




Vol 16, No 1

2000

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

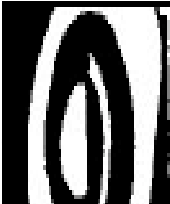


**Youth Work in the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea
with Special Reference to Aipo Rongo Diocese**
Newton Saura Ekoda

**Communicating the Gospel in Meaningful Cultural Forms
in Melanesia**
Philip Manuao

Developing Local Theology
Russell Thorp

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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All Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Cover design by Br Jeff Daly CP and John Kua

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ISSN 0256-856X Volume 16, Number 1 2000

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ADDRESS (Editorial and Subscription):

Melanesian Journal of Theology
Christian Leaders' Training College
PO Box 382, Mt Hagen, WHP
Papua New Guinea

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 scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contribution 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 Editor will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians and of general theological interest.

E-mail manuscripts to cltc@maf.org

The opinions expressed in the articles, book reviews, etc., are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the editor, or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to conform to the requirements of the Journal.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* normally appears twice yearly, in April and October.

Editor: **Doug Hanson**
Christian Leaders' Training College

Editorial Team: **Patrick Gaiyer**
Patrick Hall
Russell Thorp
David Hodgens
All of Christian Leaders' Training College

Subscriptions: **Doug Hanson**
Christian Leaders' Training College

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EDITORIAL

The Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC) has provided all pieces of writing. The first two articles are by Melanesian graduates of the College, while the third article is by a faculty member. They are all relevant to the Melanesian church today.

Newton Saura Ekoda analyses youth work in the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea with special reference to the Aipo Rongo Diocese. He begins by describing youth, their development and needs. Then, after evaluating youth work within the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea, he makes some recommendations for improvement.

Philip Manuao discusses communicating the "Gospel in Meaningful Cultural Forms in Melanesia". Philip focuses on the Gula'ala people. He begins by looking at their culture, and then focuses on two appropriate media for sharing the gospel: audio and visual. He gives many good and relevant recommendations.

Russell Thorp shows the importance of developing local theology in cultures. He gives several solid recommendations for developing a local theology. Russell states, "The hope is that this will stimulate local believers to respond biblically to the deep issues they face, in order to encourage genuine discipleship that brings glory to our Lord Jesus Christ."

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.

Doug Hanson

YOUTH WORK IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE AIPO RONGO DIOCESE

Newton Saura Ekoda

Newton Saura Ekoda graduated with a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Christian Leaders' Training College. Newton is now coordinating youth work for the Aipo Rongo diocese of the Anglican church in Papua New Guinea.

Introduction

Youth ministry in the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea, especially in Aipo Rongo, was introduced 22 years ago, but failed to establish itself. Since then, many people have tried to do something about it, but with little or no success. Why is that? What is the cause? Is there something being left out, or is it not properly done? Is it all right to step back and criticise it? This paper seeks to address these questions, and to recommend some ways to improve youth work in this diocese, and in the church as a whole.

1. Understanding of Youth

Youth is defined in some places as the period between the ages of 12 and 25, and, in others, as that between 10 and 30. Some people consider all those with youthful minds and characters to be youth. Many people, today, both in the secular world, and in the church, find it hard to understand young people. And, in their endeavour to understand them, they describe them as “a crazy bunch of people who are a disgrace to the society”.

Of course, there is some truth in these criticisms, but what is the cause? This chapter aims to help us understand where the youth are coming from, so that we can help them, in this crucial stage of their development.

1.1 Development in Youth

We need to see youth as growing human beings, with relationships to other human beings, their surroundings, and the supernatural.¹ They are developing: physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually, and culturally. They are developing in these six areas at the same time.²

Physically

Boys are becoming taller and stronger in their arms, legs, and shoulders. Their voices change. Hair grows on their faces, and other parts of their bodies. Their sexual organs develop, and they are able to produce children.

Girls are growing quickly at this time, and their bodies are beginning to take the shape of a woman. They develop body hair, and begin to have their monthly menstrual cycle.

Young people will abuse their bodies at this time if not properly guided. We need to help them to know that their bodies are God's dwelling place. He bought them at a high price, and they belong to Him, and are not their own.³

Emotionally

Because of the changes taking place in their bodies, they feel confused, embarrassed, and unsettled. Sometimes they are happy, at other times they are sad. They are unsure of themselves, and wonder what others think of them.

At the same time, their feelings for members of the opposite sex are becoming strong, and sometimes uncontrollable. Gilbert says how youth are "both looking for, and can recognise, people who will, themselves, provide positive, warm, supportive, and encouraging emotional support".⁴

¹ Wesley Black, *An Introduction to Youth Ministry*, Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1960, p. 82.

² Pete Gilbert, *Understanding Teenagers*, Nottingham UK: Crossway Books, 1993, p. 18.

³ 1 Cor 6:18-20.

⁴ Gilbert, *Understanding Teenagers*, p. 99.

Mentally

Young people are beginning to distinguish between right and wrong, and to judge for themselves. Their parents, or others, would have previously made decisions for them. Now they want to decide for themselves.

This is the best time for young people to make a decision for Christ. What they are looking for is in God, and only He can satisfy them fully. We can be role models for them, in our speech and action. Eldridge says young people look for those “whose lifestyle reflect a consistent walk with the Lord”,⁵ and, if we show them that life, we are sure to direct them to Christ.

Socially

When they were children, they liked to be with older people, especially their parents and relatives, but now they want to interact with those outside of their family circle. They are more concerned with the opinions of their peers than with those of their parents and relatives.

It is important that we help young people to be involved with healthy company, where God’s presence is apparent,⁶ and to be careful that they do not get involved with bad company that could ruin their lives.⁷

Spiritually

Formerly, they would follow the religion of their parents and guardians, and accept what was imposed upon them, but now they want to decide for themselves what, or to whom, to give their allegiance. Eldridge says young people “are questioning the adult-value systems”.⁸ They see church life as something to be endured rather than enjoyed.⁹ To them, God is “an angry old man who judges harshly”.¹⁰

⁵ Daryl Eldridge, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995, p. 246.

⁶ Ps 14:5.

⁷ 1 Cor 15:33.

⁸ Eldridge, *Teaching Ministry of the Church*, p. 246.

⁹ Karl Faase, *Don't Miss the Mark: A Youth Worker's Manual*, Melbourne Vic: Acorn Press, 1996, p. 47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

We should not condemn them too quickly here, without listening to their criticisms. We need to help them see that each one of us is “the church”,¹¹ who come together as a body to worship God, with older ones leading us. We also need to see that God is loving and caring, slow to anger,¹² but is also a God of justice and order.¹³ As Eldridge says, we must help them “to establish a scriptural basis for their faith”.¹⁴

Culturally

Young people are growing up in a world that is changing very fast. Economic, educational, and political systems are developing, and technology is becoming sophisticated. As a result, a “youth culture”¹⁵ has appeared, which seems new and foreign to many older people.

While different development and changes are taking place in the youth, pressures of all sorts are mounting on them, too.

1.2 Pressures Youth Face

Following are six basic types of pressure youth are facing: peer pressure, education/employment pressure, economic pressure, sexual pressure, social status pressure, and cultural pressure.

Peer Pressure

Young people like to form groups with like-minded members, especially in music, fashion, sports, drugs, etc. To them, acceptance is vital to each individual, “and they will go to ridiculous lengths to gain it”.¹⁶ No one wants to be rejected for not participating

¹¹ 1 Cor 1:2.

¹² Ps 103:8.

¹³ Ps 33:5.

¹⁴ Eldridge, *Teaching Ministry of the Church*, p. 246.

¹⁵ “Youth culture” is contemporary lifestyle seen in youth (more will be said about this in the next section).

¹⁶ Faase, *Don't Miss The Mark*, p. 36.

Education/Employment Pressure

While the education system is providing opportunities for greater learning, avenues for employment are declining. Many young people are pushed back to the village, with inadequate practical knowledge to survive there.

Economic Pressure

Today, everyone wants to be economically self-sufficient, but the facilities for gaining knowledge on how to be economically self-sufficient are not properly provided.

Sexual Pressure

For young people, gratification of sexual desires is very high on their agenda. Dr Michael Alpers says:

Among the men, who reported an exact (not necessarily accurate) age of first intercourse (N=58), the mean age was 17.0 (+1-4.4). For an additional 84 men, the age could be estimated, based on school grades, and calculated to a mean of 17.4 (+1-4.0). The age at first intercourse ranges from 8-30, and was greater (mean = 21.2) among those over 40 years old (mean 15.1, N=17). Nearly 55 percent of the men said their first partner was a woman younger than themselves that they did not marry. These men thought that about one-third of their first sexual partners were previously sexually experienced. Among the women, who reported exact age at first sexual intercourse (N=49), the mean was 17 (+1-3.4). Ages ranged between 11 and 29.¹⁷

Social Status Pressure

Today, more young people are educated, and are threatening the positions of the older people. In contrast, the older people value age and experience more than modern education, and they still expect submission, on the part of the young ones.

¹⁷ Michael Alpers, *National Study of Sexual and Reproductive Knowledge and Behaviour in Papua New Guinea*, Goroka PNG: Institute of Medical Research, p. 29.

Cultural Pressure

The older generation is calling on the young people, and expecting them to follow the traditional norms and practices of society, but introduced cultures are putting pressure on them, too.

1.3 Youth Culture

Traditional value systems and structures are breaking down, and youth are developing a lifestyle that is completely new. The vocabulary of young people is confusing. For example, English speakers use the term *brala* and Pidgin speakers use *brata*, to refer to “brother” or “friend”. This is confusing because the English dictionary doesn’t have *brala*. Their music is different, and the words they put in their songs are often strange to older people. Their dress and hairstyle are new, and their behavioural patterns are completely different to those of the past. Every “regulation that guided the moral values of traditional society, in most cases, have been undermined for the sake of change and development”.¹⁸ All these things are contributing to the development of youth culture.

To conclude this chapter, it is useful to take the words of Br Andrew as he speaks on social change and present-day problems:

If we are to understand the connection between them, we have to consider the social situation, before these things came, the traditional and cultural basis of life in this country. . . . Parents may be able to help here, as they experienced the changes earlier, and they often have better insight into traditional life. We must also learn from young people, themselves. How do they experience these changes? What are they hoping: for themselves and their country? Can they help us understand, from their experience, how these social changes are related to the problem?¹⁹

Br Andrew offers very helpful thoughts for us to work on. Our youth are growing up in a fast-changing world, and are in a transition period. We

¹⁸ Mutengkec Wahazokac, “Youth: Their Roles, Attitudes, and Responses in a Changing Society”, in *Catalyst* 21-1 (1991), p. 30.

¹⁹ Brother Andrew, “Alternatives for the Future”, in *Catalyst* 21-1 (1991), p. 56.

really need to know from where they are coming, so that we may understand them better, rather than throwing words at them, which do not help at all.

2. Foundations of Youth Ministry²⁰

In this chapter, we will try to see what youth ministry is, why it exists, how it operates, and who is involved.

2.1 A Theology for Youth Ministry

The future of the nation, the church, and the young people, themselves, is dependent upon how we rear them today. And this is where youth ministry comes in. It does not take the place of parents, but works alongside them, to enable “the gifts of many to touch, with the truths of the gospel, the lives of youth, in every realm of their being”.²¹

Youth ministry is not just walking alongside young people, to help them in their problems, nor it is “baby-sitting for teenagers”, as some think it to be. It is rearing young people God’s way, and helping them in this crisis time of their growth period, that they might make decisions for Christ.

Black proposes the following 10 “theological building blocks”, as key elements of a solid foundation for youth ministry.

Building Block 1: A Biblical Focus

The Bible is God’s authoritative revelation of Himself. Stott says, “It is authoritative because – and only because – it is inspired.”²² Milne adds, “Our knowledge of God comes through the Bible. He has caused it to be written, and, through it, speaks to us today, as He spoke to His people, when those words were first given.”²³ We know that everything else, even

²⁰ The title, subtitles, and main thoughts in this chapter come from Black, *Introduction to Youth Ministry*, pp. 10-19 and 29-47.

