, and feared them. Spirits either brought disaster or happiness to the community. When they were happy with the community, they brought blessing. When they were angry, they brought disaster to the people. Spirits were considered very powerful, and highly respected. The community had laws, taboos, and conditions to govern their relationships with these spiritual powers.

When sickness or disaster overcame the community, the chief of the village, somehow, knew that there was something wrong between the community and the spirits. He had to call a meeting and find out the cause of the sickness. The belief and vision of the people was to have a healthy community. They didn't want sickness and unhappiness in their village. If sickness or disaster was around their community, they usually looked among themselves, finding out who had offended the spirits, and then they looked for ways to heal that sickness, by making reconciliation with those offended.

Imbongu people believed that sickness was a sign, showing them they had broken the taboos or conditions governing their relationships with the spirits. Also, they believed the sickness came from one of their family member's sins. Imbongu people didn't have any idea about germs, or other natural causes, that affected their lives.

When someone was suffering badly from sickness, the Imbongu people even looked back to past generations for the cause of that suffering. The relatives of the suffering victim had to call a meeting to discuss the suffering. The paternal and the maternal sides of the suffering victim had to come together for these discussions.

Some issues or questions raised in the discussion included:

- Did the paternal ancestors of the family of the suffering victim do anything to the maternal ancestors of the family?

- Did the mother and father of the suffering victim do anything wrong to their tribesmen, or deceased relatives?
- Did the suffering victim's grandparents commit any sin that was affecting the victim?

The paternal and maternal sides of the suffering victim had to answer all these kinds of questions. When they found out their mistake, they had to say sorry to the spirits, and do some repentance rituals to show their repentance in the eyes of the people and the spirits. After all these healing and repentance rituals, the suffering victim was healed.

The other belief the people had about the suffering of a person was the problem about the relationship between the community and the spirits. They used the same procedure, by calling all the paternal and maternal sides of the family together, and started discussing the suffering. Some issues and questions raised were:

- How was the victim's relationship with the community?
- How was the victim's relationship with the spirits?
- Had any laws (taboos) been broken?
- Were there any conditions unfulfilled?

The victim, and his/her relatives, investigated all these areas to discover the cause of the suffering or sickness. Imbongu people had a strong relationship with the spirits, and conditions were set aside for them to follow. This was a part of their everyday life.

I also found out that, in Thai society, the beliefs about suffering and evil were similar to the beliefs of the Imbongu people. Thai people believed that suffering came to people's lives because a taboo was broken. Otherwise, Thai people also believed that neglecting an ancestor, and the spirits, brought suffering into the lives of the people. Other disasters, too, they believed, were caused when certain people manipulated the spirits – such as in sorcery and witchcraft. Accidents,

too, are believed to come from the spirits, because of wrongdoings, or breaking of taboos.[1]

B. Rituals

After healing of the suffering, Imbongu people had to show their appreciation to the spirits, by special repentance rituals. They had to look for a pig that had a red hair. The red-haired pig was scarce and unusual in those times. They had to kill that pig, and roast it in the ground oven (*mumu* pit). After it was well roasted, the men had to bring that pig to the men's house.

Special chants were sung by the men, while bringing the roasted pig to the men's house. Special dressings were also put on by the group that was taking part in the repentance rituals. The pig was put in a special place in the men's house. That place was well decorated with bones of pigs and humans, too. That special area, or part of the house, was highly respected and feared. The men believed the spirits dwelled around there.

After some time, the roasted pig was gone. The men believed that the spirits had eaten that meat, and they were very happy that the spirits accepted their repentance rituals, and that they wouldn't disturb their life with suffering again. Youths under the age of 16, and women, were not allowed to see these things or ceremonies.

When the roasted pig in the men's house was gone, the men knew that the spirits had accepted their sacrifice. They were happy, because reconciliation was made through the pig. The roasted pig had done a great thing between the men and the spirits.

Now, showing their happiness and acceptance of the spirits, the men had to perform some rituals. It was important that they renewed their relationship through taboos and conditions. The men had to go back to the men's house and communicate with the spirits, saying, "We accept the wrongdoings that we have done to you spirits. We have broken the taboos, but now you spirits accept our rituals, so we are

[1] Marguerite G. Kraft, *Understanding Spiritual Power: a Forgotten Dimension of Cross-Cultural Mission and Ministry*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995, p. 16.

strengthening the laws and taboos. We will try our best to keep our covenant strong."

We see that the Imbongu people believed that their suffering had spiritual causes. They looked for whom had offended the spiritual powers and beings, and caused this suffering to come. Sometimes, they found that the offence was caused by the victim of the suffering, the victim's relatives, or even something the victim's ancestors did in past generations. Reconciliation had to be made to the offended spirits, and then the spiritual powers, or beings, would remove that suffering from the people.

2. Biblical Perspectives on Suffering

God's people have always wondered about why there is suffering in this world. They have asked about the reason and purpose of suffering. In this section, I will look at some of the biblical interpretations, or perspectives, about the reason and purpose of suffering.

A. Old Testament

Some people might think that God and suffering don't go together. Instead, they think that suffering is related to evil, and to Satan. Some of the communities around Israel thought that sickness and suffering came from hostile supernatural forces.[2]

Harrison writes that the Babylonians believed that evil spirits entered them by some openings on the head. To prevent this they wore necklaces, nose rings, and charms, to protect them from those evil spirits. The Egyptians, too, believed that evil spirits caused sickness and suffering. They had to see the priest-physician to cure their suffering and sickness. The priest-physician had to use magical formulas and charms to determine the cause, and to cure it.[3]

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[2] R. K. Harrison, "Disease", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, George Arthur Buttrick, ed., Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 847.
[3] Harrison, "Disease", p. 847.

These communities practised witchcraft to cure their suffering and sicknesses. They had no idea, or belief, that sickness was caused from germs, or other things.

With the Israelites, their faith concerning suffering was different altogether from the surrounding communities. The Israelites didn't see suffering and sickness as coming from evil forces. They believed sickness and suffering came from God, Yahweh, because their relationship with God was not good. When the Israelites forgot their covenant relationship with God, and disobeyed the laws and commandments of God, this brought suffering to their lives. They didn't believe in other sources of suffering.[4]

In their covenant-relationship with God, the people of Israel were to follow the laws that God gave them. These laws were a unique thing for the Israelites – for they separated Israel from the people around them, and gave them guidelines for a good and healthy life, too. The Israelites had to eat certain foods, follow various rules about washing, and avoid unhealthy activities. Their lives were laid out by the laws and commandments of God. Following God's laws and commandments helped the Israelites to lead a healthy life, free of suffering.[5]

If someone was suffering from sickness, the Israelites knew that the suffering person must have broken the law. This suffering was a sign that they had neglected, or ignored, their covenant relationship with God. So, the priests had to perform sacrifices to reconcile the Israelites with God again. In Ex 15:26, the Lord warned His people that, if they disobeyed His laws and commands, He would bring sickness to their lives. For the people in the Old Testament, suffering was a spiritual matter, not just a physical matter.[6]

When the biblical writers reflected on the origin of suffering, in the story of the Fall, this idea about humans breaking their relationship

[4] R. K. Harrison, "Healing", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, George Arthur Buttrick, ed., Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 546.
[5] Harrison, "Healing", p. 546.
[6] Ibid.

with God seems to be emphasised, too. Adam and Eve doubted God's word, and disobeyed Him. The close fellowship of God with mankind was broken. The story tells how, because of this, women will suffer as wives and mothers. For the men, there will be hardship; the soil will make them work hard to make a living. Finally, there will be suffering that leads to death.[7]

Sometimes, the question about the origin of the evil and suffering is asked, "How did it start and where did it come from?" Some people see in the snake a symbol of Satan, and put the blame on him. But this is not the major point of this story. The origin of evil and suffering is a mystery.[8] The major point of the story is that Adam and Eve doubted God's word. They sinned, and rebelled against God.[9]

Does this mean that sin causes suffering? The story of the Fall shows us that suffering can be directly related to sin. What happened to Adam and Eve, when they doubted God and disobeyed Him, can happen when we disobey God, too. There are consequences of our sinful actions, and often these bring suffering to us and to others.[10]

However, suffering is not always directly related to personal individual sins. The Fall has meant that we live our lives in a fallen world. Therefore, the good creation of God's original plan has been disturbed. Not all human suffering is the result of personal sins. There are tragedies that happen, which don't distinguish between the good and the bad. This is the result of living in a fallen world. Jesus, too, showed that this type of suffering isn't the result of the personal sin of the one suffering, or of one of his/her ancestors (John 9:1-3; Luke 13:1-5)

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[7] J. T. E. Renner, *Genesis*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1984, pp. 56-57; Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: a Lutheran Exposition*, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1993, pp. 89-90; O. A. Piper, "Suffering and Evil", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, George Arthur Buttrick, ed., Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 451.

[8] Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament in Outline*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1978, pp. 169-170; Richard Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, Adelaide SA: Luther Seminary, 1983, p. 7.

[9] Kolb, *Christian Faith*, p. 90; Piper, "Suffering and Evil", p. 451.

[10] Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, p. 7.

Even though the story of the Fall tells about suffering, mankind is not without hope. God, Yahweh, is creator, and everything remains constantly, and finally, under His divine control. The power of evil and suffering is not more powerful than God. This shows that, however big an evil thing or suffering may happen to mankind, it will not take them away from the saving work of God. God's loving care and concern is with His people. In the story of the Fall, God went looking for Adam and Eve, although they had sinned against Him, and hid from Him. He gave them clothing of skins when they tried to cover themselves with leaves. Even though they will face suffering, God shows that He is always close, and cares for them.[11]

The Psalms often show this belief of Israel. They show that, even though they face suffering, defeat, and helplessness, the Israelites trusted that God was with them. Psalm 23, for example, shows the trust of the writer that God is near in times of suffering.[12]

Job is an example of someone who suffered. What does his story of suffering teach us?

The friends of Job are like some people, who say that suffering is a judgment from God for those who do evil things. They accused Job, saying he was suffering, because God was angry with his unfaithfulness. But Job defended himself, saying that he hadn't done anything displeasing to God. He challenged his friends to show him what sin he had done that God is punishing. But they couldn't. They were just following the traditional belief that suffering is God's punishment for those who do things against God. It's like God's anger sent suffering, as a payback for the wrong a person has done. But Job couldn't agree with this. Instead, he blamed God for the suffering he was experiencing. He called God a cruel God, who laughs at His own creation that bears suffering and death.[13] The story of Job rejects the idea that suffering is always a punishment from God for something a person does wrong.

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[11] Renner, *Genesis*, pp. 58-59.
[12] J. T. E. Renner, *Psalms*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1980, pp. 54-55.
[13] Zimmerli, *Old Testament in Outline*, p. 163.

The suffering of Job is a mystery. The book doesn't really answer all the questions about why there is suffering. It shows us that Job, who was suffering, asks a lot of questions that are not really answered, and this is the struggle for many suffering people. Where is God? Why is He hiding His face from me? All these times, I was worshipping God, so why does He turn away from me? These are some of the doubts and questions Job had, which suffering people ask, too.[14]

Job tried to find the answers to his suffering, but he couldn't discover the answers. But, one thing Job discovered, was that he was a sinner, just like any other ordinary person. However, in his situation, his suffering was not related to any of his personal sins against God. Yet, in Job's suffering, he was redirected to God, to confess Him as sovereign, and to praise Him as God. And so, something positive comes from Job's suffering, even when he doesn't get the answers to all his questions about his suffering. Job wanted God to create a new life from the chaos in his life. Job never got easy answers, but God led him through this chaos in his life. In this, we can see that suffering brought a more-important and deeper understanding in Job's relationship with God.[15]

Sometimes Israel, as a nation, experienced suffering. God used this, too, so that the people, or nation, could look back to their relationship with God. God used some nations, like the Assyrian power, as a rod of His anger to discipline the Israelites for their disobedience to Him, so that the Israelites could repent, and be reconciled with God again. Also, their relationship with God could be renewed again.[16]

Despite all this, the nation of Israel was always turning its back on God. In Deutero-Isaiah, there comes the word from the prophet – that a servant would suffer on behalf of the people. This servant would suffer, by taking the punishment of the people on Himself (Is 53:2-

[14] H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought*, London UK: SCM Press, 1956, pp. 515-516.
[15] Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, pp. 8-9.
[16] Rowley, *Faith of Israel*, p. 259.

12).[17] The New Testament writer saw this as a prophecy of Jesus Christ, and His saving work.

B. New Testament

The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to all God's dealings with us. Therefore, our suffering, as Christians, can never be understood apart from this.[18]

In the cross of Christ, we clearly see the saving work of God, and the revealed love of God for mankind. But it is not just the love of God that is seen in the cross, but also His condemnation of evil, and His conquering of our enemies (that is, sin, suffering, and death). In the epistles, too, Paul talked a lot about the saving work of God, through the suffering of Jesus Christ. The cross was the central point in the epistles. Paul understood that, through the suffering of Jesus Christ, we are made righteous with God. It is not through the law, and by doing good deeds, that we are called righteous. No, we are called righteous, by faith alone.

This points out clearly that, for Christians, suffering is no longer judgment and punishment for sin, because Christ has taken the punishment for sin in our place. The central New Testament teaching, and Christian doctrine, is that, through Christ's death, we have forgiveness, and are not guilty before God. The suffering Christians face, is not punishment from God (Rom 8:1-2). It isn't necessarily His condemnation for particular sins.[19]

Christ's defeat of death is His defeat of suffering. When Christians face suffering they aren't without hope, because they know that, despite seeing and feeling pain and tragedy, they still trust Christ's victory over death.

But Christians still suffer and die – why? Christ's death didn't totally remove evil, death, and suffering immediately, but He broke

[17] Piper, "Suffering and Evil", p. 452.
[18] Tom Smail, "The Cross and the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Renewal", in *Charismatic Renewal*, London UK: SPCK, 1995, p. 60.
[19] Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, pp. 22-23.

their power, and promised that they can't destroy us (Rom 8:37-39). We are protected by the blood of Jesus Christ. For Christians, death does not separate us from God, but brings us closer to God (Phil 1:21-23). Through suffering, too, we can have a much closer relationship with God, by trusting in Him, and not in ourselves (2 Cor 1:8-10, Rom 8:17).[20]

God didn't avoid suffering. He met suffering, and suffered Himself. We try to avoid suffering. But God's purpose is not always to take us out of situations of suffering. He does promise to be with us always, throughout our suffering. Christ will always be with us. Suffering and death can't change that. Christ, Himself, went through pain and suffering, and He feels, and understands, the pain and suffering we face in our lives, and that makes the presence, peace, love, and comfort of Christ come closer within our suffering.[21]

Christians recently asked some questions, like, "Where was God when the tsunami wave destroyed villages near Aitape? Where was God when the volcano erupted in Rabaul?" We can answer, "Just where He was when His own Son was killed at Calvary." God was, and is, there with us in our suffering. This is the great message of Christ's death for us. God takes our suffering on Himself. He entered our problems, and experienced our pain.[22]

Our question is, "Why do we suffer?" But the greater question is: "Why does God suffer?" In the death of Christ for us, we see that God's love for us is beyond our understanding. Yes, God suffers for us. He does this by suffering with us. This leads us to put all our trust in Him. In our suffering, our questions of "why?" turn us to God to trust Him, and to look to Him alone as our only help.[23]

Suffering can tempt us. Because of pain, we can be tempted to lose faith in God. If in times of suffering we trust in our own strength and power to overcome suffering, this can lead us away from faith in

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[20] Piper, "Suffering and Evil", p. 453; Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, p. 24.
[21] Ibid., p. 25; Smail, "The Cross and the Spirit", p. 65.
[22] Paul J. Lindell, *The Mystery of Pain*, Kehl/Rhein: Editions Trobisch, 1982, p. 39.
[23] Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, p. 28.