²¹ Bob Taylor, *Youth Ministry Planbook*, Nashville TN: Convention Press, 1977, p. 2.

²² John Stott, *The Authority and Relevance of the Bible in the Modern World*, Homebush West NSW: Bible Society, 1979, p. 1.

²³ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 18.

“philosophies and fads” of this world, will pass away, “but God’s Word will remain forever.”²⁴ Young people need to know this.

What the “youth really need is time and space to build their own relationship with God”.²⁵ The Word of God will address their questions, arguments, debates, probing, and searching.²⁶ If youth activities are founded on the Bible, they will come to realise that the Bible stands as the only sure, authoritative word on matters of faith and belief. Youth ministry must be built upon a solid foundation of biblical faith.

Building Block 2: Grounded in God

God created human beings (youth included) in His own image,²⁷ for Himself. But all have chosen sin rather than Him.²⁸ Despite this, God offers redemption, as a free gift to all, through His Son Jesus Christ.²⁹ Young people, like all human beings, need this salvation.

God is constantly raising, encouraging, and empowering His servants to do the work, to which they are called.³⁰ He has a great love and care for His creation, and is constantly reaching out to human beings with His amazing message of hope and salvation. Youth ministry is part of this reaching out. It is God’s work among young people and their families. Youth ministry is built upon a solid foundation, grounded in God, as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Building Block 3: People need a Right Relationship with God

Like all human beings, youth lost their relationship with God at the Fall, and are searching for ways to restore that relationship. They must be helped to realise that God has provided a way for their relationship with Him to be restored, through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

²⁴ Is 40:8.

²⁵ Duffy Robins, *The Ministry of Nurture*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1990, p. 64.

²⁶ 2 Tim 3:16.

²⁷ Gen 1:26.

²⁸ Rom 3:23.

²⁹ Rom 6:23.

³⁰ Phil 2:13; Heb 13:21.

Youth ministry is there to “offer the setting and context” for young people to hear about this amazing message of restoration, and accept this free gift of salvation, through Christ Jesus.³¹

This means evangelism must be a priority in ministry with youth, and not an alternative activity. It must be seen as “the energy that flows through all” that is done in youth ministry. Youth ministry seeks to carry the message of salvation, in appropriate ways, to all youth.

Building Block 4: The Church is the Basic Unit of Ministry

The church is God’s chosen vehicle to carry His message to the world.³² It “is in the world to bear witness to the nature and destiny of man, as a child of God, and heir of eternal life”.³³ Youth ministry must recognise this relationship, and constantly seek ways to be incorporated into the total ministry of the church.

In the 1980s, in my early 20s, when I felt God was calling me to youth ministry, I started mobilising young people for service in the church, only to find myself being opposed, and rejected, by the elders of the church. This should not happen today. Youth ministry is part of the total ministry of a church.

Building Block 5: Recognise Development Processes

Young people are neither children nor adults, but are in a developmental process. We need to recognise this, and teach, and equip, them at their level. See how Jesus related to people at their level of understanding. With His disciples, He taught them, gradually revealing more of Himself, so that their understanding developed. He also involved them, by delegating responsibilities, and allowing them to learn through their mistakes. When they were willing to accept the task, He left them on their own, and returned to heaven. Youth ministry recognises the developmental uniqueness of adolescents.

³¹ Rom 6:23.

³² Matt 16:18.

³³ F. R. Barry, “The Church and the Ministry”, in *Asking the Right Questions*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960, p. 61.

Building Block 6: Parents are Responsible for Religious Training

Parents are to bring their children up in the knowledge and love of God,³⁴ and to train them in the way they should go.³⁵ Youth ministry does not take that responsibility away from parents. It helps them accomplish it.

We can see this happening in the family of Jesus, who followed the religious tradition of their day, by travelling to Jerusalem for the annual observance of Passover.³⁶ For the Jews, training of a child in the ways of the Lord was the first thing in his or her life. Paul knows this well, and instructs the Christians at Ephesus (fathers especially) not to ill-treat the children, but to bring them up in godly training.³⁷

Christian parents, like the Israelites, need to bring their children up in the faith and love of God. As Clarence Benson expresses it:

Children are moulded by the sentiments, opinions, and moral standards, which prevail where they live and eat. . . . It is in the home that the child gets his first, and most-enduring, ideas of God. Not so much in the street, as in the family. Not so much at school, as from the mother. Not what he hears in church, but what he sees in his father.³⁸

Those ministering to youth must be aware of the role of parents in the spiritual nurturing of their children, and work alongside them. Youth ministry must seek ways for the church and homes to be mutually supportive.

³⁴ Before crossing the Jordan to the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to give the Israelites instructions they should observe in the land they were to possess. One of those commandments was to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, and to teach their children to do likewise (Deut 6:4-7).

³⁵ Prov 22:6.

³⁶ Luke 2:41-52.

³⁷ Eph 6:1-4.

³⁸ Clarence H. Benson, *A Guide for Child Study: Unit 4*, Wheaton IL: Evangelical Teacher Training Association, 1935, p. 18.

Building Block 7: Youth Leaders are Called to Minister

Different people have different reasons and motives for their involvement in youth ministry. Some genuinely sense a calling to serve God through youth ministry, while others do so for less-noble reasons.

Individuals, of the first kind, act with willingness and joy, sacrificing their time and energy, with love and care, and not expecting anything in return. But those who are involved for other reasons will find their task frustrating, and without joy and satisfaction. Youth ministry depends on the leadership of those called to minister.

Building Block 8: God Calls Some to Specific Ministry with Youth

The New Testament does not speak directly about youth ministry, however, the giftings mentioned in Paul's letters³⁹ are indications of gifts needed to effectively serve in the churches today. The Bible is full of individuals, whom God called, and used, in specific areas in the past, some to be prophets, others priests, others kings. He continues to do so today, especially in youth ministry. Youth ministry is an authentic calling, not a stepping-stone to another ministry.

Building Block 9: Youth are to be Involved in Ministry

The Bible has many examples of youthful servants of God. For example, David, who was regarded as too young to accompany his older brothers to the battlefield, led the Israelites into a surprising victory over the Philistines.⁴⁰ John Mark, whom Paul regarded as "a slacker" for running away from their first missionary journey,⁴¹ later becomes useful,⁴² and is probably the author of the second gospel.

Those two young figures: one a king, and the other an author, were both called by God, and encouraged by others to accept the service, to which God had called them. This is how it should be with young people today. Youth can be involved in meaningful ways in ministry.

³⁹ Rom 12; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4.

⁴⁰ 1 Sam 17.

⁴¹ Acts 13:13, 16:36-39.

⁴² 2 Tim 4:11.

Building Block 10: Purpose of Youth Ministry

Youth ministry must follow the purpose of the church, and live out the Great Commission in the world. It must aim to keep young people fully aware of their role in the church, pointing them towards God, and helping them to find their place in the things God is doing in the world.

Youth ministry is there, not to take the place of parents, but to walk alongside them, to help young people respond to God's love for them, and to participate in teaching, obeying, and witnessing for Christ in the world around them. The purpose of youth ministry is to point youth towards God, and help them become involved in the Great Commission.

2.2 The Basics of Youth Ministry

Because youth ministry is to follow the purpose of the church, it needs theologically-trained ministers, with a responsibility to minister the Word, and teach the church's ministry to youth. Today's youth ministry is faced with many new challenges – challenges of drug abuse, sexual abuse, the frightening disease of AIDS, rascals, and declining moral values, to mention only a few. These issues call for a broad, deep, and theologically-sound youth ministry.

Basic Concepts of Youth Ministry

1. Every church has a youth ministry

In every church, big or small, there are always young people, and it would be misleading to say, "We don't have youth, so let us start up a group." The present youth activity may look dull and weak, but we should build on that foundation by supporting it with social activities to attract youth. Social activities are strong tools, and strengthen a weakened group in need of life and vitality.

In Papua New Guinea, the churches often look at youth ministry, as something spiritual, and leave it to their pastors, or priests, to introduce activities for young people. This should not be the case, since youth ministry is basically a matter of involving young people meaningfully in youth-oriented programs.

2. *Youth ministry is not a separate program*

Youth ministry is, and must be, linked to the ongoing work of the church. It must be included in the program of the church. Sunday School departments and classes, church discipleship, and mission education groups, and youth music groups need to receive adequate attention and promotion, to make a balanced, effective youth ministry. The churches of Papua New Guinea need to ensure that their youth activities are part of their overall programs, not something separate.

3. *Youth ministry strikes a balance in reaching and teaching*

Reaching and teaching must be given equal time and attention, not one over the other, in competition. It is the mandate of the church,⁴³ and churches must make every effort to reach and teach every youth, at all levels of understanding. Those, who are involved in reaching and teaching, must make every effort to encourage each learner to make a specific response.⁴⁴

Youth are part of the church, and must not be seen as a satellite group, barely linked to the church. Their activities should be coordinated with the church's overall calendar, to avoid overlaps and conflicts. Richard Bundschuh says:

Both the young and the old need each other more than they realise. They balance each other, so that one does not tip the scales in a burst of excessive exuberance, and the other does not get weighed down by being overly cautious and stale. It is not healthy for a youth group to be so separated from the rest of the church body that they forget they are one part of a whole group of people, who are all trying to be like Christ.⁴⁵

The churches of Papua New Guinea must understand the need to reach out to the main body of the church, though they may be separated into appropriate

⁴³ The Great Commission, as recorded in Matt 28:18-20.

⁴⁴ Lawrence. Richards, *Creative Bible Teaching*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1970, p 270.

⁴⁵ Rick Bundschuh, *The Church*, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 1988, p. 88.

ages of young people, and teach them on their own level. They should be seen as part of different groups, for special purposes.

4. *Youth ministry is a shared ministry*

We find, in Eph 4, that God has gifted all Christians for the work of service. This should encourage us to find, in each other, the abilities to share in the ministry of young people.

Today's youth ministry requires more than a one-man show, where one leader dominates everything. We need to draw from all resources, to share not only in exciting activities, but also in prayer, teaching, hospitality, mercy ministry, and worship. For maximum benefit, the churches of Papua New Guinea must train, equip, and instruct young people to take part in the full ministry of the church.

5. *Youth ministry touches all aspects of a youth's life*

Youth ministry is not only concerned with the spiritual part of a young person's life. It involves all aspects of life, including physical, mental, social and emotional development, as well as spiritual development.

Youth leaders and workers need to realise that God is very much interested in all areas of human life. They must be concerned about the young person's everyday life, as well as what they do on Sunday mornings. Today's young people are very different from those of 30 or 40 years ago. Papua New Guinean churches must make every effort to meet the needs and interests of modern youth.

6. *Youth ministry belongs to the Church*

Youth ministry belongs to the church, which belongs to Christ Jesus. Ministers are servants of the Lord in the church, "charged with the responsibility to lead the church in doing the church's youth ministry", in "helping young people move on beyond making decisions of faith, and what it means to live a lifestyle of faith".⁴⁶ Youth ministers need to realise the awesome responsibility that they have in involving the whole church in ministering to young people, at this critical time of their lives.

⁴⁶ Faase, *Don't Miss The Mark*, p. 42.

The churches of Papua New Guinea should not wait for the national government or non-government organisations to initiate youth ministry, but should accept the responsibility of starting their own programs.

Two Philosophies of Youth Ministry

Basically, there are two different approaches to youth ministry in the church today:

1. An activity-based approach is full of activities, without in-depth teaching of the Word of God and discipleship making;
2. A ministry-based approach is full of well-planned activities, with in-depth teaching of the word of God and discipleship making, which leads to outreaches, and mercy ministries.

The former approach is less appropriate than the latter, because it does not provide for training and equipping of the young people for service.

Black gives nine suggestions for moving youth ministry towards a ministry-based approach:⁴⁷

1. Discuss philosophy and approaches to youth ministry with church leaders.
2. Schedule a meeting with youth leaders.
3. Schedule a meeting with parents.
4. Schedule a discussion time for the youth.
5. Channel the planning for youth activities through the church-program organisations.
6. Delegate responsibilities, when planning large projects.
7. Involve parents in youth ministry.
8. Keep the priest, pastor, and staff informed.
9. Be patient.