God. But if we take suffering, tribulation, and temptation as an education for our spiritual life, and reduce our trust in our own strength and might, then it strengthens our relationship with the risen Lord (Rom 8:17).[24]

Christians have to have a strong faith that the new life they have is not theirs, but it is through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christians have to accept suffering patiently, instead of rebelling against the Lord. No matter how heavily believers have to suffer, they can be sure of Christ's final triumph over all the power of evil (John 16:33). As disciples of Christ, we have to respond with love, patience, forgiveness, and reconciliation through suffering.[25]

The New Testament clearly teaches that being a disciple means following Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow Him. Believing in Jesus doesn't just mean obeying a set of laws, but being in relationship with Him. This means also sharing with Him as Paul said – dying with Him, and rising with Him (Rom 6:4). Christ suffered, and our suffering can be a sign that we belong to Christ. Suffering places us alongside of Christ. Stephen, the first martyr, met his death in the same forgiving love to his enemies as Christ did when He was crucified (Acts 7:60). As Christ's disciple, he followed Christ in suffering.[26]

Paul, too, experienced suffering as a follower of Christ. He didn't just follow Christ, when God rescued him from suffering situations. He learnt to trust God at anytime, and in any situation. Paul tells us in 2 Cor 12:7-9 about a painful situation in his life. He prayed to God to take away his pain. But God didn't deliver Paul from his suffering. God taught him the way of the cross – not rescuing him from his suffering, but leading him into a stronger faith in the midst of his suffering (2 Cor 12:9-10). Paul was also imprisoned for preaching (Acts 16:23), and was shipwrecked on his missionary journey to Rome

[24] Piper, "Suffering and Evil", p. 453.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Smail, "The Cross and the Spirit", pp. 65, 68-69.

(Acts 27). He didn't escape persecution or misfortune. He suffered these, as a follower of Christ.[27]

The book of Revelation, too, clearly teaches that followers of Christ face suffering. John wrote that Christians, persecuted for their faith, should not give up their faith in Christ. John was shown that, even if Christians must die for their faith, they will life with Christ. Death, persecution, and trials aren't the last things, or the end of life. Christ has broken the power of death. Revelation points out clearly that Christ didn't take away the persecutions and trials that Christians faced. But the good news is proclaimed clearly in Revelation. Christ has won the victory. And that victory can never be removed, even when suffering or persecution is faced by Christians.[28]

Being a follower of Christ means becoming like Him in humiliation, that is, in suffering and weakness (1 Peter 2:21). Christians have to accept suffering, because we are the disciples of Christ (2 Tim 2:3). Peter tells his readers not to be surprised when they have to endure suffering in their lives. It is a testing of their faith (1 Peter 4:15-16). They should be confident that God cares for them, and that their suffering will be for a short while only. Later, they will share in God's glory (1 Peter 5:6-10). Christians won't be Christ's disciples without carrying the cross. This suffering is not suffering resulting from sinful actions. What "bearing the cross" really is, is patient and obedient suffering, because of Christ.[29]

Christians, who publicly confess and admit that they believe in Christ, will suffer tribulation and trial (Mark 13:12-13; Rev 17:6; 20:4). The great tribulation that has to come upon mankind has already started with the passion of Christ, and will continue until the coming back of the Messiah.[30]

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[27] Ibid., pp. 65-67.
[28] John G. Strelan, *Where Earth Meets Heaven: a Commentary on Revelation*, Adelaide SA: Open Book Publishers, 1994, pp. 140-141.
[29] J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, London UK: Adam & Charles Black, 1969, pp. 8-9; Haar, *Suffering and the Christian*, p. 30.
[30] Piper, "Suffering and Evil", p. 452.

Believers have to understand that there is suffering on earth. All people have to face suffering, whether believers or unbelievers. Suffering comes through different ways. Humans produce suffering themselves, through self-love, greed, and the love of the world. Believers can't escape this type of suffering either, because they are in the world. But, through their endurance of suffering, and continuing to follow Christ while suffering, the atoning work of Christ, and the glory of God, comes clearly out into the light.[31]

Believers also face suffering because of opposition to Christ and His message. The power of this earth hates the light of Christ. That is why believers have to suffer – because the power of the world doesn't want the light to shine on the people who are in darkness (Matt 5:10-12).[32]

Another thing we realise in suffering is that it helps us to think of others. When we are in suffering, it helps us to think of others and hold our "redemptive hand to them (rather than to judge, criticise, and condemn them)".[33] We can look at Jesus in His last agonising hours at Calvary: where He arranged for His mother to stay with John, He opened the gates of Paradise to an undeserving thief, and He prayed, asking His Father to forgive the sins of those who crucified Him. Here, we can see that, in the pain and death of Christ, His love, patience, mercy, and heart for others, reached out freely to the needs of those around Him.[34]

God's people wondered about why there is suffering. We can see that, when they put their trust in Him, they found meaning and purpose, even in suffering.

3. A Lutheran Perspective about Suffering

A. Martin Luther

What did Martin Luther think generally about suffering? He said that the gospel speaks about two things concerning suffering. Firstly,

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Lindell, *The Mystery of Pain*, p. 46.
[34] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Luther talks about the shame, disgrace, and suffering people have to face for the sake of the gospel. He called this "cross-bearing". Secondly, he talks about suffering from sickness, trouble, and afflictions, occurring because of natural causes. This is, properly speaking, not a cross, said Luther, but an affliction.

What did Luther believe about Christians suffering affliction? He said that people naturally try to find out in what way they may have offended God for Him to send this suffering. But, here, Luther is saying that God isn't sending that suffering, but the human conscience thinks that way.[35]

Christians understand clearly that God loves them, and superintends all evil and suffering in their lives. But when there is suffering, Christians, too, ask questions about the love of God. Is God hostile to me? Has the Lord forsaken me? But, Luther said we shouldn't judge these situations with out natural beliefs, but we should judge, and find answers, through the Word of God. When we don't judge with the Word of God, Luther said that our judgment will be wrong, and it will mislead us. We will think that every form of suffering is a punishment from an angry God.[36]

What does the word of God say? Firstly, it shows us that God loves us, and that not a single hair can fall from our head unless it is the will of God (Matt 10:30). In here, we can say that, whatever suffering and evil comes, it can't do anything against Christians, unless it is the will of God (Matt 10:29). From God's word, we can be sure that God values the lives of human beings more than the sparrows.

Secondly, Luther speaks about suffering as "cross-bearing". When someone is persecuted or suffers because of faith in Christ, he calls this "cross-bearing". When someone has shame, suffering, and disgrace before the eyes of the world, and is considered wrong (for

[35] Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: a Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1959, pp. 10-12.
[36] Ibid., p. 20.

instance, when a person suffers persecution for the sake of the gospel) – this is "cross-bearing".[37]

Some good examples of people who bore suffering for the sake of the gospel are John Huss, Jerome of Prague, and many others. The world accused them of heresy, and they were put to shame, just like our Saviour Jesus Christ, and were martyred.[38]

Luther said that Christians have to be prepared to suffer, too. There are natural disasters, and the devil also will bring misfortune to us. But Luther encourages us to get strength from prayer. Prayer is another thing we have to consider in times of suffering.[39]

Suffering is called a cross when we come by it. However, when we are the cause of our own suffering, Luther doesn't call that a cross we have to bear. It is clearly stated that, in the Bible, Christians don't carry their own cross, but Christ's cross. Christians must suffer for Christ's sake. This means Christ suffered on the cross, and we will also suffer, because of our belief in Christ.[40]

Luther also suggested that Christ doesn't like those who dislike the cross. He believed that, if you want to be a joint heir with Christ, yet not suffer with Him, He will not acknowledge you on the last day as a brother/sister. Luther saw that Paul challenged Christians also to bear the cross of Christ (Gal 6:17).[41]

Luther talks about thanking God while suffering, instead of cursing God. The more unjust suffering we bear for the sake of the gospel, the better it is for us, Luther says, therefore, we should accept such a cross and thank God for it.[42]

Luther also distinguished two different aspects of God: the revealed God, and the unrevealed God. People, all the time, talk about

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[37] Ibid., p. 355.
[38] Ibid., p. 356.
[39] Ibid., p. 357.
[40] Ibid., p. 356.
[41] Ibid., p. 359.
[42] Ibid., p. 362.

the unrevealed God. They naturally think of His great power and strength. They fear His angry judgment on their sins. Also, when they see God only in this way, their narrow perspective about suffering and evil is that it comes only from God – from offending Him, because of some sinful action.[43] But Luther also said we have to see God through Jesus Christ as the revealed God. In Jesus Christ, especially in His suffering, God's personality towards mankind is revealed clearly.

The revealed God is the God who speaks to mankind. Through the incarnation, God revealed Himself to mankind. The Word, in the beginning, became flesh, and lived among us as a human being. God reveals Himself clearly through Jesus Christ, who was not a powerful person by the standards of this world. In His suffering and death on the cross, which looks like defeat and weakness, God's power over sin is revealed.[44]

Luther strongly emphasised that God is known through suffering. Through the suffering of Christ, we can really see the love, peace, joy, and care of God. The weakness of God in Christ, and His suffering, tells us that our human strength is not worthy, or able, to set us free from suffering.[45]

Luther sometimes disagrees with people who promote a theology of glory. They don't think about the suffering side of Christ. They think only about the glory side of Christ. Luther disagrees, because people forget the great suffering God endured on the cross, and they only think about His healing and miraculous power. They don't want to face suffering in their lives. Luther also said that people, who are enemies of the cross of Jesus, are also enemies of their own cross. This simply means they don't want to go through suffering. They feel and understand that suffering is for heathens, or for those whose faith is not

[43] Kolb, *Christian Faith*, p. 20.
[44] Ibid., p. 21.
[45] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1966, p. 28.

strong. They also interpret that suffering was defeated already by Christ on the cross, and there is no suffering for Christians today.[46]

The theology of the cross is not the natural thinking of humans. But it is God's way. All God's wisdom, love, salvation, and grace are hidden in the suffering of Christ. God's power doesn't appear directly, but it is hidden in the suffering of Christ. In other words, we can say that the grace, love, and peace of God is hidden in disaster and suffering. Luther believed that, in times of suffering, you will clearly see the presence of Christ near.[47]

We can understand that Christ is with us in times of suffering and disaster. Christ never leaves us. Also, we can see that suffering is not only for heathens, but also for Christians. Christ works with people, through suffering and troubled times. The suffering of Christ, in the world's eyes, reveals helplessness and defeat. But, through that, God showed victory, power, peace, salvation, and love. In other words, we can say that it is not through strength, might, and power that people will be saved, but it is through weakness, defeat, and suffering that victory will be won.[48]

The world hates suffering, but, through suffering, God turned such elements of suffering as the cross and death into the reality of salvation. Luther's understanding of the theology of suffering is that God hides Himself through suffering. God works in opposite ways to how people think. God has the power to create something out of nothing. But God shows His strength and power through weakness and defeat. God's life works in death, and His strength in helplessness.

When the understanding of people about the suffering of God is limited, then their understanding about God is limited. If people want to understand God's love and peace they need to understand His suffering, and they need to understand their own suffering. People, who hate Christ's suffering, hate their own suffering. People, who

[46] Ibid., p. 29.
[47] Ibid., p. 30.
[48] Ibid.

question their own suffering, also question Christ's suffering. People, who love their own suffering, love Christ's suffering.[49]

Luther didn't separate glory from suffering. The real glory of God is revealed in His suffering. The glory is revealed through the suffering of Christ. If there was no suffering, we could say that there wouldn't be any glory. Glory, peace, and love were revealed through suffering.[50]

From Luther, we learn what our natural beliefs will tell us when we are suffering. They will say that you must have sinned for this to happen. They will ask: "Where is God? Why has He forsaken you? Why does He judge you with this suffering?" But Luther urges us to cling to the promise in God's word in the midst of suffering. Luther points us to God, as He is revealed clearly in Christ Jesus.

B. As a Pastor, How am I Going to Minister?

1. Syncretism

It will be very dangerous for pastors to preach about suffering and evil to the congregation, without the people getting the wrong idea. Melanesian people were, and are today, heavily involved with spirits. They had, and are going through, practices about healing in their everyday lives. They have seen the outcome of their beliefs and practices. This practice isn't a Western philosophy, which was introduced into Papua New Guinea. Western people are surprised to get some of the answers that some people give. Melanesians have seen, touched and felt the outcomes of their beliefs in their everyday lives. So, pastoral workers have to be very careful, because Imbongu people, in their practices, might not really have any space for Christ.

We have to put Christ in the centre of the healing practices. Beliefs about the spirits have to be replaced with a belief in Christ.

Amo, in his article, has also suggested something about suffering and healing in his area. Healing practices were performed to save the

[49] Ibid., p. 34.
[50] Ibid., p. 33.

life of someone, who was suffering from sickness. All this healing was done to bring happiness to the individual, family, community, tribesmen, and the society, altogether. Like that, God, too, did save us to bring happiness and unity in our lives.[51]

The Imbongu people wanted to get well from their suffering. They wanted to see a positive outcome from their suffering and healing rituals, and they wanted to see the answer with their eyes, immediately. That is a big difference from biblical teaching. Imbongu people are not prepared to suffer, and bear sickness, in their life. They only want to get well, and see a positive outcome. This is different from Christian faith in the Lutheran church.

Many people choose to follow churches and preachers, who promote healing power, rather than endure suffering. When the people see a healing miracle taking place in their life, they think that Christ is really working, and is present. Melanesian people want to get well, and live a happy life. They don't want to suffer, or find unhappiness in their lives. Melanesian people search for salvation in their everyday living. Imbongu people found that the cause for sickness was with the spirits, and their relationship with them. That means, too, that, when they see healing taking place, they believe that some spirit power is at work. So, they believe and follow that church preacher, where they experience healing power. They won't want to hear any preaching about suffering. But it is a great danger that people won't believe in the work Christ did on the cross. Instead, they think healing is the great salvation message in the lives of the people. They only believe when they see success, healing, and blessing. They work out how to get this from the spiritual power – the Holy Spirit. They emphasise how to get this spiritual power. They don't emphasise the work of Christ, and that people need to trust Christ's work.