⁴⁷ Black, *Introduction to Youth Ministry*, pp. 38-40.

It is the responsibility of the youth minister or youth leader to put these suggestions into practice.

2.3 A Network of Relationships

Often we see the world as being divided into groups by colour, race, gender, age, and credit rating, and we plan special activities for such groups, according to their needs.

We must also understand that man is not an island. We need each other, for survival and growth. Youth ministers must recognise this, and make every effort to build bridges across these divisions so that young people can learn from different age groups. Parents and other adults will make a tremendous impact on young people, if the bridges are laid properly.

2.4 Church Programs

The church is instituted by God,⁴⁸ with Christ Jesus as its head, and the Holy Spirit being instrumental in its progress. This means that the church's programs must be the kind that gives honour and glory to the Triune God.

A church's program must not be just activities, or events, to please its members, but should do everything in its capacity, as the institution of God in the world, "to present everyone perfect before God", as Paul puts it. Its program must be able to accommodate every age group, including youth.

Youth ministry must not be seen as a separate program. It must come out of the church's existing programs, guided and directed by the church, with parents and other adults involved, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

3. Historical Background

We will now briefly look at the history of youth ministry in Papua New Guinea, and the Anglican church, and then see how it has been practised in the diocese of Aipo Rongo.

3.1 The National Government's Concern for Youth

The introduction of civilisation, Western-style education, economic systems, and urbanisation into Papua New Guinea, brought many good, but not

⁴⁸ Matt 16:18, which is fulfilled in Acts 2.

properly guided, changes, which led to social breakdown in families and societies. Many “out-of-school youth” drifted to urban areas for employment or excitement, or because of family or village conflict. Those who did not find employment were frustrated and restless, creating disharmony in their communities.

This became a growing concern for both government and non-government agencies, forcing them to find alternative ways, or activities, to solve this rising problem.⁴⁹ In the early 1970s, the United Nations Program of Technical Cooperation and the South Pacific Commission appointed a social welfare adviser, who visited most of the South Pacific nations and independent territories (including PNG) and presented this report:

The Pacific [countries] are experiencing noticeable changes, accompanied by social breakdown. The impact of socio-economic changes in those relatively small, and sometimes fragile, cultures can be devastating.⁵⁰

Influences like this, from outside, and pressures from within the country, encouraged the PNG government to become organised. With the help of the United Nations, it established the National Youth Movement Program (NYMP) in 1980. This was the principal youth program for Papua New Guinea, targeting young people between the ages of 12 and 25, with the aim “to productively involve youth in the development of their communities, and to encourage maximum participation in the economic, political, cultural, and spiritual life of the nation”.⁵¹

To make this happen, it created what Chris O’Connell and Ruby Zarriga call “a hierarchy of democratically-elected structures of local youth groups, and

⁴⁹ Maev O’Collins, *Youth in Papua New Guinea: with Reference to Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu*, Canberra ACT: ANU Press, 1984, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Maev O’Collins, *Youth and Society: Perspective from Papua New Guinea*, Canberra ACT: ANU Press, 1986, p. 2.

⁵¹ *National Youth Movement Policy*, Port Moresby PNG: Ministry of Youth and Home Affairs, 1982.

district, provincial, and national youth councils”.⁵² It “appointed paid community youth coordinators (CYCs), and made available considerable sums of money for youth groups and projects”.⁵³ This was done to facilitate training, while committing itself to the twin goals of national integration and economic development.

This program was fully sponsored, financed, and supported by the government, through the Ministry of Youth and Home Affairs, backed by the churches and non-government agencies, such as YMCA. In the years that followed, the national government pumped in large amounts of money to keep the program going.

It was through such support that Papua New Guinea came up with a National Youth Policy that was described to be “comprehensive and detailed”,⁵⁴ the first South Pacific nation to have such.

Around 1984, the National Youth Council was restructured, and all 19 provinces and National Capital District Youth Councils were represented, together with representatives from six of the major churches,⁵⁵ and a few of the national non-government agencies,⁵⁶ to comply with the requirements of the National Youth Policy. This created an opportunity for the introduction of Anglican Youth Ministry.

3.2 The Church’s Concern for Youth

The churches were equally concerned for the young people, in this initial stage of the country’s history, and saw youth work as an urgent task.

The Catholic church developed, and implemented, the Catholic Program, for its youth, in line with Christian vision. The Lutherans designed the Five-Star Program, out of which came the Yangpela Didiman Program, to help its youth in the development of the nation, through self-help projects. The

⁵² Chris O’Connell, and Ruby Isaiah Zarriga, “Papua New Guinea’s National Youth Movement”, in *Social Problems in the Asia Pacific*, Sandra Sewell, and Anthony Kelly, eds, Brisbane Qld: Boolarong Publications, 1991, p. 211.

⁵³ Paul Roche, “International Youth Year 1985”, in *Catalyst* 15-4 (1985), p. 325.

⁵⁴ O’Connell and Zarriga, “National Youth Movement”, p. 239.

⁵⁵ Catholic, United, Lutheran, Anglican, Evangelical Alliance, SDA.

⁵⁶ YMCA, YWCA, National Union of Students.

United church came up with the Four-Square Program, and the Seventh-day Adventist church was first in the field with its Pathfinders Program.

It was during this time that the former national Anglican Archbishop of Papua New Guinea, the Right Revd Sir George Ambo, decided to do something for his youth. He could see his own young people involved in criminal activities, playing sports on Sundays, and not attending church services. This reminded him of the church in the West that was losing its young people to the excitements of the world, and, as the head of the church, he decided that he needed to start up something immediately, rather than wait to see the situation worsen.

In 1985, Sir George Ambo appointed the Revd Sam Batara, a priest from the Philippines, as the National Anglican Youth Coordinator. He was given an office in the Anglican national office in Lae, and some financial resources, with the responsibility to develop a youth program for the Anglican church. Sir George continued to be very supportive of the youth ministry until his retirement in 1989.

A. Anglican Youth Work in Papua New Guinea

In September 1986, the year following his appointment, Revd Batara organised the first National Anglican Youth congress in Lae, bringing together youth representatives from the five dioceses.⁵⁷ Its purpose was to inform the representatives about the youth work, and encourage them to start up youth work in their respective dioceses, which was to be supported with K500 per diocese as capital.

At the congress, the following initiatives were proposed, and later submitted to the Provincial Council in 1987 for approval:

1. Anglican Provincial Youth Council.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The Anglican Province of Papua New Guinea is divided into five dioceses: (1) Dogura, covering Milne Bay Province; (2) Popondota, covering Oro Province; (3) Port Moresby, covering Central, Gulf, and Western Provinces; (4) New Guinea Islands, covering the five island Provinces; (5) Aipo Rongo, covering Momase and Highlands Provinces.

⁵⁸ The governing body of the Anglican Youth Ministry, which was to be called Anglican Youth Care Force (AYCF).

2. Anglican Youth Policy.⁵⁹
3. Anglican Youth Constitution.⁶⁰
4. A working committee to work with Revd Batara.

It seems that only initiatives one and four were accepted. The aim of the AYCF was to take care of the young people, and to develop them physically, mentally, socially, economically, culturally, and spiritually, and to integrate them into the life of the church and community.⁶¹

Its objectives were 11-fold.⁶² To help meet these objectives, the AYCF sought training programs for leaders of the dioceses, and organised a yearly National Youth Week for sharing, celebration, worship, and teaching. It encouraged each diocese to organise:

1. Self-help training, and initiating economic projects;
2. Sports and recreation;
3. Cultural activities;
4. Community services;
5. Spiritual development.

These were to be funded by the national government, through AYCF. By mid-1987, all five dioceses had their youth ministries operating under appointed chaplains.

This saw youth groups from the previous NYMP disband, and associate with the new movement, eventually abandoning all other areas of development, to concentrate on spiritual development only.

In 1991, after Revd Batara left, the youth office was run down, because of financial mismanagement. Funds that supported activities in the five dioceses and the national youth gathering came to a halt. The national man,

⁵⁹ See Appendix 1.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 2.

⁶¹ Draft Youth Policy, 1986.

⁶² See Appendix 3.

who took over from Revd Batara, resigned, leaving the Bishop responsible for youth ministry, the Right Revd Tevita Talanoa, to take over the reins, and delegate responsibility to each diocese to run their own programs and activities, under the direct guidance of their diocesan bishops.

When this happened, all the dioceses suffered (including Aipo Rongo). The diocese of Popondota, however, with the help of Revd Cameron Venables, managed to make a fresh start, and stands out as the leading diocese in the area of youth ministry today.

B. Anglican Youth Work in the Diocese of Aipo Rongo

Aipo Rongo diocese has a long history of youth work. This dates back to the time of Revd Lyall Turley, an expatriate, who was rector at All Souls church, Lae. It was during this time, in 1978, that *Dasiga*⁶³ and *Heduru*⁶⁴ were born. *Dasiga* failed to continue, after Revd Turley and prominent leaders left Lae, but its impact was so great that young people in several urban parishes, including Lae, Wau, and Madang, were drawn to start similar programs in their churches.

It was not until May, 1984, that the Diocesan Council,⁶⁵ in response to a proposal by Br Mack,⁶⁶ agreed to establish a youth training centre, to conduct experimental courses for youth leaders at St Andrew's Community Centre in Madang. In June, 1984, Br Mack visited Simbai and Koko parishes, to obtain knowledge of the village situation, so that the necessary steps could be taken to help village people.

After the April, 1985, clergy conference, it was decided that youth leaders' training courses should be conducted at parish level, and that, if possible, a

⁶³ An Oro Province word for "praise". A musical group formed by the tertiary students of Lae to bring creative music into the church through songs, dance, and drama blended with cultural flavour. It recorded cassettes, raised a lot of money, and made a number of visits to Australia.

⁶⁴ A Motu word for "helping hand". It is a school to assist out-of-school, and jobless, youth in Lae, to further their education and vocational training.

⁶⁵ A governing body in a diocese headed by the bishop.

⁶⁶ E. G. Mackenzie, an expatriate, based in Madang, who had already started working with out-of-school youth.

Young Anglican Fellowship⁶⁷ should be set up in each parish by those trained as youth leaders. This programme was followed, and almost all urban parishes, and a number of rural parishes, had youth fellowships established. It was during this time that Nancy Waimi⁶⁸ and Br Mack said:

We hope that, from this experience, we can formulate a diocesan youth policy, with objectives, which would include a visit annually to fellowships by staff, the conducting of combined area camps, two yearly meetings of all fellowship leaders, etc. Perhaps, on experience in this diocese, a youth policy for the youth of the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea will be finalised.⁶⁹

In 1986, Ms Waimi was appointed Diocesan Youth Coordinator by the then Bishop of Aipo Rongo, the Right Revd Jeremy Ashton. Under Ms Waimi's leadership, youth ministry in the diocese took root, with a spiritual emphasis. This created more hunger for the Word of God and teaching, but it also created friction between the clergy and herself, resulting in her resignation in 1987.

After Ms Waimi's resignation, different bishops, coordinators, and leaders came and went. The youth ministry, which looked so promising went flat. Some leaders, and other members, left to join other denominations, while others struggled to keep the ministry going, with minimal support from the diocese.

In 1995, after his consecration, Bishop James Ayong asked Revd Wilfred Siwana⁷⁰ to be youth chaplain on a part-time basis, operating from his parish at Koko. In 1997, Revd Siwana was moved to Mt Hagen, as parish priest, with the intention that he should work closely with the bishop on youth ministry. In 1998, the author spent time educating rural parishes about youth work, especially in the Jimi and Simbai areas, and part of the Siane area. A few leadership workshops were conducted as well as a diocesan youth camp.

⁶⁷ A fellowship more spiritually oriented.

⁶⁸ Nancy Agorabae, a graduate from CLTC.

⁶⁹ Aipo Rongo Diocesan Youth Report to Synod, July 1985, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Parish priest of Koko, in youth ministry since 1986.

In 1999 and 2000, the Diocesan Council allocated a substantial amount of money for youth ministry, with Revd Siwana becoming full-time youth chaplain, being based at Goroka. Up till now, however, no proper diocesan youth council has been formed, and there is still no youth policy or constitution.

4. Analysis of Youth Ministry

In this section, we will look at Aipo Rongo more closely, examining its program, ministry, successes, and failures, and seeing how far its aims and objectives are being met.

4.1 Survey of Youth Ministry in Aipo Rongo

In his time in Aipo Rongo as youth worker (and student), the author of this paper carried out a survey in different parts of the diocese,⁷¹ and his findings for urban and rural areas are set out in the two tables, below.⁷²

Summary of Table 1

The activities listed in the table were commonly practised by the urban parish youth. These activities were spread out through the year, with weekly, quarterly, and yearly programs and ministry that involved young people, as well as some interested older people.

These activities motivated and challenged, not only young people, but parents, and other older people, to live for God. The church services became alive, and stimulated commitment, giving, and a love of God and His Word.

They had their weaknesses, too. The activities that were meant to bring sound biblical teaching, and to address social and economic issues, failed to do so. Boy/girl relationships went out of hand, and many young girls ended up with unwanted babies. Choruses, without theological significance, dominated the church worship, and some activities failed to be consistent – frustrating young people.

The activities only centred round spiritual development, and lacked a holistic approach, which created tension between young people and the clergy.

⁷¹ Including Lae, Madang, Wau/Bulolo, Goroka, Mt Hagen, Siane, Jimi, and Simbai areas.

⁷² See Appendices 4 and 5.

Many aspiring young people's leaders left to join other churches or denominations.

Summary of Table 2

The activities listed in the table were widely practised by the rural parish youth. They had weekly and quarterly programs. Adults and families also participated.

Like the urban youth, these activities motivated, challenged, and encouraged both young and old, in their walk with God. The church services became alive, stimulating commitment, giving, and the love of God and His Word.

But, like the urban youth, adequate and sound teaching was lacking. Ordinary Christians ran many activities, without proper guidance and direction, which led to heresies. Unnecessary pregnancies occurred with young girls, which discouraged parents from allowing their children to attend youth meetings.

Comments

We must remember that youth ministry deals with young people, who are, first of all, human beings in a developmental process, trying to relate to other human beings, their surroundings, and the supernatural. In doing so, they will inevitably create problems for others, and for themselves. Recognition of this fact should be the starting point for youth ministry.

Urban youth are surrounded by many different social and economic activities and changes. Their program and ministry are influenced by these changes, and, many times, they would want to be competitive, by the world's standards, which is healthy, but needs proper guidance and direction from theologically-trained personnel. This is where the clergy, in general, and the parish priest, in particular, are most needed.

Rural youth, on the other hand, do not have similar kinds of excitement where they live, but the social and economic pressures are there. With limited knowledge, they try to come up with meaningful activities for themselves, but usually end up with problems. This also calls for pastoral care, and theological guidance, by the clergy.

The minister, or parish priest, should not leave youth on their own to come up with their own program, without guidance and leadership. We saw, in section two, that youth ministry is an integral part of the church, and not a separate program, where the minister, elders, parents, and other adults are involved in the upbringing of their youth, in every aspect of life and development.

Youth ministry belongs to the church, and the church belongs to Christ, and the minister, *diakonos*, is servant to this. Part of his responsibility is to see that every age group in the church is growing in its relationships with God, with one another, and with its surroundings. This requires teaching of the Word of God, clearly and meaningfully nurturing and discipling. Unless this is done, youth ministry in Aipo Rongo will continue to struggle to become well established.

4.2 Evaluation of Youth Ministry in Aipo Rongo

Having discussed the youth ministry's program successes and failures, we now look at its aims and objectives, to see how far they have gone.

Are Aims and Objectives being Met?

We saw that Nancy Waimi and Br Mack said in their reports that they hoped to formulate "a diocesan youth policy, with objectives, which would include a visit annually to fellowships by staff, the conducting of combined area camps, two yearly meetings of all fellowship leaders, etc."

But that never came about, although some form of activities were happening in the urban and rural parishes.

It was also their hope that the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea would formulate some kind of youth policy and guidelines drawn from this Aipo Rongo experience. That actually came about in 1986,⁷³ but it seems the Anglican Provincial Council did not accept them.

We may put the blame on the Provincial Council and the Archbishop of that time for not considering and endorsing the draft youth policy, and its aims

⁷³ See Appendices 1 and 3.

and objectives. We may also hold them responsible for not coming up with incentives to enhance youth ministry in the diocese. There is some truth in this, but since it was the desire of Nancy Waimi and Br Mack to see things happening for the young people in Aipo Rongo, aims and objectives should have been formulated there and then. And proper coordination and consultation should have been done with the appropriate authorities, including the clergy, to see an effective youth ministry in the diocese.

Anything new that is introduced into a society does not go unchecked. It is thoroughly scrutinised, and criticised, until time and efficiency determines its genuineness and value/worth. It also calls for determination, perseverance, humility, and submission, on the part of the one introducing a particular activity, for full approval and acceptance. It is no different, when anything new is introduced into the church.

Views and Comments from Clergy and Others

The general views and comments from the clergy and others are surprisingly good and encouraging. They compliment youth ministry for the changes that are taking place in the churches. They see worship becoming alive, giving increasing, and a desire to love God, and see one another growing. But submission to authorities and elders is lacking. The youth seem to disregard the authorities and traditions of the church. This puts in question whether what young people profess is genuine Christianity.

Views and Comments from those Involved in Youth Ministry

The general views and comments from young people are that today's youth are going away from God, and His principles. We are trying to restore that. The clergy should appreciate this, and be part of what we are doing, rather than step back and criticise.

My Judgment

From the views and comments from clergy, others, and youth themselves, it appears that:

1. The church has failed in its responsibility to mobilise, nurture, disciple, and teach the youth;

2. As a result of this failure, the youth have acted on their own, without clear aims and objectives, resulting in ineffectiveness, and no growth.

5. Recommendations for Effectiveness and Growth

In this final section, I will make recommendations the church might consider in its ministry to the youth. Before doing that, let me remind the church that, as the Body of Christ, its first and foremost ministry is to the people,⁷⁴ as is stated in Ephesians.⁷⁵ Proper planning, with clear goals and strategies, must be put in place, so that the people are well served.

Recommendation 1: Take Good Care of People

People have all kinds of needs, especially in this fast-changing world. Children's needs are different to those of their parents, and also to those of youth. The needs of urban youth are different to those of rural youth. As Edward Dayton and David Fraser have said: "Every group has a particular need, and the gospel needs to be communicated in a way that meets that particular need."⁷⁶

The church must be prepared to accommodate youth, to help meet these needs, so that they may grow up to be men and women, fully balanced in every area of life. Young people are in a developmental stage, so proper care must be given to them, or else they may be destroyed for life.

Jesus, who surrendered His eternal glory for the sake of humankind, is very much concerned to see that His people, for whom He died, are properly cared for.⁷⁷ Milne says:

Following Jesus, and loving Jesus, means accepting responsibility for Jesus' people . . . the people for whom He died, and who are, therefore, the burden of His concern. So He speaks His Word today

⁷⁴ People of every age, gender, level, background, status, class, etc.

⁷⁵ Eph 4:11-13.

⁷⁶ Edward Dayton, and David Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelism*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980, p. 7.

⁷⁷ John 21:15-17.

for these who will hear it: “Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep.”⁷⁸

If the church is to be the Body of Christ on earth, it will do well to heed His Word, and be responsible for taking good care of the people, including the youth, for whom He died.

Recommendation 2: Proper Planning is Needed for Youth

Proper planning is a must, if the church is to see youth being reached, cared for, and led to Christ. Some people hold to the belief that, by planning activities, then God’s sovereignty, “and the spontaneity of the Spirit’s work” is overlooked.⁷⁹ This is partly true, but God also works through human intellects. The church must, therefore, come up with appropriate plans to evangelise, care for, and teach people, in line with God’s original plan for humankind. Dayton and Fraser jointly express:

Planning is setting a desirable objective, imagining all of the different ways of reaching that objective, and then laying out a step-by-step program for reaching the objective. Planning includes, not only the means and methods that will be used, but also considers who will do the task, how much it will cost, and when it will be done.⁸⁰

We see from this definition that planning is:

1. Setting a desirable objective;
2. Imagining different ways of reaching that objective;
3. Laying out a set-by-step program to reach the objective;
4. Considering methods, or means, to reach the objective;
5. Considering who will do the task;
6. Estimating how much money is needed to reach the objective;

⁷⁸ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1993, p. 318.

⁷⁹ Cited in C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, Glendale CA: Regal Books, 1987, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Dayton and Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelism*, p. 26.

7. Deciding when to complete the desired objective.

Proper planning of youth ministry will lead young people to a desired destination, which is to God. Without it, we will find young people being led aimlessly.

Recommendation 3: Clear Goals Must Be Set for Youth

God is very much interested in the whole person, and so clear goals should be set to help young people holistically, so that they are mature before God, as Paul states it.⁸¹ This should be the main aim of the church, as it ministers to young people.

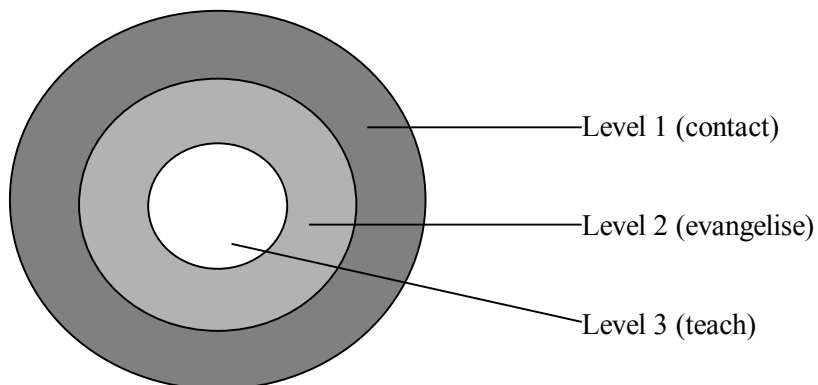
Aipo Rongo has urban and rural youth. With the urban youth, the young people are between the ages of 12 and 30, and nearly all of them are either in school or are working. Their needs are quite different to those of the rural youth, who are mostly villagers between the ages of 12 and 40 (and sometimes over), including married couples and families. So, clear aims or goals should be set out, according to the different settings, and their needs.⁸²

Goals for youth ministry must be in line with the church's overall goal, because "youth ministry is not intended to be a separate entity within the church, but one supportive element of the overall mission of the church".⁸³

⁸¹ Col 1:28.

⁸² Usually goals will grow out of the needs of the young people.

⁸³ Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998, p. 60.



Recommendation 4: The Three-Circle Strategy⁸⁴

Strategies are methods or procedures, used in particular circumstances, to accomplish certain missions or objectives. Here is one of those strategies I wish to recommend to the church for consideration, in its endeavour to minister to youth. It will help illustrate how the first three recommendations would operate in practice.

4.1 The Circles Represent Different Levels of Religious Subculture

Farley, in trying to explain the diagram, above, said this:

We Christians have a subculture of our own. We can imagine that people, who are totally removed from our subculture, are outside the Level 3 circle. As we move closer to the centre of the circles, the subculture becomes more removed from that of society at large. When non-Christians enter our world, they often feel out of place. Yet, often Christians are not sensitive to this: they expect these people to take one big step, when a number of smaller steps will do.⁸⁵

Many Christians make the mistake of trying to bring young people to Christ, through short-term projects like weekend camps and youth rallies. These projects are not bad in themselves, but, for maximum effect, they need to be part of a long-term strategy. Most young people do not respond to Christ

⁸⁴ The title and main thoughts in this section come from Ross Farley's book *Strategy for Youth Leaders*, Sydney NSW: Scripture Union, 1991, pp. 27-31.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

quickly, so constant work with them for a longer period of time is more appropriate.

4.2 *The Circles Represent the Youth Group*

The three circles can represent young people in different levels of a group.