2. Ministering to Suffering Imbongu Christians

The teachings and doctrines of the Lutheran church must be well presented, and taught, in the lives of the congregation. Christians aren't

[51] William Amo, "The Use of Traditional Healing Practices in Christian Pastoral Care", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1977), p. 46.

taught properly the meaning of suffering and healing, from a Christian perspective. They still hold onto their beliefs about the powers of the spirits to cause suffering, and bring healing.

Suffering is an everyday thing that comes to our lives if we aren't careful in looking after our bodies. Suffering sometimes is caused by bacteria and germs. Suffering is a result of the Fall. It is not necessarily the result of specific sins. People need to be taught to look after their community, and the surrounding materials they use in their everyday life. Hospitals are there to cure sickness. There are Christian medical practitioners, who are highly trained to do that job of curing the sicknesses of the people. Wisdom and intelligence come from God. God gives men the wisdom and ideas to invent new technology and drugs, so why are we going to ignore the wisdom and knowledge God gives us?

The first and most important thing we need to do in our Christian lives is to put Christ at the centre of everything we do. For example, doctors and nurses should pray before and after the working hours of their daily routine in the hospitals. Medicines should be blessed before using them in hospitals.

Healing won't bring God's salvation to men. Healing won't bring freedom to the community and the country altogether. Sometimes, people use power that is not from God to perform miracles. In the Old Testament, we see that Pharaoh's magicians did the same miracles as Moses and Aaron. So, we can see that healing from suffering is not always from God's healing power. Even Satan can use someone to perform healing, miracles, and wonders.

Pastors have to minister when someone is suffering. It is clearly seen in my congregation that, when someone is suffering from sickness or other things in their lives, that often there isn't any ministry taking place at that time. The elders in the congregation say, "Let them suffer, because of their evil doings. Let them feel the pain, and later they can repent and come back to God." Also, they say that suffering is coming from God, and so let it come. That's why they don't bother visiting sick patients, and also witnessing to them.

The first mission work for the church elder, in Imbongu congregations, is to visit all their Christian members, who are suffering. Their presence will make a big difference in times of suffering. Their prayers will be greatly appreciated by the ones, who are suffering.

Elders and pastors shouldn't stand back and look at their congregation members suffering. A pastor or an elder in a church is to look after the sheep of Christ. Christ gave us that job, to look after the people He died to save.

Visitation by church workers of suffering people will be a great thing to do. In good times, Christians won't worry about you visiting them, but in times of suffering they need your presence. That is the time they want to see who is their real *wantok* and helper. So, that is the time for us, as servants of Christ, to do our mission work, to show clearly that Christ is with them in times of suffering. And also, to show them that their relationship with Christ can grow stronger in times of suffering.

In this ministry of visitation, too, there is a problem. The problem is this: a pastor or church worker will regularly visit a suffering person that he or she knows personally. But a person, with whom they don't regularly associate, will be visited once or twice a month. This shows us clearly there is a problem in this ministry. This problem can be identified as the "*wantok* system". An elder in the church, or a congregation member, will only visit a person, who is suffering from sickness, if he or she is their *wantok*. If they aren't their *wantoks*, they don't bother much about them, and they won't pay much attention to them. If this *wantok*-system-visitation occurs regularly, other suffering people will think that they haven't got any friends. Where are the so-called Christian friends and church workers? And this question will further lead them to ask: "Where is Christ? Is Christ nearby to help me? When will Christ heal my suffering? Is Christ not my *wantok*?" These questions are produced by the actions of Christians towards suffering people.

If we really want to show Christ in times of suffering, we have to break the barrier of the "*wantok* system". We, as Christian friends in Christ, have to treat every suffering person equally. We have to show

clearly to everyone the good news we preach. We shouldn't only visit the people we know as *wantoks*. As Christians, we carry the light of Christ when we visit everybody, whether *wantoks* or not. In this way, the suffering person will truly see the presence of Christ in times of suffering. They will see the presence of Christ through us, and feel and understand that, even if their suffering is not removed from them, still Christ's presence is there with them in times of suffering, and, through that, their faith will be strengthened.

Another area to look at is in the correctional prisons. That is another place where people are suffering. They need workers of the church, and also Christian friends, to go and visit them. They can talk with them, pray with them, and also ask them what they are feeling when they are staying in prison. In this way, they get to know more about the treatment they are getting in prison. And we can look for some ways to help them with the treatment they are getting, by talking to the authorities in charge. There are times when the workmen treat the prisoners cruelly. Officers often don't know of that problem within the disciplinary forces and the prisoners. A church worker has the duty to talk to the officers in charge to enable them to look into the matters, and, through this, we can help the people who are suffering in the prisons. The prisoners will understand that there is someone who has a concern for them. Through this, the people will see Christ clearly in times of suffering.

Another area, where I see a need for improvement in ministering to the Imbongu people, is in times of funeral activities. When someone dies, or a father or mother of a Christian dies, there is no visitation from Christian friends or church workers. In Imbongu society, your presence is important when a family is in sorrow, worry, and pain. They feel that they have lost someone in their family, who would contribute something in family affairs. That is the time when they feel that someone has to come close to them, and strengthen them in their faith, in their time of worry. But often, Christians and elders leave them alone. They think that the family of the dead person are Christians, and they can have devotions by themselves. This brings up another lot of questions. What kind of church am I following? What kind of Christian friends have I got? And these questions will lead them to say

that, if I stay on with these people, they are going to do the same thing when I am in trouble, pain, and worry. Many times, a Christian community fails to provide the support – the love and concern of Christ – in a visible way to the suffering.

Even if they are not blood relatives, Christians should see the very real ministry of love and concern they can show when people are suffering the death of a relative.

When people are left alone in their suffering, they will naturally have fears and doubts. It will be natural for them to think that God must be punishing them for something, or God must have forsaken them. More than ever, traditional beliefs will come up again in times of suffering, causing great fear and distress in the victim. In such times, it is hard for them to cling to God's promise. This is our ministry to the suffering: to bring them the good news that they can't naturally feel, see, or hear in their suffering. We must be the messengers. We must bring the good news: showing them what God in Christ is really like.

Conclusion

In this paper, I found out that Imbongu people lived in a world, where spiritual beings and powers are very real. Their lives were heavily dependent on the spirits, whether they experienced help or harm. Suffering and disasters have spiritual causes, according to Imbongu traditional beliefs.

Many Christians, too, believe that suffering is caused by turning away from God. We have sinned, so God sends suffering into our lives to awaken us from our wrong doings, and to cause us to repent, and come back to Christ. So, some people think that, if they have faith, they will never face suffering!

In my research, I found out that suffering can come to heathens, and also Christians. For example, in the Aitape tsunami disaster, believers and unbelievers were affected, not only sinners. And this fact disqualifies the teachings and beliefs of many Christians that suffering is always caused by the particular sins of individuals.

Research in the Old Testament shows that suffering enters our lives, because we live in a fallen world. The disbelief of Adam and Eve brought suffering to this world, and that means people, living on this earth, will face suffering, whether they are Christians or heathens. But the Old Testament, too, shows us that suffering and evil are under the divine control of God. This means suffering will enter our lives, but won't take us away from God.

In the New Testament, too, I found out that suffering isn't a judgment from God to Christians, because Christ has taken the punishment for sin in our place. This doesn't mean Christ took suffering out of our lives, but that Christ broke its power, and promised that it can't destroy us. We are protected by the blood of Jesus Christ. Through suffering, we can come to a much closer relationship with God, by trusting in Him, and not ourselves.

Luther understood that the Bible talked about two things concerning suffering:

- Cross-bearing: that is, when someone suffers persecution for the sake of the gospel.
- Affliction: that is, when someone suffers persecution and disaster because of natural causes.

But he believed that suffering and persecution won't remove us from the kingdom of God. Luther also said that Christians have to be prepared to face suffering. They shouldn't only trust God when they see success, health, and blessing in their lives. Even when facing suffering, Luther taught that Christians should put their trust in God, as He has been revealed clearly in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, when ministering to suffering people, we have to clearly show Christ in times of suffering. We have to visit suffering people, and strengthen them in their faith with God. Christians tend to doubt God's presence and love, when they face suffering. We have to let suffering people know that God is there with them. Through our ministry, we have to reveal what God has done for them, through Christ crucified on the cross. The church has to show Christians what God is

like, not just from their experiences of blessings or suffering, but also from how He revealed Himself through His suffering for us in Jesus Christ. Our ministry must focus on bringing this central message to suffering people, in our words and actions.

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A CHRISTIAN YOUTH LIFE IN BUANG TRADITION

Skaria Malelak

Sakaria Malelak comes from Buang, Morobe Province. He graduated with a Diploma in Theology from the Lutheran Seminary, Ogelbeng, in 1996. Sakaria is now the pastor at Resurrection Lutheran church in Lae, Morobe Province.

Introduction

As an ex-youth leader, and a member of a youth group from the Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG), I came to be familiar with youth ministry, and its structure within ELC-PNG. In my experience, I came to realise a number of problems in youth ministry. Many of these problems are directly, or indirectly, related to the youth structure itself, which is a Western-oriented one, initiated largely by some missionaries.

It is not my intention to state here that the ELC-PNG youth structure is a failure. Rather, this structure needs adjustments, and changes, to make it really effective. Moreover, this type of Western-oriented structure has its problems. The present youth structure is suitable mostly for the urban areas, whereas the rural areas have had some difficulties in coping with it.

Therefore, I am suggesting that there should be an alternative youth structure, besides the present one – a locally-oriented youth structure – which can be relevant for ELC-PNG youth ministries, if not as a whole, then, especially, for rural youth ministries.

My aim here is to compare the aims of traditional Buang youth life with biblical terms, or aims, of youth life, and to develop an alternative Christian youth structure, which can benefit Buang youth ministry, and ELC-PNG youth ministry as a whole.

1. The Aims and Objectives of Traditional Buang Youth Life

Information on traditional Buang youth life was documented during my research done in the Buang area, between June 18 to 24, 1996. I interviewed a total number of 14 people (13 males and one female), all comprising village leaders, and senior men, who were good story-keepers. These people contributed information on past traditional Buang youth life, as well as present Buang youth life. From the group of 14 people who were interviewed, the four most reliable ones were chosen to again check, finalise, and approve the information, which is presented here. The names of these four people are: Neo Ganjez Wang (age 64, male), village story-keeper; Adam Patun (age 55, male), village story-keeper; Giusa Katapsa (age 54, male), village leader; and Lucas Yalang (age 43, male) senior man.

Background of the Buang People

The Buang people live on the mountain ranges, which extend along the Snake River in the Snake River valley. It is about 50 kilometres west of Lae city.

There are about 7,000 people living in approximately 30 major villages. The dialects spoken are classed into two major ones, the upper Buang dialect, and the lower Buang dialect. The Buang people are a peace-loving and obedient people. They labour hard to survive, by gardening and hunting – and they have been successful gardeners and hunters for a very long time.

For the Buang, the life pattern of an individual must count for the benefit of the community as a whole. From childhood to adulthood, an individual's life is interwoven within the community, sustaining the name and dignity of the community. So, the life of the young ones depends on the community, and is developed by the community, where, in adult age, they will play significant roles in, and for, the community.

Youth Life in Early Childhood

At the age of five to six years, the children start to participate in family activities. Usually, the son accompanies the father to perform male tasks, while the daughter follows her mother to participate in the

female tasks. The separation of the sexes is a practice, which one must follow, at certain times, until one is married.

From this stage of childhood, the children start gaining some first-hand experience, by watching, and getting practically involved, in their parent's activities. The boys start learning skills, from tasks, such as chopping trees, making a garden fence, or building a house. The girls learn from their mother ways of gardening, nut gathering, preparing meals, and also other women's roles. After childhood, comes the adolescent phase, the period of time when Buang children were taught traditional teachings.

Learning Traditional Customs and Taboos

Traditional customs and taboos were taught to the boys, when they were about 11 or 12 years of age, or when they started to cover tree bark wrappings over their nakedness. At this stage, the boys were no longer allowed to sleep in their parents' house at night. Although they were part of the family during the day, working and having meals with them, they were required by rule to sleep in the men's house or *haus man* (a special house, regarded as sacred, and reserved for males only). The boys must be present at the men's house before darkness sets.

From early evening till late, the boys were taught traditional customs and taboos in the men's house. The teachings were done orally by specially-appointed guardians, who were usually bachelors. Most of the teachings were general, and were also taught to the girls, but the special lessons, taught to the boys only, were lessons in the art of tribal fighting, and lessons on certain male taboos. Boys, who were reported for misbehaving, often received punishment from their guardians, in front of the other boys, as part of their lessons.

The girls did not learn in groups, such as the boys did. At an early age of about seven or eight years, or when a girl started to wear grass skirts, she began to learn customs and taboos. Buang girls were taught by their mothers and aunties, or by other older women. This went on from time to time, until the girls reached puberty.

After this phase of learning, the boys and girls were then ready for separation from their childhood age.

The Initiation

The separation from childhood age into adulthood was marked by the initiation ceremony. First, there was a period, where one must endeavour to succeed in tests and trials before being initiated. The initiation ceremony was largely for males. While the females had no formal ceremonies, they usually observed some other means to gain their marks of womanhood.

From the men's house, the boys were then selected to undergo some tests. First, they were taken to tribal battlefields to witness the battles going on. Later, they took part in a trial battle play, being organised by their guardians. After that, they took part in a real battle with the older men, and, after this first taste of real battle, the boys were ready for the initiation ceremony.

The initiation ceremony was simple, and yet memorable, for the boys. On the day of the ceremony, they were dressed in full traditional costumes, and were displayed in front of the whole community. They were then given some encouragement speeches by the village elders, and, after that, each boy was given a special bow and arrow. This signified, and declared, that the boys had passed from childhood to manhood. After this, a great feast was held, where everybody was invited.

The girls had no special ceremony to mark their entry into womanhood, and adult age. From the day a girl started to have her first menstrual period, she was kept in the house, out of sight, for about three or four weeks, and then released.

The day of her release was marked by a feast, attended by her family and close relatives. After this, she was closely monitored and instructed further on how to behave and act as a woman. She should now abide by all the customs and taboos that she had learnt from her mother, aunties, and other women.

About two to three years after her first menstrual period, the girl's family and relatives would decide whether she was ready for declaration into womanhood. If all the family and relatives agreed that she was ready, then they would hang a *bilum* on her head as a sign that showed she had been declared into womanhood. She was now also ready for marriage, if any young men wished to marry her.

The Post-Initiation Period

After the initiation period, the boys and girls obtained further instruction, especially advice concerning adult and married life. The instructions were taught to them through the same pattern of learning: boys in the men's house, and girls by their parents, aunties, and other women.

After further instruction, the boys and girls were then fully accepted as adults. This meant that they no longer submitted to their childhood guardians. They now had every right as adults to fully participate in community activities. One exception was that they still had to avoid mixing with the opposite sex without an elder's consent. Respect for the opposite sex was highly maintained. As the young ones were then fully accepted as adults, they were given responsible roles like: for the males, being a village watchman, or messenger; and for the females, they were given responsibilities for choosing which garden should be harvested first, or they were specially appointed to help another woman, who was in labour.

This was also the time when the young ones could decide to marry, but this applied especially to the males, since the females had been given this opportunity earlier, when they were first declared into womanhood.

Successful Adults

When a young Buang person reached the stage of full adulthood, there were hardly any known failures. The successful adult was regarded as a man or woman, who fulfilled the traditional aspects of male or female life, in and for the community. They respected, and lived by, the traditional customs and taboos. They were now of great importance to their community, for the value and dignity of the

community was sustained for another generation by these young men and women. This was the ultimate aim of Buang youth life.

Buang Youth Life Today

Traditional Buang youth life has changed today, since the coming of the white man. The modern education system has taken over from the traditional one, replacing the role of parents and guardians. This education system, I believe, has failed. It produces a sense of failure, more than one of success. Many young Buang people today, in the village, feel unimportant, because they have never been to school. Many feel failures, because they could not go on to high school. Only a few "pass", and the rest become "dropouts". This creates frustrations, and problems, among the young people, who must now try harder to find their place in the community.

Schooling takes up much time for many young people, and, so, initiation ceremonies are dying out. This, again, creates a serious problem. It has made the passing of childhood to adulthood much more difficult for the young person, and much vaguer for the community. Nothing has taken the place of the initiation process, especially in the discipline and training for freedom-loving children.

So young Buang people today are quite undisciplined in childhood, and, without initiation, become rebellious adults.

The new system of government, too, has taken away the powers of the village leaders and "big men", and so young people don't respect these leaders any more.

The youth group of the church failed in Buang, because, sometimes, young men and women will not be permitted to meet together, as observed in the traditional customs. Many youth groups in Buang have ceased to exist, because of suspicious and criticising parents and families of the young ones. There has been criticism of youth programs, such as, having night fellowships, going for outreach, and going out Bible camping. These attitudes of parents and families have, somehow, resulted in the young ones taking part in other outside activities, such as playing sport to win money, having drinking parties,

listening and dancing to pop music, and engaging in "boy/girl" relationships, which sometimes ends in corrupt marriages.

Somehow "Christianity" (which was new) was associated with the new Western lifestyle, and has mistakenly promoted some very unChristian practices! It is a pity that the introduction of Christianity was not more contextual – penetrating into Buang lifestyle, and "baptising" it, that is, adapting, or fulfilling, traditional life and practices with Christian meaning, and also accepting the good that is in Buang society.

The challenge for the church today is to set up Christian programmes, along with the traditional support of the community, which can meet the needs of young people today.

2. Biblical Teaching about Youth Life

The life of young Christians must be built on a biblical foundation. The Bible places strong emphasis on young people, and especially on the need to train and discipline them to take their place in the Christian community. Here are some Bible passages that show different ways in which the Bible signifies youth life.

The Jewish Context (OT)

Youth is a time with no fixed limit. "Youth" is used for infants, or the very young (Ex 2:6; Judges 13:8; 1 Sam 1:22; 4:21), and is used for the fully-grown as well (Gen 34:19; 2 Sam 18:5; Lev 27:1-8). But, age 20 is the time when one has passed from youth to maturity. Age 20 appears to be the upper age limit of the group, which needs special attention. For example, in Ex 30:14, those under the age of 20 are not required to give an offering as "ransom pay" for their lives; and, in Lev 27:3, when making a vow of dedication, the value of a person above the age of 20 is greater than that of a person below the age of 20; and, in Num 1:3, those conducting the census counted people of age 20 and upwards.

Parents are encouraged to discipline their children from an early age (Prov 13:34; 19:18). The book of Proverbs has many more verses, which show the importance of child training.

Children, who had faith in God, and who were disciplined, became leading figures; like, Joseph, who submitted to God, when he was sold as a slave by his brothers, and God made him a ruler in Egypt (Gen 38:46); and Samuel, as a child, was dedicated to God, and became a priest and a prophet of Israel (1 Sam 3:19-21). Similarly, David trusted God, and became king of Israel (1 Sam 17:33-37).

Children are always regarded as part of religious worship. For example, children were present when Joshua led worship at Mt Ebal (Josh 8:35), when King Jehoshaphat prayed in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Chr 20:13), and also when the people of Judah were offering sacrifices, and rejoicing, during the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 12:43).

Lastly, children are valued highly. They are regarded as blessings from God (Ps 127:3-5). Old men rejoice in their grandchildren, and even bless them (Gen 48:9; Prov 17:6).

The Christian Context (NT)

The New Testament also shows that children are valued highly. Jesus accepted children, and blessed them (Matt 19:14-15), and He said that children should be welcomed (Mark 9:36-37). He also warns against causing children to sin (Mark 9:42). Both Paul and John wrote special words to children in their letters (Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20; 1 John 2:12-14).

The New Testament shows prominent characters, who submitted to God in their childhood days, like John the Baptist, who grew, and became strong in the Spirit (Luke 1:80); Jesus, who grew, and was filled with wisdom and the grace of God (Luke 2:40); Timothy, who knew the scriptures from childhood (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).

The New Testament also places emphasis on training and disciplining children. It shows that training a child is largely the duty of parents (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21), and also the duty of church elders (Tit 2:1-6).

Lastly, the New Testament shows that children are part of the congregation. Jesus wanted the children to praise Him in the temple

(Matt 21:15-16). Paul's letters to the congregations in Ephesus and Colossae have some words especially for young people, and this shows that young people are part of the congregation.

To sum up the points of the Bible, we see that, firstly, the children are special, and are regarded as a blessing from God. They are valued highly. Children must be trained and disciplined in God's ways by their parents and elders, and by the whole community of God's people. They must grow in faith with God, to become God-fearing people, along with the whole community of God's people.

The Bible doesn't show clearly whether young people are a group of their own in the community of God's people. A statement from the South Australian Youth Ministry makes this clear:

> Theologically, there is no distinction between youth and adults. The scriptures, nowhere, separate "youth" into a distinct sub-cultural group. They are neither better nor worse than any other Christian.[1]

What the Bible requires of youth is that every one of us must remember God in our youth, to be able to live a successful God-fearing life until we all reach unity in the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God.

3. Present Youth Ministries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea

The Youth Group

The youth ministry of the congregation covers the children's Sunday school, as well as the confirmation class, and the youth group of the congregation. In ELC-PNG, the children's Sunday school and the confirmation class are not generally recognised as being under the youth ministry. So, when speaking of the youth ministry, it is often the "youth group" that comes to mind.

[1] South Australian District, LCA Youth Ministry Committee, *Youth Ministry and the Congregation*, Adelaide SA: LLL, 1983, p. 1.

The present ELC-PNG youth office was set up in the early 1960s, under the former "Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea" (ELCONG). Missionary, Revd Jack F. Reents, of America, was appointed director, and, at that time, he published a booklet containing information on forming a youth group. The booklet, written in *Tok Pisin*, titled *Buk Bilong Lainim Wok Bilong Ol Yanpipol*, contains the basic patterns on which a youth group is built. The present youth groups in ELC-PNG are based on these patterns, which I will try to describe here.

The youth group is part of the congregation. It is made up of interested young people from the congregation, who are aged between 14 and 25 years. The youth must elect their own office-bearers, consisting of a president, a secretary, and a treasurer, along with their assistants. An elder must be appointed by the congregation to act as an adviser to the youth group.

The youth members are divided into smaller groups according to the "five-star" programme (the five-star program is described in the booklets by Reents, pp. 25-27, and Strauss, pp. 65-131). The "five-star" groups are set, according to the five programmes, which include worship, bible study, outreach, charity, and sport. A leader from each group is elected to form, along with other leaders, the five-star committee. Other activities, which are held during fellowship times, are prayer meetings, Bible sharing, and Bible quizzes. Outside activities include Bible camps, outreaches, and sports.

The youth president is the youth group's representative in the congregation council, reporting on youth work to the council. The congregation council also informs the youth group about church matters concerning youth, through the youth president. In this way, the youth group is in touch with the congregation, and church as a whole. The youth group is also part of the ELC-PNG National Youth body, through the parish, circuit, and district youth bodies.

The Major Aims of Christian Youth Ministries

The Bible stresses the need to train, and prepare, young people in faith and discipline, so that they may take their place in the Christian

community. This should be the standard aim of all Christian youth ministries.

The major aim of the Christian youth ministry in ELC-PNG is to help young people know Jesus as their Lord, and to integrate young people into the life and service of the congregation and the church. This aim is acknowledged by Reents,[2] and also by Strauss.[3] The aim is also emphasised by other Lutheran churches, like the Lutheran church of Australia,[4] and the American Lutheran church,[5] and also by other denominations, like the Nazarene church,[6] and the Seventh-day Adventist church.[7]

Since the aim of the ELC-PNG youth ministry has grounds in the Bible, its youth ministry must strive to meet this particular aim. If not, the youth ministry is a failure.

Problems with the Aims not being met within the ELC-PNG Youth Ministry

Nearly all of the youth groups in ELC-PNG have failed to fulfil the aims of the youth ministry, especially to integrate the youth into the life and service of the congregation and church.

First and foremost, is the misunderstanding of the aims. Many youth members and leaders, church elders, and other leaders, have misunderstood, or have not been aware of, the youth ministry's aims. Then also, if the aims are clear, they are not being achieved by the youth group. The congregation, time and again, leaves the youth

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[2] Jack Reents, *Buk Bilong Lainim Wok Bilong ol Yangpipol*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, nd, p. 6.
[3] Werner Strauss, *Wokabaut Wantaim ol Yangpela*, Madang PNG: Kristen Pres, 1990, p. 9.
[4] South Australian District, LCA Youth Ministry Committee, *Youth Ministry*, p. 4.
[5] Rich Bimler, *77 Ways of Involving Youth in the Church*, St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing, 1977, p. 21.
[6] Garry Glassco, and Tarp Goma, *Ol Program Bilong NYI*, Mt Hagen PNG: Nazarene Publications, 1993, p. 3.
[7] Church Ministries Department, *Adventist Youth Handbook for Papua New Guinea*, Lae PNG: SDA Ministries Department, 1985, pp. 6-7.

ministry to the youth group itself, with no proper guidance to help the young people achieve the given aims.

Here is an example of a youth group, which somehow failed to fulfil the aims of the youth ministry. Information here on the Resurrection Lutheran Youth Group, of 7th Street Lae, is based on my own experience, when I was president of the youth group from 1990 to 1991.

The Resurrection Youth Group was formed in 1980. There were about 65 members at that time, but, when I joined the group in 1989, there were ten members left from the "1980" youth group. The rest were new youth members. Only four from the "1980" group were fully involved in congregational activities, therefore fulfilling the aim of the youth ministry. Fourteen of the old members had transferred out of the area, while six joined other denominations.

The rest of the youth members were still around, but were not involved in any youth work. They were there as non-active members of the congregation. Some of the many reasons given, when they were asked, as to why they were not involved in congregational activities, were that they had done their part already in the youth group, and their youth age had passed. Many said they had hard feelings against the youth group, because leaders of the youth group had misused the youth funds, or they were not given any chance to use the youth musical instruments. Some girls said that boys often asked them for secret relationships, and this turned them away from the youth group forever.

Because of these, and many other hard feelings against the youth group, these ex-youth members were reluctant to be involved in congregational activities or ministries. The original ten members left from the 1980 group claimed that they were the true success of the youth ministries, for they were still active in youth work.

The example of the Resurrection Youth Group shows that, after nearly ten years of the youth group's existence, only four members had really fulfilled the aim of the youth ministry.

The failure of aims, by them not being met, is largely due to lack of understanding of the youth ministry's aims by the church workers and leaders – pastors and laymen alike. Should these aims be recognised, and implemented fully, by these groups of church workers, the youth group will have greater success in fulfilling the aims of youth ministry.

Research was conducted in 1977 by the Melanesian Institute on behalf of ELC-PNG. Their report on youth work indicated that many church leaders and elders had two major questions about youth work. The two questions were:

1. What is the aim of youth ministry?
2. If the aims of youth ministry are of high value, how can the church help leaders and elders cope with, or encourage, youth work?[8]

Reports to the 16th Synod of ELC-PNG in Goroka,[9] from some church districts, on youth work, showed that youth groups have been misled about the youth ministry's aims, and many had been confused on where to start and end. Some reported that their youth ministry was successful in other ways, but they failed to mention that the youth ministry's aims had been fulfilled.

Misunderstanding of the aims leads to false aims arising within the group. For example, the youth group project becomes a misdirected aim for the youth group to reach. When the project is successful, the youth group then considers themselves to be a successful youth group. In the "five-star" programme, it lays down the objectives of the church's youth ministry. The programme is set to turn a young person into a mature and committed Christian. It indicates that:

- "worship" is to help a young person know how to worship God in many ways;

[8] Theodoor Ahrens, *Sios i Laik Sut long Mak*, Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1977, p. 19.
[9] *District Report Handbook: ELC-PNG Synod Goroka, 1988*, Lae PNG: ELC-PNG National Office, 1988.

- "Bible study" is to help a young person know more about the Bible, and to help the young person to study the Bible by himself or herself;
- "outreach" is to help the young person be ready to put his or her faith into action, by witnessing to Christ in all places and at all times;
- "charity" is to help the young person be involved in helping, giving, and supporting those in need; and
- "sport" or recreation is to help young people meet, play with, and get to know each other.

Now, many youth groups believe that, to fulfil these objectives, means that they have fulfilled the aims of the "five-star" programme. For example, three of the "five-star" programme activities (outreach, charity, and sports) have become aims of some youth groups. For some, to go for outreach all around Papua New Guinea is the only aim of their youth group. To help the poor and needy (charity) can be another aim of another youth group. And, to go around playing sport with other youth groups, or other clubs, can be another aim, which some youth groups adopt. So the real aims of youth ministry have not been met in these situations.

Apart from the group, other individual aims have also been encountered. Some have the aim of encouraging boy/girl relationships, which later end in marriage – and that's it, thanks to the youth group, and goodbye. Then there is the young boy, who is so keen to learn to play musical instruments, and, after gaining some skills, he leaves the youth group, and goes out to try out his new skills in the local live band. These types of aims lead to many youth members failing to achieve the real aims of youth ministry.

Reports to the recent ELC-PNG National Youth Conference held in Mumeng (1995), by youth leaders from many church districts, showed that the aims have been misunderstood, and are not being met. I attended the conference myself, and I witnessed that youth representatives, who attended the Conference, presented reports, which

showed that they had been fulfilling misdirected aims, which were being set up within the youth groups by their members.

Their youth plans have become some kind of aims, which they must fulfil to be successful. Some plans, which were mentioned, were making outreach trips to other provinces, visiting overseas partner church youth groups, establishing a business project, sending youth leaders overseas for youth courses and conferences, recording gospel songs in a studio, and some more like these. These activities represent misdirected aims, some of which can turn a youth group into another organisation, which is quite separate from the congregation, or church framework.

Nothing in these reports mentioned anything about young men and women from the youth group being integrated into the greater congregational and church ministries, or taking responsible roles in the church. This is the real aim of Christian youth ministries.