- Level 1 represents young people, who are prepared to have social contact with the youth group, but are not prepared to take the relationship further.
- Level 2 represents those, who have had enough contact with the group to regularly attend activities, where the gospel is communicated.
- Level 3 represents those, who will willingly attend activities for Bible study and prayer. They are the core of the youth group.

4.3 *The Circles Represent Three Levels of Ministry*

Goal of Level 1: The goal of Level 1 is contact, and its activities are to be designed in a way to attract new contacts into the group, and consolidate old contacts. Its events must be socially oriented. There should be no message presented in a formal way, but that should not stop informal sharing of the gospel.

Purpose of Level 1: To introduce new contacts to the youth group, and to Christian young people, in a non-threatening environment. Sports and other recreational activities would be ideal at this level.

Promotion of Level 1: Activities should concentrate on those, who are outside all the circles, targeting young people, who have not been to a youth group activity before.

Goal of Level 2: The goal of Level 2 is evangelism. This does not necessarily mean heavy evangelistic rallies, but activities that have fun programs, with evangelistic input.

Purpose of Level 2: To convey important gospel truths, consistently and regularly, to young people. They should be reminded that humankind, including youth, is lost in sin, and needs a Saviour, and the meaning and implications of sin should be explained, in terms that they can understand.

Promotion of Level 2: Activities, concentrating on young people, who have already been prepared through contact at Level 1.

Goal of Level 3: The goal of Level 3 activities is the development of young people, through teaching, Bible study, prayer, and discipleship. These are core group activities.

Purpose of Level 3: To nurture new and young Christians, as well as to equip and motivate all to minister to their peers. Bible study, Christian doctrine and traditions, prayer and personal devotion should be emphasised at this level.

Promotion of Level 3: Activities, concentrating on young people, who have already been prepared, through contact at Level 2 to incorporate them into Level 3.

Youth leaders need to be on the lookout, all the time, to see who are showing keen interest in the gospel, so that they can be introduced to Level 3. When they are established in the core group, they should be introduced to the wider regular worship service of the local church, so that they can feel they are part of the family, without reservations.

4.4 Step by Step

The above strategy breaks down, into several small steps, the process of bringing young people into the church.

It should be found that the number of young people attending Levels 1 and 2 is greater than the number attending Level 3, because Level 3 demands extra commitment. If the three levels have an equal number of young people, then something is wrong. Either the group is not contacting and evangelising effectively, or it is not disciplining enough.

The core group should not be too large. Leaders can mobilise new youth groups in their own local areas, using the same methods as above, but still under the umbrella of the main church youth.

Before reading Farley's book, I had already come to the conclusion, through my own experience in Popondeta and Aipo Rongo dioceses, especially in Mt Hagen, that the right way to go in organising youth ministry is the same strategy as found in his three-circle concept.

I have started using this strategy with the youth in Mt Hagen, and hope to develop it so that Mt Hagen can become a base, where youth leaders from other parishes can be trained and equipped to apply the same principles in their own areas. I strongly recommend that the church adopts this three-circle concept, so that youth ministry will grow effectively.

Conclusion

Youth ministry is exciting, yet challenging, for it is dealing with people, who are both excited and confused by the various changes that are taking place within their bodies, and around them. These people are entering into a new sphere in life, and are faced with challenges and pressures, to which they have to respond.

Sometimes their responses are not good, and they end up being victims of their own mistakes, and are disregarded by their communities. But they are unique and precious before God, and He is concerned about their well-being.

This calls for the church, and especially Aipo Rongo diocese, to be responsible in its ministry to youth. It demands a new vision, with a real commitment to see young people being reached for God.

The church cannot wait for the national government and/or non-government organisations to come up with something for the youth. The church is solely responsible, and must meet today's youth, with the strength and guidance God gives.

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APPENDIX 1

A DRAFT OF THE ANGLICAN YOUTH POLICY

We, the youth in the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea, consider ourselves as partners in the total mission and ministry of the church, handed to her by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We shall always seek to grow, and to help others grow, into fullness of life and service in the Lord.

In line with the Anglican faith, its tradition, and discipline, and official position on issues, arising, as decided by Provincial Council, we shall develop and maintain strong youth programmes, carefully planned and run by the youth, ourselves, aiming at the following goals:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We seek to grow in the grace and love of Christ, by knowing Him more personally, and deepening our Christian discipleship, studying God's will and purpose, revealed in Christ, and through His church, and by active participation in worship and the sacraments. We also seek to make Jesus known through evangelistic and spiritual renewal programmes, sharing in fellowship with others, and living a Christian example.

SOCIAL MATURITY

We seek to grow in our relationship with others, in love and in fellowship, by assuming our social responsibilities, promoting good citizenship and brotherhood among peoples, and making others and ourselves more aware, and concerned, of social realities, human rights, and human development.

EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT

We seek to grow in knowledge, experience, and skills, as we open our minds and hearts to the rich opportunities for learning: through doing, observing, sharing of ideas, experiences, and adventures, self-teaching, and promoting the right kind of training for people, developing practical skills, and leadership qualities.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FITNESS

We seek to grow with healthy bodies and sound minds, through physical fitness programmes, developing sportsmanship, and promoting health care through health education, counselling, and pastoral care.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND OUTREACH

We seek to grow in love and sacrificial giving, through service, enabling people to help themselves, and each other, in their needs, and help our communities advance, through self-help and cooperation.

CULTURAL EMPHASIS

We seek to grow in appreciation of our rich cultural heritage, through cultural studies, cultural expressions in worship, and other celebrations, and making use of our good customs and traditions to enhance better relationships and happy living.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

We seek to grow in search of the more abundant life (as we pray with Christ for our daily bread), through honest labour, hard work for self-reliance, sharing of resources for a good cause, and improving living conditions of our people.

PARTNERSHIP

We seek to grow into unity, and to work closely with other groups, churches, government bodies, and non-government agencies, regardless of beliefs, practices, background, and political affiliation, in the spirit of cooperation, mutual understanding, and respect for each other's position.

OPENNESS AND FLEXIBILITY

We seek to grow in the service of Christ, in the changing situations and daily events in this world, by pursuing any other aims and programmes called for, and more fitting.

YOUTH COMMUNICATION NETWORK

As youth, in the worldwide Anglican church, we shall always try to establish and maintain links with youth in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and to participate, as far as we are able, in programmes that promote international brotherhood, cooperation, and sharing of resources.

As a Province (Anglican Province of PNG), we shall strengthen our links, surpassing diocesan, district, and parish boundaries, to promote consultation and sharing, in order to better serve the needs, interests, and aspirations of the youth, in particular, and our church, and the nation, in general.

We shall maintain a fully-coordinated ministry among our youth, through a network that links our youth in the remotest rural village with our Provincial (National) Youthcare Office, through parish, district, diocesan, and provincial youth bodies (e.g., Parish Youth Executives, Zone Youth Councils, Diocesan Youth Councils, and Provincial Youth Council), given charge to work out their own constitution, programmes, and activities, in accordance with this Youth Policy.

We are ever aware of our partnership in the total ministry of the church, and in the service of the nation. We shall seek to work closely, and share resources, with all working groups, committees, councils, and institutions in the church, and with other bodies and agencies outside of the church.

We seek to minister to, and with, each other, and to be more able. We shall continue to develop our resources: in manpower through training, in facilities through sharing, and in support through legal fundraising.

We shall maintain our ministry, with the help of full-time and part-time youth ministers, dedicated to the service of our youth and the church, such as a Provincial Youth Coordinator, Diocesan Youth Coordinators, Youth Chaplains, Youth Trainers, Youth Leaders, and other youth workers demanded by our programmes and activities.

APPENDIX 2

CONSTITUTION OF THE ANGLICAN YOUTH CARE (FORCE)

ARTICLE 1 – DEFINITION AND NAME

Section 1 – Definition

The Anglican church of PNG, as part of the Body of Christ, considers, as part of its mission, is to minister to, and with, young people. To look after this ministry, it is necessary to involve the young people, themselves, in the planning, coordination, and implementation of a youth policy, programs, and activities. A Provincial Executive Body has been duly created by, and composed of, youth representatives from every diocese, to oversee the national church's youth ministry.

Section 2 – Name

This body shall be called Anglican Provincial Youth Care (Force), and this name shall be used in its official dealings, communications, and accounts.

ARTICLE 2 – DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

Section 1

The Anglican Youth Care shall stand upon the principles and objectives, declared by the first national Youth Congress in September, 1986, which shall, in common endeavour with our youth, be:

1. To know Christ and to make Him known
2. To join with all God's people in promoting His Kingdom, young and old together forming the body of Christ, sharing in His work, and mission in this world.
3. To maintain strong and autonomous (youth-run) programmes that help develop plans, and achieve the aims of the church.
4. To hold fast to the Constitution and Canons of the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea, accept the authority of the Anglican Provincial Council, and support the traditions and practice of our church.
5. To develop young people, to grow as body-mind-soul, to be good members of the church, and useful citizens of the country.
6. To plan, organise, evaluate, and coordinate appropriate programmes and activities for youth, in their respective levels and situations (e.g., out-of-school, students, workers, unemployed, etc.).
7. To train for, and play, leadership roles, to share greater participation and responsibilities in our own communities, including the church.
8. To provide opportunities for every individual within the youth fellowships to gain wider knowledge, and useful practical skills.
9. To do loving service, and prophetic ministry, for our people in the church, in the local community, and the nation as a whole, as needs and matters of concern arise.

10. To foster ecumenical or inter-church working relationships, as well as partnership with government bodies, and civic agencies.
11. To pursue any other aims and programmes the church youth may decide to adopt.

Section 2

The Anglican Youth Care shall seek to abide by, and implement, the Anglican Youth Policy, adopted from the decisions made at the First National Congress, and duly approved by the Provincial Council.

ARTICLE 3 – ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

Section 1

The Provincial Youth Care (Force) shall:

- (a) Be the governing body that makes final decisions, or delegates decision-making to the provincial youth coordinator, on matters concerning youth and youth ministry at the provincial (nationwide) level;
- (b) Be an autonomous body in the Anglican church, under the authority of the Provincial Council, created by, and serving, the youth, in accordance with the official Anglican Youth Policy;
- (c) Work to implement all resolutions and decisions made at the Youth Congress, and at its own meetings, and to make sure that the National Youth Service network is effectively working;
- (d) Create committees, and appoint members into such committees, as considered necessary to carry out any youth programs and activities;
- (e) Specify the duties and powers of the committees created, and may recommend to any committee definite courses of action on any plan or project;
- (f) Consider any proposals submitted by any committee, any diocesan youth care (force), and any other body, or agency, inside and outside the church, which it may freely endorse, support, or reject;

- (g) Enter into contracts or negotiations with any individual, group, or office, which may involve, or be involved in, our National Youth Network, or it may delegate the same to a committee, or the Provincial Youth Coordinator;
- (h) Be given the privilege to recommend to Provincial Council the termination or appointment of a Provincial Youth Coordinator;
- (i) Have the authority to examine and audit the assets and liabilities of the Anglican Youth Care, and its subsidiary offices;
- (j) Have the power to ask, or appoint, respective persons to assist in examining its financial status, or advising it on any legal questions.

ARTICLE 4 – MEMBERSHIP AND MEETINGS

Section 1 – Regular Members

The Provincial Youth Care Forces shall be composed of 15 members:

- (a) Diocesan youth care (forces) shall choose, and send, their official representatives as follows: Aipo Rongo with 4, Dogura with 2, New Guinea Islands with 2, Popondota with 2, and Port Moresby with 2;
- (b) Additional members shall be the Provincial Youth Coordinator, a Youth Chaplain, and a volunteer legal officer.

Section 2 – Alternate Members

- (a) A Diocesan Youth Care Force shall select, in addition to their regular representatives, alternate representatives, correspondingly, who shall attend for regular members, unable to attend a planned meeting.
- (b) When both the regular and alternate representatives cannot attend a meeting, the regular member shall delegate membership to a proxy of his choice.