I feel that there should be other alternatives, in which the true aims of Christian youth ministry could be met. In my opinion, I suggest that the youth ministry should be examined, and be:

1. adjusted to be more effective; or
2. an alternative youth structure, locally oriented, should be established besides the present one.

I hereby select the second of the two suggested points to present a possible course of action, in which the aims of the Christian youth ministry could be met.

4. An Ideal Christian Youth Ministry in Buang Tradition

Here is my model of an ideal Christian youth ministry, built on local (Buang) patterns. I believe it is more appropriate for church structures to be built on local patterns, rather than being a copy of the missionary's home-church structure. The great commission, and the history of Christendom, both point clearly to the necessity of proclaiming the "Good News", but, neither in scripture, nor in the

historical development of the church, does the gospel include details of a particular social structure, or church organisation.

As already made clear (see section 2), the Bible places a strong emphasis on young people, and especially on the need to prepare them to take their place in the Christian community. In this model pattern that I am proposing, youth ministry is defined in its wider sense, which includes the whole of a youth's life – starting from infant baptism to the mature age of 20 or 25, and covers the Sunday school and confirmation class as well. This misconception of youth ministry being attached only to the youth group is altogether altered here. The model here is set according to the traditional life patterns of Buang youth.

Childhood Guidance and Training Period

Childhood guidance and training have been a part of the Lutheran church's pastoral and educational ministries. These start at infant baptism, and proceed to Sunday school, and the confirmation class. So, as in the Buang tradition, the childhood age, from four to 13 years, is covered in these ministries. This should also be seen and recognised as a greater part of the overall church's youth ministry, which must continue on after the confirmation period, to help young Christians identify more deeply with the Christian community. So, in this sense, the confirmation rite must be held in a way to encourage young Christians to be willing to participate in the next step of what the youth ministry has to offer.

The Confirmation Rite in Light of the Initiation Ceremony

The initiation ceremony in Buang marks the day a young person is declared into adulthood. In comparison, the concepts of confirmation, most generally held by Christians of the Lutheran church, are that it is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church, which helps the baptised child, through word and sacrament, to identify more deeply with the Christian community. The confirmation rite is also a religious rite, for the fulfilment of the confirmation process, where the young ones affirm their stand in the Christian community.

As many initiation ceremonies are dying out today in Papua New Guinea, the confirmation, and its celebrations, should have great

importance placed on them. Churches should not discourage, but encourage, the way confirmation ceremonies are being celebrated today, like having feasts and traditional dances of Christian value, and inviting fellow Christians of other congregations to witness. Since the initiation ceremony is dying out, and nothing is being done to replace it, I feel that the confirmation ceremony should be seen as fulfilling the role of initiation in a Christian context.

So, for example, as in the Buang tradition, something extra could be added to the confirmation ceremony, like having those to be confirmed dressed up in their own traditional or cultural dress. Further, when receiving the confirmation certificate, they could also be handed a small bow and arrow, or a *bilum*, each. The meaning for this could be defined in a Christian context. For example, the bow and arrow will signify that the young Christian is now armed and ready for the spiritual battle, which all other Christians are fighting. The bow and arrow can represent the word of God as the weapon of truth. Similarly, the *bilum* would signify that the young Christian girl is now ready to carry all the burdens, which she comes across in her Christian life.

Such celebrations could have a lasting impact on the participants and their families, and those present at the ceremony, and they may support and encourage the young Christians in their Christian lives. And also, if some "after confirmation" programmes are set for the young ones, then they will be willing to participate.

Post-Confirmation Period

After the confirmation, there is no fixed programme for the young person, in which he or she can participate. The young person may know only to participate in the Sunday worship, or the communion service, but many drop out after the confirmation period. The youth group is the only place where the young person may go, but, then, the youth group has failed the very aim, which the confirmation demands.

In order that young people may assume more mature roles in the congregation, genuine opportunities should be provided for them to see themselves as members of the congregation, and to feel committed to its purposes. Major attention should be given to help young people to

accept the fulfilment of the confirmation ministry as a significant point for proceeding into the next stage of their lifelong Christian commitment. I feel that, apart from the youth group, the youth ministry should introduce an "after-confirmation" programme to help young ones, who have already been confirmed. So, as in the Buang concept, further guidance, acceptance, and a responsibility period must be applied here.

Here, I suggest that, after confirmation, the young person should be given further guidance, and then be given responsible duties within the congregation. So, instead of forming a new programme, and a new group, for the young people after confirmation, the young people should be incorporated into the already-established "men's" and "women's" groups.

As in Buang (and also in many other rural areas), it is unusual for young men and women to meet together by themselves. This caused problems with the youth groups, as mentioned in section 1. So here, boys can be adapted into the "men's" fellowship group, while girls may be adapted into the "women's" fellowship group. In this way, further guidance on the Christian life could be achieved, by the men training, and encouraging, the boys, and the same with the women and girls. This will be in line with the apostle's words to Titus (2:3-6).

In these groups, the five-star programme of the youth ministry can be followed. This will be easy, because part of the programme is already being followed in both of these groups. Both men's and women's groups have programmes, which include worship times, Bible study, outreach, and charity, or community service. Sports (recreation) and Bible camps can be added for the interests of the young ones. In these groups, programmes and activities must be set also to suit the needs of the young ones involved. For example, important issues, which have always been learned in cultural traditions (as in the Buang tradition), like the menstrual period for females, other bodily changes, which occur in the lifetime of both sexes, sexual behaviour, and married life, are often neglected in family circles today. Teachings on these issues can be revived in these groups, so that boys and girls may learn them openly, without guilt or shame, and in a Christian context.

Programmes in these groups must also have special times for the young ones to promote their Christian skills, or leadership abilities.

The groups must be designed to provide a training ground for young Christians, with mature Christians leading them in group activities. The older and more-mature Christians here will feel more responsible for guiding the young Christians into full Christian ministries.

After some time in the groups, the young Christians must now be given full congregational responsibilities, depending on their character, capabilities, and willingness. The congregational ministries include the Sunday school, music group, church leadership, or administration, and other congregational activities. This is where young Christians, of both sexes, will participate together with the whole congregation. Here also, the call to Christian service could be wider, if the young ones can be persuaded to apply for training in the church's institutions, like the seminary, evangelist schools, church college, or teacher- and girl-training schools.

So here, now, the young people are being fully integrated into the full congregational and church's ministries, fulfilling the aims of the Christian youth ministry. In this ideal youth ministry model, I believe that many problems, which are currently faced within the ELC-PNG youth ministries today, will no longer bother young Christians, especially of the Buang church. Moreover, it will enable fulfilment of the aims of the youth ministry.

Conclusion

Buang traditional youth life, as in many other Melanesian cultures, is an important part of the community. The community pays great attention to this, in raising and protecting its youth, from early childhood to mature age, so that the young people can be integrated into full community life.

In regard to this, the life of young people, in biblical terms, is also valued highly. From childhood, the young ones are trained and disciplined in God's ways, by parents and elders, or the whole

community of God's people, until they reach maturity, when they are placed into the full life of the community. The Bible doesn't show the life of young people as being of its own, and separated from the whole community of God's people. That is why the lives of Christian young people today must not be defined to mean that it belongs only to the "youth group" section of the church, nor that it belongs to some lower stages of the Christian life, and not equal with the rest of the community. This type of mentality, today, leads to the many problems facing the present ELC-PNG youth ministry.

So, I have come up with this alternative Christian youth structure, based on local (Buang traditional) patterns, and based on the Bible. This, I believe, could overcome many problems facing the youth ministry, and could fulfil the aims of Christian youth life. This ideal Christian youth structure would certainly benefit the Christian life of the Buang young people, if not the ELC-PNG youth ministry as a whole.

As an ex-youth leader, and member, who has witnessed the many failures of Christian youth ministry in ELC-PNG, I would encourage a serious review of the ministry, in order that it may become sensitive to traditional customs and structures. By doing so, I believe Christian youth ministry can be more efficient in achieving its aims.

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CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, TEACHING METHODOLOGY, AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Greg Schiller

Greg Schiller is an Australian, lecturing at the Lutheran Highlands Seminary, where he is currently Vice-Principal. He completed a Bachelor of Theology at the Lutheran Seminary in Adelaide, and has commenced studies towards a Master of Theology.

The Situation in Papua New Guinea

Missionaries, a century ago, often based their mission programme on the setting-up of schools. The younger generation were removed from village influences to learn the Christian way of life in the mission school, and to learn to read, write, and count. Sometimes, boarding schools were established, so that a complete removal from village life was effected. The very aim of the schools seemed to presuppose a Western-based education style.

From the beginning, the school approach was used by Lutherans in Papua New Guinea. Within months of their arrival, the missionaries' attempts to conduct classes completely failed. After three years, however, a boarding school had been organised. In the mornings, there was the normal school classroom routine. In the afternoons, the students worked under the guidance of missionaries at various manual tasks, using the new iron tools. It is interesting to note that Wagner evaluates the classroom routine as ineffective, while the work programme in the afternoon, and the example of community life, proved to be the most-effective teaching methods.[1] Already then, we see an indication of the importance of non-formal and informal education methods in the early introduction of Western-style education to Papua New Guinea. I define non-formal education as planned non-classroom activity, geared to

[1] Herwig Wagner, "Beginning at Finschhafen", in *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986, pp. 31-83.

learning by doing. Informal education takes place in the dynamics of the learning community.

To this day, primary and high school education in Papua New Guinea remains modelled on Western styles. These areas of education have long been the responsibility of the government. Teaching positions have been nationalised at the primary level, and, to a large extent, at the secondary level. Yet, a basic Western-style classroom method of teaching is still followed, even in the remotest village schools. Teaching methods, materials, and curriculum remain largely uniform throughout the country, emphasising classroom routine, with a teacher-centred, theoretical programme, aimed a formal certification for higher education, or town-based employment. The non-formal afternoon work programme has largely been neglected.[2] It is considered irrelevant to the aims of formal certification. Yet, the majority of students have no opportunities for further education, or employment in the towns. They return to their villages. This is hardly accounted for in the Papua New Guinean education system.[3]

Theological training for indigenous Papua New Guinean Lutheran pastors, interrupted by the war years, became established only in the late 1950s, and early 1960s.[4] The Lutheran Highland's Seminary was established at Ogelbeng (near Mt Hagen), in 1961,[5] to train experienced men for pastoral work in Highlands congregations. The early training for ministry was done in close connection with practical evangelistic work in nearby congregations.[6] Initially, Kate was the language of instruction, but this was later changed to Tok Pisin. After ten years, a detailed three-year curriculum was introduced. Students studied Old and New Testament theology, dogmatics, church history, practical and pastoral theology, and spent one year on vicarage. Only the biblical

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[2] Hartley Hage, "Language and Schools", in *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986, pp. 432-434.

[3] Ibid., p. 420.

[4] Helmut Horndasch, "The Church and its Ministry", in *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986, p. 389.

[5] Ibid., p. 400.

[6] Ibid.

languages were not introduced into the curriculum. The seminary had, therefore, evolved into one, largely patterned after its Western counterparts. A number of basic differences should, however, be noted initially.

From the beginning, all students, together with their families, and all staff, together with their families, lived on the seminary campus. Thus, the seminary community had the chance to live as a Christian community. The whole community formed a Christian congregation on campus. Worship, study, work, and everyday family life, are experienced within the community context.

Even though students and their families leave their villages to live at the seminary compound for some years, a village atmosphere prevails, to some extent. The most important factor here is that garden land is allocated by the seminary to each family unit, who must retain their subsistence agricultural life while at the seminary. Community work for the seminary, and private garden work, are part of normal seminary life in the afternoon programme.

The adjustments cannot simply be dismissed as surface changes, for they do significantly lodge the theological education programme within a rural Papua New Guinean setting. On the other hand, the emphasis at the seminary does remain on formal education, through morning classroom lectures. Here, the lecture method largely copies the Western models, under which the teachers (expatriate and national) taught. The available textbooks in Tok Pisin, the assignments set, the tests given, would not be out of place in any Western seminary. This is becoming more so as the seminary strives to improve its academic level, and looks to accrediting its graduates. Thus, in this sense, the seminary appears locked into the known Western system of seminary education.

Teaching Methods at Papua New Guinean Seminaries Reviewed

Questions about the suitability of transplanting Western theological education methods to Papua New Guinea were raised by A. Erickson, in 1974. Erickson, a lecturer at the Senior Flierl Seminary, Logaweng, the coastal counterpart of the Lutheran Highlands Seminary at Ogelbeng, noted problems, both at the seminary, and in the

congregations. At the seminary, he noted that students did not absorb the lecture material, and that students' sermons were foreign to the village style of preaching.[7] In the congregations, he noted that recent graduates of the seminary were not able to adjust their style and approach to village situations, could not apply theology to village needs, concentrated on sacramental duties rather than preaching, and had difficulty communicating warmth and concern for congregation members.[8]

Erickson felt that these problems challenged some of the basic assumptions about training pastors for congregational work in Papua New Guinea. Firstly, he questioned whether the academic, institutionalised approach to training pastors was the best model for Papua New Guinea. Secondly, he argued that unhealthy authoritarian attitudes held by pastors, and the irrelevant nature of their teaching and preaching, were learnt, and reinforced, at the seminary. Finally, the lack of warmth and love, and the inability to apply theology to a village situation, came about because students had spent too long in an artificial, and isolated, environment.[9]

These observations have been highlighted in recent times, especially by K. Riecke, lecturer at the Lutheran Highlands Seminary, from 1990 to 1992. He was shocked at how true Erickson's observations were, in the contemporary situation, especially since they were had been made almost two decades ago.[10] Riecke realised that nothing much had changed in the way theological education was conducted in the Lutheran church in Papua New Guinea, in the time since Erickson raised the issue.

Reflecting on his experiences as a lecturer, Riecke made a number of criticisms, which, in sum, agree with Erickson's assessment. Firstly, he observed that the seminary was becoming even more of an academic institution than before. Attaining degrees, and accreditation for degrees, led seminaries to overemphasise the academic aspect of education, over

[7] A. Erickson, "Search for Alternatives", in *Catalyst* 4-3 (1974), p. 34.
[8] Ibid., p. 34.
[9] Ibid., p. 55.
[10] Kurt Riecke, "Why are Changes so Difficult to Make?", in *Catalyst* 23-1 (1993), p. 17.

against the personal growth of the student. Secondly, he noted that the lecture method persisted as the basic teaching method, despite the obvious poor learning results. Thirdly, he realised that students learnt not only what they are taught, but also how they are taught. The basic methods and attitudes used at the seminary were later perpetuated in students' ministries after they were ordained. Fourthly, he perceived problems in continuing to finance and staff the current system. Finally, he questioned the usefulness of students' studies being divided into separate subjects, following the traditional biblical, systematic, historical, and practical theology divisions. Riecke suggests that students would benefit from a more-integrated curriculum.[11]

It appears that, in Papua New Guinea, educators in general, and theological educators, in particular, have not learned the lessons very early taught to the first missionaries. They have ignored non-formal and informal education methods, and concentrated on formal education methods. Research has shown that the way that one teaches tends to mirror the way that one was taught.[12] Since Papua New Guineans have been introduced to institutionalised education, through Western instructors, or instructors taught by Western instructors, they perpetuate Western models of education, assuming that it is the way to educate. Education is perceived to be something Western. There is generally no serious consideration of how Papua New Guineans teach and learn. What are their teaching and learning styles? How can they be applied to the educational setting in Papua New Guinea today? Culture has an important influence on how people prefer to learn.[13] Insights from cultural anthropology can help here.

Insights from Cultural Anthropology for Teaching Methodology

Cultural anthropology encourages us to penetrate beyond the assumption that all people think and learn in the same ways. We need to

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[11] Ibid., pp. 25-27.

[12] Dorothy Bowen, and Earle Bowen, "What Does It Mean to Think, Learn, Teach?", in *Internationalising Missionary Training*, William David Taylor, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1991, p. 204.

[13] James E. Plueddemann, "Culture, Learning, and Missionary Training", in *Internationalising Missionary Training*, William David Taylor, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1991, p. 218.

come to terms, not only with visible forms that are obviously different in other cultures, but also with the invisible thought forms, which receive, and interpret, messages in ways that may be quite different from ours.

Hesselgrave shows how understanding cultures, in terms of layers of culture, can be helpful. The model, Hesselgrave presents, is suggested by G. Linwood Barney. Material artefacts and observable behaviour are the outer layer of culture. In the next layer are the society's institutions. This is followed by the layer consisting of the society's values. The deepest layer of culture consists of the society's ideology, cosmology, and worldview.[14] This model helps in a number of ways. It shows that it is relatively easier to discover, and describe, another society's visible artefacts, forms, and institutions than it is to discover, and describe, its values and worldview. Making surface changes to a culture, though easier, will not automatically incur changes to the values and beliefs held by people of that culture. Hesselgrave argues that missionaries cannot be satisfied at communicating Christ cross-culturally, merely at the surface level. Missionaries also need to learn to communicate Christ to respondents in terms of their ways of viewing the world, and in their ways of thinking. Educators should also be aware that surface changes are of little use if the cognitive processes, the ways of thinking and learning, of their students are not taken into account.[15]

Earle and Dorothy Bowen, teachers in Africa for more than 18 years, noted that many missionaries felt similar frustrations as Erickson and Riecke: students in the two-thirds world did not learn in the way missionary educators expected them to.[16] The Bowens researched "learning styles", or "cognitive styles" (the Bowens use the terms interchangeably), and have stressed that, for effective cross-cultural communication, it is important to be aware of how people of other cultures think and learn.[17]

[14] David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1986, pp. 101-103.
[15] Ibid., pp. 163-164, 295.
[16] Bowen, "What Does It Mean?", p. 265.
[17] Ibid., pp. 204-205.

The study of learning styles, and the ways people structure their learning, is not a new field. The Bowens have done specific research in the area of "field-independence" and "field-sensitivity", concepts developed by Witkin, in the 1940s.[18] These concepts refer to how students take note of their surroundings – how they seek meaning, how they become informed: sensitive to, or independent of, their environment.[19] In researching learning styles of students in Africa, the Bowens realised that the type of student, known as "field-sensitive", was similar to the students they had been teaching in Africa. As well, a number of traits seemed to be characteristic of the majority of field-sensitive students. The following traits, the Bowens list as:

- being very sensitive to the judgment of others;
- being responsive to social reinforcement;
- being good with interpersonal relations, which are very important;
- like being with people; groups are very important;
- obedience to authority important;
- culturally-determined gender roles important;
- not analytical at problem solving;
- extrinsic motivation very important;
- autonomy not as important as social acceptance.[20]

Despite the diversity of cultures in Papua New Guinea, these traits broadly fit most Melanesians. Loeliger, for example, who writes generally about Melanesian societies, emphasises how ancestors, clan, and extended family are central,[21] right relationships within a community

[18] Ibid., p. 205.
[19] Ibid., pp. 206-207.
[20] Ibid., p. 207.
[21] Carl E. Loeliger, "The Traditional Context", in *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing, 1986, p. 24.

are important,[22] and older men are respected, and hold considerable authority.[23] Oliver writes about the importance of collective action in the social-descent unit,[24] that authority status is ascribed in terms of seniority,[25] and that many Melanesian societies emphasise distinct gender roles.[26] McElhanon and Whiteman point out the Melanesian sensitivity to shame, in listing the avoidance of shame as something highly valued.[27]

This seems to indicate that at least the majority of Papua New Guinean students would be field-sensitive students. The Bowens suggest that the field-sensitive person predominates in many cultures that have been traditionally missionary-receiving cultures.[28] Their own studies showed that almost all students in Kenya and Nigeria were field sensitive.[29] Hesselgrave concurs with these findings, categorising tribal peoples as "concrete relational thinkers".[30]

If field-sensitive students have a characteristic way of thinking and learning, then teaching methodology ought to reflect this. Western teaching methods have generally been developed for field-independent students. Thus, since Western teaching methods have been copied in Papua New Guinean educational institutions, and in the seminaries, learning is not as efficient as it could have been. Educators need to consciously adapt their teaching styles to the learning styles of the people with whom they are working.

The Bowens studied how teaching strategies, appropriate for field-independent students, differed from those appropriate for field-sensitive students. In the light of their African teaching experiences, they propose

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[22] Ibid., p. 21.
[23] Ibid., p. 26.
[24] Douglas L. Oliver, *Oceania: the native cultures of Australia and the Pacific Islands*, Honolulu HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1989, p. 1028.
[25] Ibid., pp. 1067, 1107.
[26] Ibid., p. 1101.
[27] Kenneth McElhanon, and Darrell L. Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom", in Darrell L. Whiteman, ed., *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, Point* 5 (1984), p. 108.
[28] Bowen, "What Does It Mean?", p. 208.
[29] Ibid., p. 211.
[30] Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, pp. 303, 325-328.

the following teaching strategies for those parts of the two-thirds world, where students are predominantly field sensitive:

1. The thought processes of field-sensitive persons are holistic. They need to see a whole plan for the subjects they are doing. Therefore, a course outline should be provided. An oral preview should also be given.
2. Clearly-written course objectives will help students to know what they are expected to learn, and why.
3. Each individual lesson should also give a brief preview of the material and goals for the lesson.
4. Field-sensitive persons should be taught how to take notes. It is not one of their strengths.
5. Frequent feedback and reinforcement are needed.
6. Illustrations, taken from life situations, are best.
7. Small units of work are to be preferred over larger ones.
8. Role-playing is an excellent teaching method.
9. Set deadlines, towards which students can work, and keep the dates set.
10. It is better to give assigned readings than to tell students to read a set number of pages about a given subject.
11. Correction and support must be given to field-sensitive students, bearing in mind that they are sensitive to the praise and criticism of both peers and authority figures.
12. Group work is preferred to individual work. Students should be encouraged to work and study in groups or pairs.
13. Field-sensitive students prefer structure and direction in doing a project.
14. If students are more visual than auditory, they will work best if notes are provided, or written up on the blackboard, or overhead projector.

15. Other visual aids of all kinds are essential. Pictures, charts, posters, and models may not only raise the level of learning, but may be necessary, even for basic learning to occur.

16. External, rather than internal, motivators reinforce the field-sensitive person. Praise, criticism, and grades have a great effect on field-sensitive students. It would be helpful to grade them more frequently.

17. Field-sensitive students learn more from examples and models. A teacher's example will teach more than an explanation.

18. Field-sensitive students want to be told how to do something.

19. Criterion-referenced grading is best used with field-sensitive students. Grading should be based on the student's performance, in relation to set standards.

20. Test material should be taken from the objectives that have been provided to the class.[31]

To many, these suggestions appear to recommend obviously good teaching methods. Field-sensitive persons will especially find this so. But field-independent learners will find many of these suggestions do not suit their preferred learning style.

Plueddemann, a professor of cross-cultural education studies, agrees with the Bowen's proposal that cross-cultural differences influence people's learning styles. Cultural differences will give some people a high degree of sensitivity to their immediate concrete context ("high-context" people), while others appear to be more interested in ideas and principles, which are broader than the immediate context ("low-context" people).[32] Though Plueddemann explains that no person is totally "low context", focusing only on ideas, or totally "high-

[31] Bowen, "What Does It Mean?", pp. 211-213. See also Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, pp. 338-339.

[32] Plueddemann, "Culture, Learning, and Missionary Training", pp. 219-220. These concepts are borrowed from T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, Garden City NY: Anchor Books, 1977, p. 92.

context", focusing only on the present context, he does suggest that people from rural, agricultural communities tend toward the high-context end of the continuum.[33]

The high-context teaching and learning style, described by Plueddemann, reflects many of the Bowen's recommendations. I summarise some of his points here:

1. High-context students are concerned with the practical and personal implications the course will have for them.
2. High-context students are respectful of the teacher.
3. High-context students cooperate with each other.
4. Non-verbal communication is significant to high-context students.
5. High-context students are group- and people-oriented.
6. High-context students respond to the praise and criticism of others with the group. A feeling of belonging, and of group cooperation, is important.
7. It is better to begin with the high-context student's experience and lead into theory and ideas.[34]

Plueddemann offers telling advice when he warns that good teaching will not consist of merely adapting to the student's preferred learning style.[35] High-context students will prefer to learn "how-to-do-it" techniques, without necessarily reflecting on the theories and principles involved.[36] Yet, today's village pastor should be able to operate beyond this "how-to-do-it" stage. Teaching methods will have to take into account the high-context learning preferences, yet extend the student beyond these bounds. A good suggestion from Plueddemann is to focus on problem solving.[37] Problems grow out of practical

[33] Pleuddemann, "Culture, Learning, and Missionary Training", p. 221.
[34] Ibid., pp. 221-228.
[35] Ibid., p. 225.
[36] Ibid., p. 228.
[37] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

difficulties, but require theoretical insights for solutions. Actual case studies are useful for both high- and low-context students. High-context students should be challenged to reflect on their experiences, and draw out theological implications. Thus, practice and theory should be integrated.

Reflections from Papua New Guinea

My own recent experiences in teaching at Lutheran Highlands Seminary confirm a number of the Bowen's recommendation, and Plueddemann's summaries. I cite just two examples:

In 1991, I taught "Galatians" to the third-year class. The subject was divided into small units. I gave regular weekly short tests of multi-choice questions. Students were assigned readings and assignment questions for each unit. Larger tests were given at the end of each unit. Although the frequent preparation of tests and assignments, and then the added work of marking them, all added to my workload, I noticed that the students did very well in their tests and assignments. They also were clear about what we were learning during the lesson period. At the end of the course, the class asked that I follow a similar method in other subjects that I taught them. Of the Bowen's recommendations, numbers 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, and 16 were emphasised in my approach to teaching this subject.

In 1992, I taught a doctrinal subject to the final-year class, which focused on doctrines challenged by other churches and sects. I had the students suggest to the class which doctrines of our church they saw being challenged. We also looked through the question-and-answer section of the *Niugini Luteran* for doctrinal questions, which were frequently asked by readers. Students were divided into small groups, with each group having to prepare an answer to the challenges made to that particular doctrine. The groups then presented their answers to the class, where further discussion and evaluation were held. Several students thanked me for what I had taught them in that subject. This surprised me, because most of the lesson content came from the students' own work, and not from my presentations. Further feedback showed that the students found the topics were relevant, and they saw how they related to their work. The Bowens' recommendations, which were

followed for the teaching methodology of this subject, were the use of life-related examples, and group work (points 6 and 12). Plueddemann's points 1, 3, 5, and 7 relate to the teaching methodology I used.

As a point of comparison, it is interesting to note that another subject that I taught, using a standard lecture method, provided some frustrations for me, especially in the test results. Where I thought that I had gone over some points time and again in class, students' test papers showed me that they had not picked up those very points. It confused me at the time that, something I thought I had presented very clearly, was not learned by the students. On reflection, I can see that I taught the subject without utilising the recommendations for field-sensitive/high-context learners.

Erickson and Riecke also made suggestions, which show that they concur with the general recommendations of the Bowens and Plueddemann. Erickson mentions that subjects should build on the experiences, knowledge, and ability of the students; that outside resource people should be used in teaching; that evaluation of the students should be constructive, focusing not only on the students' academic achievements, but also on personal growth.[38] These suggestions correspond with the Bowens' recommendations at points 6, 11, 16, 17, and 19, and Plueddemann's point that teachers should proceed from students' experiences to theory and ideas. Riecke emphasises the need for subjects to be related to daily-life situations (Bowens' point 6; Plueddemann's point 1); that fieldwork should be an integral part of seminary training, with subjects building on the experiences from fieldwork (Plueddemann's point 7); the example of teachers (Bowens' point 17; Plueddemann's point 2); utilising different teaching methods, such as group work, drama, role-playing, case studies, visual aids (Bowens' points 8, 12, and 15; Plueddemann's points 3, 4, and 5); the development of the whole person.[39]

Most of the Bowens' and Plueddemann's discussion focused on adapting teaching methods to a culturally-preferred style of learning, presupposing that formal classroom education was the norm. Yet, the

[38] Erickson, "Search for Alternatives", p. 58.
[39] Riecke, "Why are Changes so Difficult to Make?", pp. 28-30, 32-33.

challenge to consider the strengths of informal and non-formal education, indicated early on by the Lutheran church's first experience with education at Finschhafen, and the later comments made by Erickson and Riecke, need to be taken seriously. The Bowens' and Plueddemann's own remarks about students learning by example, and the value of students' experiences for learning, also suggests that this topic needs to be considered further.

Formal education methods generally are not questioned. It seems expected that high academic qualifications will be obtained through using formal teaching methods. The corollary is that non-formal and informal education is related to inferior education, at least in regard to academic achievement.[40]

Non-formal and informal education has always had a recognised place at the Lutheran seminaries in Papua New Guinea. It seems, however, that their roles were more respected in the earlier years. Horndasch writes of how the community of staff and students, with their families, at Logaweng, live as a Christian community/congregation, "having a normal spiritual life in worship and work, exercising discipline among themselves, and caring for the sick, and for the children".[41] I have also described the community life aspect of the seminary at Ogelbeng. Horndasch also records how the initial training at Ogelbeng was done in close connection with practical evangelistic work in nearby villages.[42] Thus, the importance of non-formal and informal education methods at the Pidgin seminaries has not gone unnoticed.

The matter of academic levels is of concern for the preparation of the church's future pastors, and also for coordinating with other theological schools. Yet, it must be questioned whether upgrading academic standards necessarily requires the diminishing importance of informal and non-formal education. Also, the goal of training effective

[40] William David Taylor, "Introduction: Setting the Stage", in *Internationalising Missionary Training*, William David Taylor, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1991, pp. 7-8.
[41] Horndasch, "The Church and its Ministry", p. 399.
[42] Ibid., p. 400.

pastors for congregational work in village and town situations should never be lost sight of.