Section 3 – Regular Meetings

There shall be a regular meeting, which shall be called once a year, at a time and place designated by the chairperson, in consultation with the Provincial Youth Coordinator, provided that written notice, followed by contacts through other available means of communication, shall be sent to members 30 days before the meeting.

Section 4 – Special Meetings

- (a) Consultation among regular members, through available communication means, shall normally be enough to gather a consensus, and settle minor emergency matters arising in between regular meetings.
- (b) Regular members, who think the presence of a business, adequate to warrant a special meeting, shall discuss the matter with the chairperson and/or the Provincial Youth Coordinator.
- (c) A special meeting, to be attended by all regular members may be called by the chairperson, in consultation with the Provincial Youth Coordinator, following the same provision as that calling for a regular meeting.

Section 5 – Quorum

In any meeting of the Provincial Youth Care Force, a simple majority, or eight members, disregarding diocesan representations, shall be sufficient to proceed with the dealing of business.

Section 6 – Voting

All members shall be entitled to vote, but each shall have but one vote. A show of hands shall normally be sufficient, unless the majority decides on the means of voting to be used before a vote is taken.

Section 6 – DUTIES AND RIGHTS OF MEMBERS

A duly designated member shall:

- (a) Be expected to fully participate in the programs and activities of the Provincial Youth Care Force, in particular, and the Anglican Youth Care (ministry) in general.
- (b) Have the right to elect, and be elected, an officer of the Provincial Youth Care Force, and to become a member of one or more of the working committees created.
- (c) Be prompt to attend regular and special meetings, and any meeting called upon by a committee, of which he is a member.
- (d) Have the right to participate in the discussions during meetings, and to propose, support, or oppose any moves, to the best interest of the Anglican Youth Care.
- (e) Have the right to examine the records and dealings of the Youth Care, to correct any errors, but not to molest any office-bearer, or member performing his respective duties.
- (f) Agree to abide by this Constitution, to safeguard the Anglican Youth Policy, to help promote the principles and objectives of the Anglican Youth Care, to aim for the success of all duly-approved youth programs and activities, and serve the welfare of all the youth.

ARTICLE 5 – OFFICE BEARERS AND THEIR DUTIES

Section 1 – Structure of Officers

There shall be the following elected officers of the Provincial Youth Care Force:

- (a) Chairperson;
- (b) Deputy-chairperson;
- (c) Secretary; and
- (d) Finance Officer.

Section 2 – Qualifications

Any regular member can be nominated and elected, to but one of the above offices.

Section 3 – Term of Office

The elected office bearers shall normally hold a term of office for three years.

Section 4 – Election

- (a) General election of office bearers shall be held once every three years at a regular meeting.
- (b) The notice sent out to members calling for that regular meeting shall emphasise the purpose of electing office bearers.
- (c) Nominations shall be made by any member present, but only regular members may be nominated. An absent regular member may only be nominated with his consent, given personally, or through his proxy.
- (d) Election shall be done in a secret ballot by any member present.
- (e) A simple majority vote shall be sufficient to elect any officer.
- (f) A special election shall be done at any meeting to fill up any vacant office.

Section 5 – Duties and Privileges of Office Bearers

- (a) The Chairperson shall:
 - (1) Be the presiding officer in any meeting of the Provincial Youth Care Force.
 - (2) Sign all official correspondence of the Care Force, or delegate such duty to the Secretary or the Provincial Youth Coordinator.
 - (3) Call regular and special meetings, in consultation with the Provincial Youth Coordinator.
 - (4) Consult, and be consulted, by the Provincial Youth Coordinator on matters of concern for the Anglican Youth Care (ministry).

- (5) Create a necessary committee, appoint its members, and assign its duties, after adequate consultation, through any means with Care Force members, where meeting is not possible.
 - (6) Have the power to call for the meeting of a committee created, or to assign a convener.
 - (7) Have the right to ask for a report from any working committee.
 - (8) Officially represent the Anglican Youth Care, where representation is called for, but the Care Force cannot consult immediately to appoint a representative.
 - (9) Turn over to the Provincial Youth Care Office any property belonging to it, which may be in his custody upon expiry of office.
- (b) The Deputy-chairperson shall:
- (1) Assume the office and duties of the Chairperson, in his absence, disability, or resignation.
 - (2) Perform any other duties delegated him by the Chairperson, or as assigned to him by the Provincial Youth Care Force.
- (c) The Secretary shall:
- (1) Take and keep minutes, resolutions, and other records of the Anglican Youth Care, be it taken at a Youth Congress, meeting of the Care Force, or its working committees, and all general correspondence.
 - (2) Issue written notices of meetings signed by the Chairperson, and write (and may sign on behalf of the Chairperson) any correspondence, which the Chairperson, the Provincial Youth Coordinator, the Care Force, or its committees may consider necessary.

- (3) Furnish the members with copies of all meeting minutes.
 - (4) Perform all other secretarial duties as required.
 - (5) Turn over to the Provincial Youth Care Office all records, documents, and other property belonging to the Anglican Youth Care, which may be in his custody upon expiry of office.
- (d) The Finance Officer shall:
- (1) Assist the Provincial Youth Coordinator in managing the assets and liabilities of Anglican Youth Care.
 - (2) Receive, acknowledge, and manage, grants, subsidies, and donations given to Anglican Youth Care.
 - (3) Pay out funds, after the official approval of the Care Force, through both the Chairman and the Provincial Youth Coordinator.
 - (4) Keep an up-to-date record of incoming and outgoing funds, and present a financial report whenever required by the Provincial Youth Care Force, or any of its members.
 - (5) Design a budget plan before the start of a year, which shall be presented, or circulated, to members of the Youth Care Force.
 - (6) Initiate, or have a say in, the planning for any fund-raising activities of Anglican Youth Care.
 - (7) Transfer custody of the Youth Care accounts to the incoming official signatories upon expiry of his office, and hand over to the Provincial Youth Care Office all account books, financial records, and other property belonging to Youth Care that may have been in his care.
 - (8) Do any other duties that the Youth Care may assign him.

- (9) Be given further provision that at any time, the Provincial Youth Coordinator, whether he is the Finance Officer or not, can disburse for expenses necessary in running the Youth Care Office and other sundry expenses, subject to proper keeping of invoices, and other official proofs of payment.

Section 6 – Resignation

- (a) Resignation of any office bearer shall be presented in writing, stating reasons, to the Chairperson or the Provincial Youth Coordinator, each of whom can declare the office vacant.
- (b) An officer, or member, moving into another diocese for more than 90 days shall be replaced by the respective Diocesan Youth Care Force represented.
- (c) The Diocesan Youth Coordinator, or Chairperson of the Diocesan Youth Care Force, shall notify the Provincial Youth Care Force, through its Chairperson or the Provincial Youth Coordinator, upon replacement of a diocesan representative to the Provincial Youth Care Force.

Section 7 – Committees, Membership, and Meetings

- (a) Committees that can look into necessary work, or programs arising, shall be formed by the Provincial Youth Care Force, from time to time.
- (b) Committee membership shall be open to anyone, as the Provincial Youth Care Force decides, as necessary, to include such expertise as corresponding to the work program, or field, assigned to that particular committee.
- (c) Committee meetings may be called by the Provincial Youth Care Force Chairperson, or by a convener assigned by him, at a time and place convenient to committee members.
- (d) Each committee created shall keep records of its meeting minutes, and of structures and procedures involved in any plan or program, given in its charge, copies of which shall promptly

be furnished to the Provincial Care Force, and to the Provincial Youth Coordinator.

- (e) The Provincial Youth Care Force has the authority to dissolve any committee it created and form another, in the interests of the Anglican Youth Care.
- (f) Any committee, duly declared dissolved shall cease to exist, and have nothing further to do with the Anglican Youth Care, or vice-versa.

ARTICLE 6 – AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended by a majority vote at any meeting of the Provincial Youth Care Force, provided that the proposed amendment(s) be given prior thorough discussion.

VOCABULARY

YOUTH – a person or group of persons with a youthful heart, or young blood, interested in the affairs of the young, or just feeling young.

PROVINCE or PROVINCIAL – refers to a national boundary, such as PNG, which is a Province in the worldwide Anglican Communion, but autonomous.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL – The decision-making body of the Anglican church, as a Province of the Anglican Communion. The Council has equal representatives from the dioceses, i.e., bishops, clergy, and laity.

DIOCESE or DIOCESAN – refers to a regional set-up, which divides the Province into areas led by a Diocesan Bishop, governed by a Synod and Council.

ANGLICAN YOUTH CARE – refers to the Youth Ministry of the Anglican church in PNG.

PROVINCIAL/DIOCESAN YOUTH CARE FORCE – refers to an executive body to oversee the youth ministry at provincial or diocesan level.

APPENDIX 3

Principles and objectives:

1. To know Christ, and to make Him known.
2. To join with all God's people in promoting His Kingdom, young and old together, forming the body of Christ, sharing in His work and mission in this world.
3. To maintain a strong and autonomous (youth-run) programme that helps develop plans, and achieves the aims of our church.
4. To hold fast to the Constitution and Canons of the Anglican church of Papua New Guinea, accept the authority of the Anglican Provincial Council, and support the traditions and practices of our church.
5. To develop young people to grow as body-mind-soul, to be good members of the church, and useful citizens of the country.
6. To plan, organise, evaluate and coordinate appropriate programmes and activities for youth, in their respective levels and situations (e.g., out-of-school students, workers, unemployed, etc.).
7. To train for, and play, leadership roles to share greater responsibilities and participation in our own communities, including the church.
8. To provide opportunities for every individual within the youth fellowships to gain wider knowledge, and useful practical skills.
9. To do loving service, and prophetic ministry, for our people in the church, in the local community, and the nation as a whole, as needs and matters of concern arise.
10. To foster ecumenical or inter-church working relationships, as well as partnership with government bodies and civic agencies.
11. To pursue any other aims and programmes the church youth may decide to adopt.

APPENDIX 4

TABLE 1 – URBAN YOUTH FELLOWSHIPS

	PROGRAM	SUCCESES	FAILURES
WEEKLY	Praise and worship	Enriched church worship	Just choruses, no theology
	Bible study	Created hunger for God and His Word	No sound teaching
	Bible quiz	Encouraged Bible reading and memorising of scriptures	Just random, not right through the Bible
	Prayer night	Encouraged prayer life	No proper teaching about prayer
QUARTERLY	Guest Speaker	Challenged to commitment in God and world around	More spiritual – failed to address social and economic issues
	Sports	Drew more and more young people into the fellowship	Not consistent
	Picnic	As above – social interaction	Boy/girl relationship problem
	Evaluation	Learned from the past to make remedies	Failed in remedial steps
	Rally	As above – and commitment to God – challenged for wholeness	No disciple nurturing nor mentoring
	Retreat	Gained fresh insights and vision	Failed to stick to vision

TABLE 1 – URBAN YOUTH FELLOWSHIPS (continued)

MINISTRY	SUCCESES	FAILURES
Hospital visitation	Opportunity to share and show God's love and blessing	Inconsistent
Home visitation	Created openness and interaction on personal basis	Pastoral care inadequate
Outreach	Encouraged and motivated Christians in their faith	Not properly coordinated
Music	Rich flavour in the worship Cassette recording	No proper teaching in music
Dance and drama	Made gospel alive and encouraged creativity	No guidance and direction

APPENDIX 5

TABLE 2 – RURAL YOUTH FELLOWSHIPS

	PROGRAM	SUCCESES	FAILURES
WEEKLY	Praise and worship	Enriched church worship	Just choruses, no theology
	Bible study	Encouraged commitment to God and obedience to His Word	No sound teaching
	Bible quiz	Encouraged Bible reading and memorising of scripture	Just random, not right through the Bible
QUARTERLY	Combined fellowship	Enriched other churches and groups	Boy/girl relationship problems
	Mini Camp	Motivated many young people and parents into serving Christ	Poor follow-up
	MINISTRY	SUCCESES	FAILURES
WEEKLY	Church cleaning	Maintain tidiness and cleanliness	Inconsistent
	Home visitation	Created openness and interaction	Pastoral inadequate care
	Visitation to sick and dying	Opportunity to share and show God's love and care/blessing	Pastoral inadequate care
QUARTERLY	Outreach (once in a while)	Encouraged and motivated Christians in their faith	Not consistent

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL IN MEANINGFUL CULTURAL FORMS IN MELANESIA

Philip Manuao

Philip Manuao graduated with a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Christian Leaders' Training College.