Much of the structure, which emphasised non-formal and informal eduction at the Lutheran Highlands Seminary, is still in place. Students and staff continue to live together on campus. Student families retain subsistence agricultural practices, while studying at the seminary. Teachers and students are divided into care groups, which meet together regularly. Fieldwork is carried out by the care groups. Year levels also participate in different fieldwork experiences, such as religious instruction in schools, and hospital and prison counselling. There is a campus congregation. The Bowens' and Plueddemann's research suggests that learning would be more effective if these non-formal and informal educational aspects worked in coordination with formal educational aspects. Riecke has also come to this conclusion:

> Theological education has to bring together studying, action, worship, and challenges for personal growth, in an integrated manner, to develop well-trained and dedicated Christian persons, being able to serve their community in an effective and inspiring way.[43]

Some suggestions, which appear relevant to the circumstances of the Lutheran Highlands Seminary, are given here.

The fieldwork programme should be treated as more than an adjunct to the formal education programme. At present, it has a lower status, since there is no serious evaluation of the students' fieldwork activities. This attitude is sharpened by the fact that fieldwork opportunities are normally scheduled in times that students see as their free time. A number of improvements should be made to the programme. The fieldwork experiences, and classroom learning, needs to be integrated. What is learnt in the classroom, can be practised in fieldwork activities, and then reflected on in the classroom. Homiletics is a subject that provides a clear example. Classroom theory can be combined with actual experience in writing for, and preaching in, different situations: village, plantation, town, compound, and radio. The

[43] Riecke, "Why are Changes so Difficult to Make?", p. 33.

practice of writing for, and preaching in, real situations seems to be important, since it is often noted that seminarians strive to preach more theoretical, academic-type sermons in the seminary chapel. This style, learned at the seminary, will not be effective at the village level. Homiletics classes can then review, and reflect on, the actual experiences of students, and the theory learnt will be better grasped by the students. Homiletics is a subject with an obvious practical aspect to it. Yet many other subjects could also be integrated with practical experiences in Bible studies, counselling, witnessing, leading worship, and religious instruction.

The experience of living together on one campus as a Christian community should be recognised for the important part it plays in the students' training. The teachers' influence on students is not limited to classroom contact. Students see teachers out of classroom hours in the context of everyday-life activities: family life, sport, gardening, shopping, and praying. Teachers should be aware of their influence as role models. Many students have grown up in villages without resident pastors. They have seen a pastor only when he visits for Holy Communion services. The seminary teachers may be the first full-time close contact students have with pastors. The attitudes and lifestyle of teachers, communicated non-verbally, will, therefore, be a major influence on students. The way worship is organised on campus, the way problems are solved on campus, and other aspects of life on campus, seemingly unrelated to the educational programme, nevertheless, will be influential learning experiences for the students. Staff should especially be attuned to this.

Worship and spiritual life, as with fieldwork, should not be an adjunct to the seminary programme. Spiritual formation of students, through organised worship experiences, small groups, meditation and prayer, and daily devotions, must be considered as important as the academic programme. Community life at the seminary should be organised around community, group, and individual worship and prayer. Teachers should recognise their role as spiritual advisers. Care groups will have an important part to play here.

Student evaluation should be based on more than the student's academic achievements. The current practice to involve the care group teacher more in student evaluations is to be encouraged. However, student evaluations of this kind should not be limited to the final-year students. More regular meetings of students with teachers to discuss academic work, fieldwork, personal development, and spiritual growth should be held. Field-sensitive students appear to benefit from more frequent evaluations, and they respond to encouragement given through peers and authority figures. The care-group system, currently emphasising worship and social activities, could emphasise this aspect more.

These examples are positive indications that what is already happening at the seminary can benefit from consciously aligning with the principle of integrating non-formal and informal education with the formal academic programme. Indeed, instead of fearing that academic standards might be lowered, cultural learning preferences of Papua New Guineans suggest that learning would, in fact, be more effective and efficient. In any case, the suggestions do seem to correspond to the seminary's aim of equipping students for pastoral ministry in Papua New Guinea. It should only be emphasised that staff numbers should be kept at their optimum levels, since more than class work is expected of staff under such a programme.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural educators can be aided by knowledge and skills learned from cultural anthropology. Yet, in Papua New Guinea, the thrust of education in general, and of theological education, in particular, has been with Western teaching methods and forms. For at least 20 years, Lutheran seminary lecturers have noted problems arising from theological training that simply copies Western educational methods and forms. Research in Africa, by the Bowens and Plueddemann, shows that culture is an important influence on how people learn. Their teaching strategies for field-sensitive/high-context people are recommended for the situation in Papua New Guinea, as a more serious coordination of non-formal and informal education methods with the academic formal methods now emphasised.

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TOWARDS THE CELEBRATION OF A PACIFIC LOVE-MEAL

Theo Aerts

Father Theo Aerts is a Roman Catholic priest from Belgium. He was Protector of "Ecumenical Studies" at the University of PNG, in Port Moresby. However, health concerns resulted in his return to Belgium a couple of years ago.

In certain Christian matters, the churches in the Pacific are faced with a dilemma. Some of them feel that, at the end of an ecumenical gathering, the celebration of the eucharist should be evident. This was already the opinion of some 50 American Jesuits, who met in early October, 1969, in North Aurora, Illinois – and some people would accept that this is now a foregone conclusion.

However, there are others, like the late Catholic Bishop of Tonga, and chairman of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Patelesio Finau, who see that this goal is still to be achieved, and believe this will be possible at the dawn of the year 2000. Even Pope John-Paul II, in his 1994 encyclical about *The Coming of the Third Millennium*, has said that the present time "demands of everybody . . . the promotion of fitting ecumenical initiatives, so that we can celebrate . . . [the year 2000], if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium" (n. 34).

If I am correct in reading "the signs of the times", I would like to propose a position between these extremes, and suggest that it would be a feasible goal to devise "a Pacific-style *agape*", involving all the churches. Some opposing groups will object that "we eat already all the time together", so that this last form of common meal would be no achievement at all. I, for one, would think that the Christian component could well be heightened, inspired by Paul's distinction between "eating" and "thanking" (1 Cor 11:25; found in the inverse order in Luke 2:20), and concentrating on the meal aspect. This paper is low-key, and attempts to chart some developments.

1. Various Scriptural Interpretations

Is the goal, set out by bishop Finau, some six years ago, still realistic today or not? Do we, indeed, want to achieve a united stand on the matter? And is it really necessary to have a common eucharist? Is that our only goal for the year 2000?

To answer this question, we may first have a look at the variety of eucharistic rituals, which are observed by the churches. As we all know, there are various competing terms in use. Without mentioning some of the more denominationally-coloured names (such as "the blessed sacrament"), we can mention a few:

- Breaking of the bread
- Supper of the Lord
- Table of the Lord
- (Holy) eucharist
- Communion service
- (Holy) mass

All these expressions are loaded terms, having behind them a long history. And, even where the same idioms are used, the same terms no longer mean the same thing for various churches – if they ever did mean the same thing. Perhaps it is worthwhile to go to the roots – the New Testament itself – because the various existing eucharistic rituals found around "the Last Supper" are not clear replicas of what the New Testament tells us. Instead, they were developed from different components in various passages of scripture.

1. Adherence to Jesus' example and command ("Take, eat, drink" – Matt 26:27; "do this . . ." – 1 Cor 11:24-25)
2. Memorial of the death of the Lord ("As often as you eat . . ." – 1 Cor 11:26)
3. Sacrifice of expiation for us, and for our sins ("For many until forgiveness of sins" – Matt 26:28)

4. Fellowship meal among Jesus' disciples (cf. earthly meals in the Jesus "brotherhood" *passim*)
5. Renewal of the covenant with God forever ("the new covenant in My blood" – Luke 22:20; also Heb 8-9)
6. Real presence of the Lord (in the eucharistic elements) ("This is My body . . . My blood" – Matt 26:26, 28)
7. Thanksgiving ("He thanked [God]" – Matt 26:26-27)
8. Pascal celebration (cf. Luke 22:15; also "Christ our Passover" – 1 Cor 5:7)
9. Sacrament of unity ("a communion with . . . Christ" – cf. 1 Cor 10:15-17)
10. Effective sign of grace given, or a "sacrament" (cf. church councils)
11. Mass as mission (cf. modern theologies)
12. Anticipation of the eschatological meal in heaven ("I will not drink . . . until . . ." – Matt 26:29; also John 6:54)

I, for one, do not believe that *all* these aspects have the same weight in the New Testament, nor that *all* must be represented in the churches' celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Neither am I convinced that *only* what some people see as the one and main part in the ritual should decide about the understanding of what other Christians derive from Jesus' word and example.

To clear the ground, then, we might address, first, some broader issues, such as a typology of the churches (section 2), and then address a wider range of theological concerns, i.e., in matters of Christology and Ecclesiology, and also a particular area of the holy signs among Christians, baptism (section 3).

2. Main Types of Churches

In a way, the New Testament is so rich that people differ in singling out what, to them, seems to be the most important texts and themes. As regards the greater Christian denominations, presently active

in the Pacific, I would like to distinguish at least three different models of churches:

a. No Sacraments

Some churches (perhaps on the basis of Gal 5:1) deny the necessity of any scripturally-based rites and actions, which signify, and confer, divine grace. Maybe this is not a fair description of these groups of believers, since we have already given them the term "church", which seems to be a loaded term (including some kind of approved, and transmitted, ministry) – so they, themselves, might rather prefer to be designated as "ecclesial communities". This view could also affect such more-specific terms, as "holy signs", or "sacraments".

Without intending to single out as non-sacramental, other hues of Christians, we would think that the Salvation Army heads the bill. They do have their organisational forms, graded after modern military ranks (not unlike, a Salvation Army officer told me, bishops, priests, and deacons among the Catholics). They also have their rites and rituals, centred around the "articles of war", the allegiance to "the flag", etc. But they do not practise any form of baptism or eucharist.

b. Bible-based Signs

Other churches accept some basic scriptural signs, such as those used for entrance into the church, and for expressing fellowship. Both signs go back to Jesus' explicit commandment. He commanded His followers to "go and baptise" (Matt 28:19), and about the need "to be reborn by water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), and so they administer baptisms. Jesus also commanded "do this in memory of Me" (1 Cor 11:24) and said that "as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you commemorate the Lord's death" (1 Cor 11:26), and so they keep celebrating "the Lord's supper".

However, some churches interpret the words of Jesus quite differently. Thus, baptism can be administered by a bath (immersion in water), by a pouring out of water (a ritualised washing), or, also, by a sprinkling. For the United church, such a sprinkling is not "a scattering in drops" (cf. English dictionaries), but rather a kind of "designating", or

"marking", a new adherent (as long as *water* is used, in whatever quantity).

Again, for those who follow the United church practice, bread and wine are only culturally-determined signs, which, in the Pacific, are better replaced by other elements (such as taro pieces, tapioca cakes, sweet potato, or green coconut, kava juice, lolly water, Coca-Cola, or just plain water) – as long as one *eats and drinks*.[1]

c. Sacraments

The Christian term "sacrament" was initially very wide (indicating possibly a few dozen things), and is nowadays distinguished for the "sacramentals". For us, "sacraments" are signs, which signify, and give grace. Several churches (Catholics, Orthodox, and Lutherans) have basically the same understanding of the sacred signs. Anglicans, and the majority of Lutherans in Papua New Guinea, would side with Roman Catholics, while their evangelical, or pietistic wing, would see themselves differently. Thus, I believe, the majority of Papua New Guinean Christians would not allow any other elements to be used in their liturgy, except natural elements as water, wine, and bread.

For the said churches, this is a most serious matter of conscience, based upon the explicit commands, and (for the eucharist) also the example, of the Lord. Of course, the earthly Jesus has given other commands (e.g., "If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you, too, must wash one another's feet" – John 13:14). This occurs, even among Catholics, although the common church tradition has never included the practice of the washing of the feet, or any other practice, as an essential sign of being a Christian.

Now, some churches have gone still further by tying the eucharist down to "true, natural wine", and to (unleavened) "bread or wheat" (cf. Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law, cn. 924). For centuries already, some churches have included such a eucharistic understanding in a wider system, counting up to seven recognised sacraments. Some Christians,

[1] John Garrett, and John E. Mavor, *Worship: the Pacific Way*, Suva Fiji: Lotu Pasifika Productions, 1973, p. 19; M. Nduvi, "Why not *Fufu* and Palm Wine for Communion?", in *Post-Courier*, August 7, 1981, pp. 26-28.

like the Lutherans, grant a special place to the "confirmation" of young adults, but without seeing it as a sacrament.

One meets, in our view, a tripartite division among different churches, and, perhaps, this division could be further simplified to only two poles: the *sic et non*, or "yes/no" dichotomy of ancient logic, and the binary choice of "off/on" of modern technology. Thus, one could assign to some churches a rather vertical outlook, and to other churches a rather horizontal one. Hence, the major Christian rite of the eucharist is either a meal of the Lord, or a gathering among Christians.

a. A meal of the Lord Jesus,
held in "the House of God" (with its "altar"),
being the privileged place for all the "sacraments",
presided over by specially-appointed persons ("ordination"),
or

b. A communion among Christians,
possible in any fitting gathering place,
which is rather the place for preaching (with a "pulpit"),
possibly done by anybody from among the people present.

We may ask, then, with the present state of affairs in mind, is any real progress towards a common understanding of the eucharist really thinkable, particularly in the Pacific world? Although, in Papua New Guinea, the group of Catholics and Anglicans is numerically greatest (well over one-third of the population), the number of Christians in the whole Pacific area is dominated by the Bible-based signs type. They are the successors of the heirs of the London Missionary Society tradition, who arrived in the Pacific 200 years ago (Tahiti, 1797-1863). There is probably no great difficulty for this group of churches to ask their "ecclesiastical relations" to join them for a shared "communion service".

However, what about an agreement with other types of churches? Is this "Bible-based signs" format of the eucharist to be imposed upon the "sacramentalists" as well? How far does the respect for religious freedom, and the conscience problems of certain believers, go? As is well known, there are Christians, who have doubts about "valid ordinations" in certain churches, and who do not accept women's

ordination (because they feel it contrary to scripture, and not a valid development of Christian doctrine). Is the opposite move not infringing on the human right of religious freedom (cf. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948), and would not an imposed "eucharist" precisely destroy the kind of Christian unity, which it is intended to bring about?

We cannot forget to take account of the "religious allegiances", which are surely different in Sydney, Suva, or among the Simbu. Catholics might represent a sizeable portion of people in Papua New Guinea, but not, I believe, in the circumscription of the PCC as a whole, and so this Council may not be burdened by the constraints existing for Catholics. Hence, provided that something drastic is not going to happen before the year 2000, the PCC can always opt for a United-church-type of "communion service" as the best that still can be achieved, even though the sacramentalist churches would be unable to share in the so-desired common celebration.

3. An Attempt to Widen the Theological Horizon

We would believe that, even if the eucharist (under whatever name) is seen as the pinnacle of religious expression among Christians, quite a few concerns enter the scene to shape one's theological mind. Maybe this wide spectrum of varying, and sometimes conflicting, views on many points is not always realised.

Presently, I would like to draw attention to the big range, in which our one faith is expressed. To apply this insight to the eucharist, I want, first (in what follows), to draw attention to three specific areas affecting our Lord Himself, His church, and, as a particular parallel, the gate to new life in Christ, baptism.

a. Names of Jesus

Even if the World Council of Churches (WCC) agrees to "confess the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour, according to the scriptures", there remains many variations in doctrines. As is well known, the New Testament does not only refer to the Lord God and Saviour, but it is in not of one voice on many subjects. One case in point, is the various Christologies, or the many names and titles given to the Lord Jesus. They differ from Mark to John, and from Paul to the author of Hebrews,

from believers with Jewish backgrounds, and Christians coming from a Hellenistic environment. I would plead here for a greater openness than exists.

Scholars have counted at least 50 ways of speaking about Jesus (i.e., in the third person) or talking to Him (i.e., in the second person). From this inventory, we can easily single out a dozen titles:[2]

1. Coming prophet
2. Messiah/Christ
3. Suffering servant
4. Master/Rabbi
5. High priest
6. Saviour
7. Son of David
8. Son of man
9. Son of God
10. Word of God
11. Lord
12. God

It would be possible to divide, somehow, the above-given titles into those which have a more-functional, or more-essentialist, sense, or a more-vertical, and others, a more-horizontal dimension. However, this is not required, to shed light on this issue.

b. Images for the Church

Another example would be the multitude of images used for the one church in the New Testament. Some authors, following Thomas Kuhn,[3] speak here of the presence of various paradigmata. Others prefer

[2] Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*, London UK: Macmillan & Co., 1953; L. Sabourin, *The Names and Titles of Jesus: Themes of Biblical Theology*, New York NY: Macmillan, 1967.

the term "images",[4] or also "models" to designate various ecclesiologies.[5] In short, there are a host of different ecclesiastical starting points, of which we mention, here, only four:

- the people of God;
- the new creation;
- the fellowship in faith;
- the body of Christ.

Not unnaturally, these basic insights will affect many sub-topics, such as the place and meaning of the ministries, the sacraments, etc.

c. Baptism

Looking now at the issue of (the sacrament of) baptism, there are also important differences among the churches as well, although here, too, a great convergence has been achieved. In my opinion, it is not necessary that baptisms are only given to people standing in streams, neither is it sufficient to understand "sprinkling" as marking with a wet finger only. But these two extreme positions are used in the Pacific area, and have some relevance here.

Perhaps, with further study, one might discover cross links between the many topics referred to, or align them with the two or three types of churches, referred to above. The important point that I wish to make is that, for ages, people with different doctrinal outlooks could live in the one mother church. I think, here, of the divides between East and West (before the great schism of 1054), North and South (with Luther, in 1521), and of later church reforms.

Can modern ecumenism not restore the broadest freedom of expression? Or should we be much more careful? As is well known, many of the great Christian families differ, e.g., in Christology. Are we

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[3] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

[4] P. S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1975.

[5] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 2nd edn, Dublin Ire: Gill & Macmillan, 1974.

now willing to ignore the achievements of the past, around the Christian divides about a Jesus, who is a mere man (Arianism), or a God, who just appeared as a human being (Docetism), or the God-man Jesus Christ, who was confessed in the great creeds? Has the time really come to take one common stand in the said, and other, areas?

4. Some Particular Thoughts on the Eucharist

Let us now zero in on the eucharist, where convergence among the churches is perhaps least. How far, then, are people ready for a common eucharist? As far as Catholics are concerned, a new wind of sympathy with other churches has been blowing since Vatican II (1962). In one text of the General Council, it clearly says that the sacrament of the eucharist has two sides: to be a *means* towards unity, and to be the *expression* of unity achieved (*Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 9).

The first element would put eucharistic sharing at the very *beginning* of ecumenical efforts (and, for this, exceptional cases have been identified), whereas the other element would place it at the very *end*, as being the last, and final, expression of true unity. Now, if the priestly ministry in the church is – again, according to Vatican II – less a matter of juridical power and authority than a matter of pastoral service given to the believers, then the former element in the eucharist might also deserve a greater emphasis than the one derived from the second element in it.

In another place, the same Council makes a further statement, pointing towards a basic unity in eucharistic understanding. Although, negatively, it regrets that certain other churches "have not preserved the 'genuine and total [earlier version: "full"] reality' of the eucharistic mystery", it also adds, positively, that "they commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the Holy Supper, they profess that it signifies life, in communion with Christ, and they await His coming in glory" (*Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 22). Obviously, this places many a "Protestant eucharist" in the field of "a meal of the Lord Jesus", instead of keeping it in the realm of "a communion among Christians" only.

Yet, to celebrate a common eucharist – by all understood in the same way – is in my mind "not yet on", mainly because of the question

of priestly orders (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 22, going back to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215; cf. Denziger-Schoenmetzer, n. 802; also "Waldensian Profession of Faith", n. 794, etc.), and the need to agree more fully on several issues.

Thus, for many theologians, to celebrate the same eucharist together is like wanting to make the ultimate step before the penultimate step is taken. This is, they feel, dishonest "by saying 'peace, peace', where there is no peace" (cf. Jer 6:14), so that people become even reluctant to seek further unity, and more unhappiness is created than otherwise would be the case.

To put it another way, many Catholics feel that they should "rather listen to God, than obey men" (cf. Acts 4:19). For them, it is not a "morally good" act to disobey those whom they recognise as their legitimate authorities in the church. They are bent not to yield to any outward human pressure, or any personal desire, whatever sadness such a decision will entail for them.

Well aware of these difficulties, and as a Catholic, I would still like to make some further explorations in the present field. Does not the saying tell us that "the better should not be an enemy of the good"? Or again, if my proposal does not describe what would be the best one can imagine, the formula may still be good.

Perhaps our widening of the horizon – to include Christ, the church, and the other sacraments – may indeed assist us to make a further step. Thus, the question I would like to ask is: Why is it necessary that people, today, have to use, always and uniquely, what they feel to be the highest achievement in a particular field of biblical "naming"?

Let us return to the great variety of the names and titles of Jesus. As a matter of fact, several of these Christological titles of Jesus are not unequivocal at all (like Cyrus being a "messiah", too, or any righteous person being a "son of god", too). Again, is it not a fact of life that many biblical designations for Jesus are in use today, and that it is quite impossible for anybody on earth to say everything, always, and on every occasion?

If this is so for Christology, and for other theological subjects, would it not be a worthwhile achievement if various churches could use "eating and drinking" in a new way? Eating and drinking together is such an anthropologically-common sign of unity, and such an important feature in the New Testament scriptures that all their implications are not necessarily exhausted already. To pursue this aim is, I think, something with justifies further investigation. Here, many aspects have to be drawn together to achieve a common agreement.

5. Elements for a Common Celebration

One way of further proceeding would be to pick up some already-existing examples of a "common eucharist" – such as the liturgy used at the WCC meeting held at Lima (1982). This liturgy has been used in some other places and times, for instance, at the Pacific Theological College in Suva (with two chalices being given around, one with [eucharistic] wine, and the other, not).

Instead of further developing this approach, it might be of some value to forget, for the time being, the said examples, and to try an "approach from below", asking ourselves what components deserve to be included in a shared Christian celebration.

So, we come to a set of guidelines, of which, account could be taken for what I would like to call a "Year 2000 Convention". These guidelines could be fittingly explained, or form the content of an occasional address, given when the actual situation (or celebration) occurs.

a. General Human Aspect

A first element to stress is that the celebration, or convention, envisaged, should be part of the proceedings for which the people came together. This affects, especially, the factor of time, so that the celebration in mind should not be an appendix to something else, or, should I say here, the preamble and opening session of the gathering, or a moment in the middle of the convention (cf. a toast at human banquets). In the case for the final and culminating option, there may arise a need that people have to go home (and have a wash after the first part of the final session).

From that first point of view, I believe that one should avoid, at all costs, the need to create a special time slot, uniquely, for the liturgical moment of the convention. In other words, it is preferable to have the concluding session addressing the last point on the ordinary agenda (e.g., the approval of minutes), which, therefore, has to be kept over for this very occasion (cf. 1 Cor 11:25) – the religious element "after the meal"). Of course, this does not mean that the chosen moment be necessarily a "closed session", or that no other "observers" could be invited for the occasion.

b. Uniqueness of the Occasion

Various elements are closely linked with the consideration of the opportune time, viz, place and dress. Is there a suitable, and available, church building? Or does one try for a stadium, or other location? Local conditions will influence the decision.

Anthropologically speaking, I believe that dress standards are also important. Even if some people may like to down-play the liturgical atmosphere, I would think that something special in appearance may still be called for. For example, guidelines could be comparable with the accepted requirements for a commemorative banquet in the Pacific, where management would request some minimal standards – from "formal dress" (with stola, or covel, or cassock), down to "tropical formal".

c. Religious-Ecclesiastical Aspect

There should be an explicit reference to the worship dimension. For this reason, it would seem proper that the participants who, in a broad sense, all belong to the Christian tradition, and thus, at times, wear their specific ceremonial garb, would put this on. This variety of dress could well emphasise that, although we are many, we are now one in purpose (i.e., to worship the Lord "who begins and ends every good work" – as the Christian tradition says).

Maybe it would be sufficient if, for this occasion, this dress aspect would only apply to the "minister" called upon for the occasion (cf. Mark 6:41) – "He gave to the disciples . . . who distributed to the people" – the people are distinguished from the disciples, who play,

there, a recognisable role). This point would hold, whether the agents chosen are ordained or not, male or female, etc. – as long as they are accredited ministers in their own churches.

d. Christian Aspect

Christianity has abundant references to "eating together", which, anthropologically speaking, always expresses sharing and trust (e.g., sharing of kava, betel nuts, cigarettes), and so bring people together. Now, to give this universal and well-established custom a Christian ring, it must include an explicit connection with the Lord Jesus. However, one can ask whether Jesus' "last supper" is necessarily the best occasion in Jesus' life from which to take a cue. Or is this incident – even in the New Testament, already – not too much overlaid by various theological interpretations, and has become a specific cause for division?

It would seem to me that the New Testament example of Jesus eating with His disciples, with tax-collectors and sinners, and especially Jesus feeding the crowds may be the better example to inspire us. The latter incident, five times recorded in the New Testament, forms a bridge between the Old Testament promise (cf. "bread from heaven He gave them to eat" – John 6:31), and the eventual New Testament realisation (cf. "He took, blessed, broke, and gave"). In this way, the feeding of the multitude surely enters into the picture, as, also, various other meals recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

Some exegetes feel that, precisely, Jesus' own fellowship meals with His disciples have to be stressed. These common meals provide:

- the context, or general backdrop, of the "last supper" (with bread and wine);
- a further reflection, in some of the post-resurrection meals (cf. roasted fish and bread – John 21:9); and
- the ultimate origin for the "breaking of the bread" in the Book of Acts, and the bedrock on which both the later *agape* meals, and the eucharistic celebrations, were patterned.

For us, it is most important to note that the said Pacific love-meal is clearly distinguished from the eucharist in imitation of the Last Supper, as is a regular feature in the life of many local congregations. In our opinion, it is not the "last supper" (cf. Matt 26:26-30; par.), which should dictate the "Year 2000 Convention".

c. Pacific aspect

On the negative side, it may be good that, for the special celebration, all denominationally-tainted terms (e.g., eucharist, communion service, etc.) be avoided. These theological, doctrinal terms separate the faith of the people. The same is true of all specific interpretations (e.g., sacrifice "for us, and for our sins", real presence, etc.), and certain hallowed practices of the past ("bread and wine", as the two separated "elements").

On the positive side, we may list several further points, which would mark a "Pacific love-meal":

- There is, as hinted already, the possibility of having lay-people, or also women ministers present, as long as they are people, who may regularly officiate in their respective churches.
- Fitting to the local scene, and to the evangelical accounts, is the use of bread, together with fish. This could be any bread, and not just "unleavened bread from grain". Naturally, also, fish is included, because it is readily available for many Pacific Islanders, independent of the fact that it clearly expresses the link with Jesus' fellowship meals on earth. One should not object that the inclusion of fish will, necessarily, create a messy situation, because the arrangement of a bit of catering can do wonders here.
- Finally, another contextualised element would be that the "Pacific love-meal" will continue in a more-relaxed manner, with common singing and dancing. Less desirable, is that the ritual be followed by various performances, to be put on by "outsiders" to the meeting, or by those who host the final

gathering. Real members of the convention, and specially-invited guests, should form the core.

6. Some Antecedents

Having reached our conclusions from general premises, we may now add some specific historical information, first taken from ancient liturgies, and, secondly, taken from the fairly-recent past.

First, liturgists used to distinguish between *eucharistia major* and *eucharistia minor*, which, in the course of time, have comprised at least a dozen different meal settings. Relevant ingredients of such meals are fish only, fish and honey, bread and fish, bread and water, bread and (diluted) wine, bread only. The former format is characterised by the recitation of the "institution story", derived from the Last Supper, with its use of bread and wine.

Without delving into all possible parallels, we would like to single out the Christian banquets that include fish. One "forerunner" may be the ancient Jewish "pure meal" as the first sabbatical meal, on Friday evening, which had messianic and other eschatological connotations. Another "forerunner" may be found in the sacred meals in memory of the deceased or *refrigeria)*), abundantly represented in the Roman catacombs (4th-5th century), and finding parallels, not only in pagan culture, but also in ancient Christian authors.

Our only point here is that cultic meals, with only bread, and without wine (and other instances), have a long history, and fall into the broad category of "minor eucharists". Hence, the suggestion, made above, for a Pacific love-meal indicates an acceptable course of action.

Secondly, another memorable incident to remember here is the third encounter between the pope, Paul VI, and the Ecumenical patriarch, Athenagores I. The equality of the two prelates, the patriarch of the West, from Rome, and the patriarch of the East, from Constantinople, was really emphasised, e.g., by using two identical thrones on one and the same platform. According to Catholic principles, a regular eucharist, or celebration, would have been possible (cf. Vatican II), but, for the

Orthodox, an expression of "full ecclesiastical communion" was impossible.

The format chosen for the said encounter at Rome, on October 26, 1967, included a liturgical celebration, but without the recital of the "institution words" (i.e., without a "consecration", hence an *eucharistia minor*). The various parts were the entrance rites, the readings, the intercessions, the action of praise and thanks, the prayer of the Lord, the occasional discourses, and the final blessing.

Conclusion

It is my conviction that, if the various aspects, treated above, are seriously taken into account, a "Pacific love-meal", structured, as outlined, above, will not just be like any other eating together "as we do all the time". Instead, this particular event would be a specific scripturally-based way of "being together as Christians". Such a celebration would be a very explicit sign of unity among believers belonging to many different church orders. It does not entail that the "communion" shown does not really reach the mark (that is, according to one's own denominational understanding). Instead, because the form advocated here is quite distinct from what any church is used to doing every so often, all Christians can take part in it, without being unduly burdened in their consciences.

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