Introduction

The art of communication is a fundamental part of human existence. We thank God for His plan concerning mankind. He did not create us to be robots. He created us to have a relationship with Him. He made us to have a relationship with our neighbours, and with our environment. He gave us the ability to be creative in the art of communication. Because of this ability, there is great diversity in cultures and in communication.

It is interesting to learn about the richness of our cultural heritage. However, it is also difficult, because diverse cultural forms are applied in different ways in transmitting messages to particular people groups or cultures. It is a broad topic, in its theory, and practical sense. Therefore, the content of this article will be narrowed, and focus on the Gula'ala culture. However, the principles presented will be relevant to other people groups within Melanesian countries, because there are similarities in communication methods.

Motivation

I was challenged by my lecturers at the Christian Leaders' Training College with this question, "How effectively do Melanesians communicate the gospel in their cultural context?" I tried to ignore this question, but it kept coming back to me. I responded to the challenge with another question, "Are there helpful forms in my culture, which I, or the church, can use for communicating the gospel message?" It took me a long period of thorough reasoning, seeking guidance, and doing research, to find answers to the questions. Finally, I am convinced that God is within the reach of every

culture. In order for the gospel message to be understood, and become relevant to Melanesians, it has to be communicated in the cultural framework of a Melanesian context. The book titled *The Gospel is not Western*, by G. W. Trompf¹ has contributed to my motivation.

Aims

1. To elucidate meaningful cultural forms, as vehicles for getting God's message across to the illiterate and the semi-illiterate people in the church.
2. To provide guidance for indigenous ministers of God to make good use of their meaningful cultural forms, as they proclaim the word of God.
3. To make the gospel message simple and relevant to the people, so that this may lead them to Christ.
4. To educate the indigenous church about applying the gospel to their context, and not to look outside for foreign methods, which are irrelevant to the Melanesian context.

1. Understanding the Gula'ala People and Culture

In this first section, we will look briefly at the history of the Gula'ala people and their culture, which, in turn, forms the foundation for this article.

1.1 Definition and Location

The term Gula'ala has two components: *gula* (place) and *ala* (ahead). So the interpretation of Gula'ala means "a place ahead". The name was originally given to a particular zone on the east coast of Malaita, in the Solomon Islands, by an early native explorer. It lies to the southeast of Papua New Guinea, and to the northeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean. Two islands, Ngongosila and Kwai, are located in this particular area. One of the early expatriate missionaries, who worked on the islands, commented, "It was a beautiful place, sheltered by reefs from the full ocean

¹ Garry W. Trompf, *The Gospel is not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

forces. The tiny island of Ngongosila was linked to its twin Kwai by a sandbar, exposed at low tide.”²

There are nine clans living together on the two islands. They came from the north, central, and the southern parts of the main island of Malaita. Each of these tribes has their priest and sacred shrine for worship of their ancestors, and a sea passage for their ancestral agent, sharks, on various parts of the islands. The islanders earn their small income from fishing, and bartering goods with the bush people at the market. They also gain income from fishing and subsistence farming on the main island of Malaita, and from making traditional shell money. They are known for their seafaring, and so the expatriates call them “the saltwater people”.

The animistic practices, and the culture, of the Gula’ala people are similar to those of the people groups of Toabaita, Kwaio, Baegu, and Kwara’ae. The Gula’ala people’s language is different from the mentioned groups. The early settlers incorporated their vernaculars to form a trade language, so the islanders were able to communicate with the aforementioned groups (who live along the east coast of the main island of Malaita). This is one of the ways God has prepared the Gula’ala people to receive communication of the gospel message.

In relation to church growth on the islands, the story is incredible. God, in His sovereign plan, led the pioneer missionaries to discover this area. They established a mission base on the island of Ngongosila before they reached out to do missionary work among the bush people on the east coast of the island of Malaita. The power of God’s word turned the animistic islanders to Christ, and now there is no fear of the spirits on the islands, everybody now has the freedom to worship the true God.

1.2 Gula’ala Worldview About Communication

Now we will look at the way in which the Gula’ala people view the world around them. It has to do with their basic assumptions, premises, and values that underline and integrate their culture, and their understanding of

² Alison Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1977, p. 49.

their world, and their relationship to it.³ This will help us see the Gula'ala perspective about the reality of cultural communication.

The concept of a cultural communication network is a complex issue to fully explain. It means more than a mere conversation. It is a relational aspect of life that involves and affects people. It is a cultural art of life to the society. In reality, we are dealing with two worlds, the dead and the living.

These two groups are inseparable. They are integrated, are part of each other, and are actively involved in the communication network. It may be described as the link for a supernatural reunion with the ancestors. We believe that the ancestral spirits draw closer to the people during the observation of the traditional ceremonies. They are watching over our lives and our properties. They are listening to our daily conversations. They are monitoring our movements. They have a special knowledge about the people. They are responsive to our cries of desperation, and they are the source for living and survival.

Our communication link with the unseen world helps us to relate to our neighbour, because it works to enhance the relationship between us, and makes us feel responsible for one another. Some questions may naturally arise in one's mind. Is it possible for everybody to communicate directly with the ancestral spirits, or does the role have to be delegated to one particular person in the tribe? How does knowing about communication with the unseen world help us in our communication between people and with God today?

Depending on the situation, the ancestors' prerogatives are displayed. This implies that the spirits can communicate with the fisherman, who call them for help from the ocean, or with the *Fata'abu*⁴ in the *Bae*.⁵ As an illustration the following case is presented.

³ Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 52.

⁴ *Fata'abu* is a title for the custom priest.

⁵ *Bae* refers to the sacred grove.

Case one: Aruiasi was a native of Ngongosila, who was kidnapped while on a fishing trip during the blackbirding era of 1870-1880s.⁶ As the boat sailed out into the ocean, the crews opened the dock so that the natives could take fresh air from the sea breeze. Aruiasi took advantage of the opportunity to escape. He silently communicated to his ancestor for a way out. Then, he called on their ancestral agent, a shark named *Bobo*,⁷ and jumped into the water. Immediately the shark grabbed hold of him, and took him home. Even today, this shark is still alive and active on behalf of his tribesmen.

The above case is to clarify that, on special occasions, the Gula'ala tribesman can communicate with the ancestral spirits, apart from following the traditional procedure.

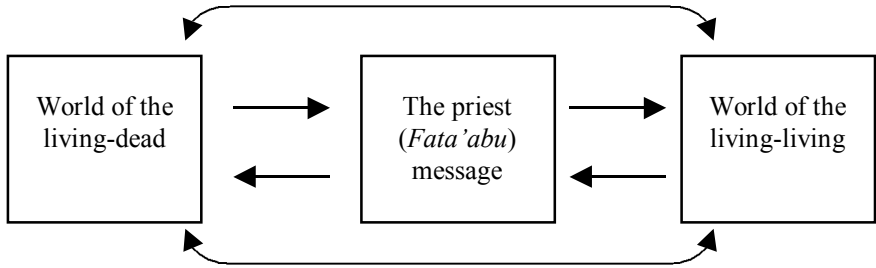
Case two: A man and his son from the Kwailalo tribe went out on a fishing trip. Unfortunately, they drifted far away from home. This incident brought confusion to the people. So the chief made a pledge of a high reward for any searching party who might find them. One particular priest heard about the appeal, and consulted the ancestral spirit for guidance, as he launched their mission. He placed a bow and an arrow on top of the mast of the canoe, and instructed the team to keep following the course of the instruments. At last, they found the fishermen on a small island called Sikaiana, and brought them home.

The *Fata'abu* plays the role of a sender and messenger in the traditional communication network. The people send their message via, the *Fata'abu*, to the ancestral spirits, and the ancestral spirits respond to them in various ways: audibly, visually, through nature, through special revelation, and

⁶ David Hilliard, *The Journal of Pacific History* vol 4, R. H. E. Maude, ed., London UK: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 41.

⁷ *Bobo* means "call to me in times of desperate need".

through divination, via the *Fata'abu*. He is the mediator between the dead and the living.



When we make a comparison between the Gula'ala concept of communication and the Hebrew concept of communication in the Old Testament, we can see the parallelism, especially with the mediatory office of the priest. The priesthood was chosen, or elected, by God, from the line of Aaron of the line of Levi.⁸ They acquired their position by hereditary right. Their occupation of the office was a full-time service.⁹ The priests had to be sensitive to God's instruction concerning their ministry.

In the New Testament, we learn that God was incarnated in human form in Jesus, who has perfectly fulfilled the mediatory office for all believers. Jesus is the great High Priest.¹⁰ He has chosen all believers to be a royal priesthood.¹¹ This is a new implication of the mediatory office, because His dwelling in the believer's life has granted them ability to communicate directly to God, and for God to communicate directly with them. Both direct communication, and communication through a priest, are only shadows of the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament to the church.

2. Towards Effective Communication of the Gospel in Gula'ala

We have seen that communication is a cultural art that has been in place since the primitive era. But, how can we communicate the gospel message

⁸ Num 18:1, 2.

⁹ Num 18:23, 34.

¹⁰ Heb 4:14-5:1-10.

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9.

in meaningful cultural forms in the Gula'ala context? We need to know that communication within the Melanesian culture takes on many forms.¹² However, not all cultural forms are suitable for us to use in the ministry of preaching and teaching. Some of the cultural forms have bad meanings and evil connotations that are inappropriate to contextualise.

Contextualisation of cultural form, with a Christian meaning, is something more than taking the historical and cultural context seriously, it is letting theology speak in and through the context.¹³

Indeed, this is a sensitive issue that needs more consideration, because we need to be aware of the danger of syncretism. It can cripple the true indigenisation and contextualisation of the gospel message. Therefore, we will be specific in our discussion concerning the use of cultural forms in this section. That means focusing on the meaningful form of communication, and evaluating the forms, according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness. "We must know that the cultural forms must always be tested and judged by the scripture."¹⁴

We will discuss the Gula'ala cultural forms in two categories: the audible forms and the visual forms.

Category 1: Audible Forms

This first category covers the activities that can be heard clearly by the sounding instrument, and the linguistic forms that make up a spoken language.

1.1 Praying

Praying is the action of making solemn requests to God or gods. Traditionally, it was the sacred role of the priest to intercede on behalf of the people of the clan, in good times, and in times of crisis. He was regarded as the mediator between the people of the clan and their ancestors.

¹² Darrell Whiteman, "An Introduction to Melanesian Culture", in *Point 5* (1975), p. 56.

¹³ John M. Hitchen, "Culture and the Bible: the Question of Contextualisation", a paper presented at the SPABC Biennial Conference, July 1-5, 1991.

¹⁴ John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1975, p. 6.

According to the religious practice, he performed the duty in the sacred grove, in reverence, and he called on the ancestral spirits systematically to the prayer liturgy, which consisted of the name of the former priests and the tribal warriors. If he mentioned them incorrectly, or irreverently, the consequences would be serious, even bringing death to him. Therefore, he has to be mindful of this, as he recites the prayers. After calling all the ancestral spirits, he pauses for a while in honour of the mythical supreme father, whom he believes to be superior to the ancestors. There is no specific name rendered to him, yet the priest and the tribesmen acknowledge him as the unseen father.

Oe na wane Dudufa, A'abu, Totofiri, kasi suana lamadua la'a
(You are Transcendent, Holy, Immutable one who lives from everlasting to everlasting)

Oe na wane ta Manu kasi lofo i fafomu
(You are the one, where no bird can fly above you)

Oe na Aofia ne amelu mouri osunamu
(You are our Saviour, in whom we find true comfort)

Oe na wane Kwai fa mouri amelu
(You are our Redeemer)

Oe na wane ni Kwaiofea lea amelu
(You are full of compassion)

Nau Fo'oa anitai i aemu
(I plead with my need at your feet)

The Gula'ala concept of prayer is much like the Africans. Mbiti comments, "Realities include God, who is supreme over all various types of spirit personification of natural phenomena, and objects are regarded as manifestations of God."¹⁵ We believe that when the priest prays, he is communicating to the whole party of spirits.

Traditional prayer can be used as a teaching aid, to show people how to approach our heavenly Father, who is invisible, and is more powerful than the ancestral spirits. This philosophy of praying seems ridiculous to the intellectuals of this world, but to the believers of Christ, prayer is essential

¹⁵ John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion*, London UK: SPCK, 1975, p. 3.

to life. It is one way Christians can communicate with God. It is talking to God and listening to Him.

It is not only a religious rite that must be fulfilled, it is not the utterance of words, it is not the feeling of desires alone, but it is the advance of our desire to God, the spiritual approach of our nature towards the Lord our God. It is the conversing of the soul with God. It is the opening of the heart to God, and it is the turning of the mind to God. Prayer is a spiritual business from beginning to end. Its aim and objective reaches to God himself. Charles Spurgeon said,

If prayer were of the lips alone, we would only need breath in our nostrils to pray. If prayer were of the desire alone, many excellent desires are easily felt, even by natural man. But, when it is the spiritual desire and the spiritual fellowship of the human spirit with the Great Spirit, then the Holy Spirit Himself must be present all through it.¹⁶

Indeed, the Holy Spirit prays for us, and prays with us, as we communicate with our Heavenly Father.¹⁷ All believers need to have the right understanding in our minds as we pray.

Prayer teaches us to learn about giving reverence to God, and praying conscientiously, because we are communicating with a living God, who is holy, loving, and more powerful than the ancestral spirits.

1.2 Sacrifice

Sacrifice refers to the religious practice of offering animals, pigs, possums, and fish to the ancestors. It is a religious obligation for the well-being of the Gula'ala community. "It is an avenue that the ancestors communicate directly with the living-living, and the people with them."¹⁸ This is the only way for purification and expiation of the person's guilt, and to maintain a

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *The Power in Prayer*, Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1996, p. 120.

¹⁷ Rom 8:26, 27.

¹⁸ Roger Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, New York NY: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 140.

harmonious communion with the ancestors, similar to the African. Cornelius Olowola writes:

When in good relationship, the offerer expresses gratitude to the ancestors, seeking favour from them all, through gifts, offering communion, and thanks offering. When the relationship is bad, it is hoped, through sacrifice, to ward off evil and danger.¹⁹

In such cases, traditional sacrifice served as the means to enhance the relationship between the people and their ancestors. To fail the responsibility, means failing the ancestor. Traditional sacrifice is an activity that calls for loyalty to the ancestors and the clan.

Indeed, traditional sacrifice is a meaningful allegory to explain the drama played out at Calvary. It has a rich message to teach mankind the two aspects relating to the work of Christ. Firstly, it shows Christ's obedience for us, in which He obeyed the requirement of the law in our place, and was perfectly obedient to the will of God the Father, as our representative. Secondly, it shows Christ's suffering for us, in which He took the penalty due for our sins, and, as a result, died for our sins.²⁰ If it wasn't for the death of Christ on the cross, there is no remedy for man's salvation. We deserve to die, as the penalty for our sin. But, we thank God for His plan concerning mankind. By His love, grace, and mercy, He initiated our salvation, and demonstrated it, by sending His only Son to fulfil it.²¹ We have been justified and sanctified by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God.²² We are called the children of God.²³ Communion is no longer with the ancestors but with the true God, who redeemed us. We are members of a new family, extended beyond our clans. We no longer need an animal sacrifice to expiate our sin, because Christ has done it on our behalf. We

¹⁹ Cornelius Olowola, *African Traditional Religion and Christian Faith*, Achimota Ghana: African Christian Press, 1993, p. 47.

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrines*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 580.

²¹ Rom 3:23-25, 5:9-11, John 3:16.

²² John 1:29, Heb 9:26.

²³ John 1:12.

have access into God's presence, because the precious blood of Christ has purified us, a Lamb without blemish or defect.²⁴

Furthermore, the sacraments portray the significance of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ for mankind. Firstly, Christian baptism is the ceremony of marking a person's admission into the Christian church, either by dipping him in water, or by sprinkling him with water. It is a sign of new life through Jesus Christ, participating in Christ's death and resurrection.²⁵ Those who are baptised are pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ, and are given a new ethical orientation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They publicly confess that they have a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are brought into union with Christ, and with the saints. It may be interpreted as Christian initiation because the person has publicly declared that he has moved to a new society of faith.²⁶ He has a new master and new tribe. He has changed from his old lifestyle to now walk in the Christian way. Christ has transformed the life, and the act of immersion baptism explains the message to the people.

Since baptism is intimately connected with the corporate life and worship of the church, it should normally be administered during public worship, so that the members of the congregation may be reminded of their own baptism, and may welcome the newly-baptised believer into the church.²⁷

Indeed, the observation of this rite has a part to play in the life of the Gula'ala church today.

Secondly, the eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, is the feast of remembrance of Christ's redemptive work for the church. It is a meal, in which all believers participate, and celebrate their salvation, through Christ. It portrays the same message about the Passover festival for the Israelites

²⁴ 1 Peter 1:19.

²⁵ Rom 6:3-5, Col 2:12.

²⁶ Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Culture*, Techy IL: Divine Word Publishers, reprinted South Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1975, pp. 165-168.

²⁷ World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry", *Faith and Order Paper* 111, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1982, p. 2.

from the power of the Egyptians.²⁸ In the New Testament, it is a festival of a new covenant that Christ gave to His disciples. The Lord's Supper was a liturgical meal, employing symbolic words and actions about Christ's sacrifice.²⁹

To retell the gospel message in the context of this form is very important for the church. This ministry will avoid any false teaching about the sacrament, such as the doctrine of transubstantiation.³⁰ The Lord's Supper is symbolic of Christ's sacrifice for us that has a spiritual meaning for the church. William Barclay paraphrased the message:

Jesus said, this bread stands for My body, which is going to be for you. This cup stands for the new relationship between man and God, made possible by the death, which I am going to die.³¹

The elements that were used in the eucharist don't have magical power. They are only symbolic. Therefore, it would be helpful to use a dry coconut to explain the eucharist in the churches in Gula'ala. This natural fruit is in their context, because the coconut fruit has the two elements together in it. The coconut juice symbolises the blood, and the coconut meat symbolises the bread. This is one of the methods used to present the message of the eucharist, in the frame of the indigenous church in Gula'ala.

1.3 Worship

Worship is the act of approaching God, with great respect, and giving allegiance to Him. In the traditional religion of Gula'ala, the concept of worship is a sacred ceremony, like prayer and sacrifice. They are part of each other. Thus, worship is an acknowledgment of one's dependence on the supernatural being, together with a certain emotional attitude. It is a practical activity in life. It is an activity involved out of man's inward devotion to the ancestral spirits, or man's way of adapting himself to the supernatural. It involves feasting, singing, dancing, working, etc. The

²⁸ Ex 12:1-42.

²⁹ 1 Cor 11:17-34.

³⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, "Eucharist", in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1991, p. 236.

³¹ William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, London UK: SCM Press, 1967, p. 107.

common people had knowledge about how to worship the spirits. They knew that the priest had to walk on his knees, as he worshipped in the *Bae*. Those, who were actively involved in the traditional ceremonies, had to perform with their whole being, to please the ancestral spirits.

To contextualise the form into a Christian context, would be an avenue for introducing the truth about worshipping God, in spirit and in truth. We must lead people to believe in something, or in someone, who is true, so that they can give their allegiance to Him, because, what we believe, will and must, govern our worship. Our faith in God educates us in approaching Him, and enhancing our relationship with Him.

The form of worship speaks of the seriousness of people's devotion and commitment to God. It helps people to express the reality of their religion, and benefits the life of the community. If we are to teach the subject to the indigenous church of Gula'ala, these aspects need to be considered.

Firstly, it is very important to explain the difference between traditional and Christian worship, so that the people will not carry the traditional mentality into the church. They need to be freed from picturing God as their ancestral spirit. The old mentality that their reverence of God is out of fear, believing God will punish them, like their ancestors, for misconduct in worship. If we are not careful, this will lead the church towards syncretism, and weaken its growth. Secondly, it is helpful to encourage the people to express their faith in worship, as their obligation to God. He is worthy of worship, and deserves to be worshipped.

The gospel call is the call to worship, to turn from sin, and call upon the name of the Lord. . . . In our Christian worship, we approach the throne of God, the judge of all. We enter the festival assembly of the saints and the angels. We gather in spirit, with the spirits of just men made perfect. We enter the assembly of glory, through Christ our mediator, and the blood of His atoning death.³²

In fact, traditional forms of worship have paved the way for the people to understand that worship is a serious activity in life, because it creates the

³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1004.

vision for us to be mindful of our attitudes. It is not optional for the church of God, rather, it is the very being of the church. Worship is the life of the church that works to build the relationship stronger. We should take up the challenge to bring the concept of meaningful worship into the church, and in our daily works of life.

1.4 *Storytelling*

This is another effective medium in the field of oral communication. In the so-called primitive society of Gula'ala, the art of storytelling can be integrated with parables, proverbs, drama, and in songs. It was included in their traditional education, in various situations.

Firstly, storytelling occurred at home, in their *luma*,³³ around the fire, while the meal was being prepared, and before the children went to bed. The parents carried out their responsibility of teaching their religion, their history, and the ethical standards of their society. Sometimes, the parents did this when they took their children out into the field. We may call this practical storytelling. It means bringing out the abstract lesson into a concrete form. This method has helped the children to see the reality of the stories, especially some important elements, in relation to their land and sea boundaries that were regarded necessary for their livelihood, and their moral behaviour.

Secondly, storytelling occurred in the *beu*,³⁴ a venue outside their houses. At this stage, the parents passed on their responsibility to the elderly in the community. The elderly were obligated to take turns in telling stories, parables, or reading a poem, because their skill in this area was more highly developed than the young folk. This denotes passing on their faith to the young generation. Young people were indoctrinated with their religions, and their cultural ethical standards, from the early ages of life. The young women stayed under the authority of their mothers at home. This method really helped the children, in their education, and their community life.

³³ The term *luma* refers to the living house that belongs to the whole family.

³⁴ The term *beu* refers to the men's house.

What lessons can be learnt from this traditional form of storytelling? We can see the importance of passing on faith to the young generation. It must begin at home, in the family.³⁵ We need to apply the principles of storytelling in our preaching and teaching of God's word. It is a simple method of relating the message to the whole church, and it provides genuine participation between the storytellers and the receptor. Kevin Hovey comments on the use of storytelling,

1. It permits a relatively-whole message in a simple form.
2. The narrative form permits us to meet the demand of cultural relevance, in both form and content.
3. It prevents serious and harmful restructuring of the new message.
4. The narrative simplicity offers a personal encounter, with a challenging, and already-cultural-accepted relevant message.
5. It provides a form of the message that so closely paralleled their own legends that everyone could immediately begin retelling and sharing the good news with others.³⁶

If we are concerned about making a spiritual impact on the life of the church, we can learn to be creative in our preaching from biblical narratives. We need to present the gospel in a concrete form, because the learning capacity of illiterates and the semi-illiterates using hearing and seeing has a higher percentage than hearing without seeing.

The art of storytelling has been recognised as a helpful activity to communicate the biblical truths. So, the pioneer missionaries, who worked among the Gula'ala people used it.

Jesus has set a platform for our preaching and teaching of God's word, through storytelling. He used to communicate the gospel in parabolic forms, by using simple stories, within the culture of the people. Jesus used

³⁵ Deut 6:4-9.

³⁶ Kevin G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions: A Manual for Cross-Cultural Christians*, Brisbane Qld: Harvest Publications, 1986, p. 216.

the natural environment as a metaphor to illustrate biblical truths, and common objects, such as, light, salt, etc. He presented the gospel at the level of His receptors, and helped them to explore the truth of God's word.³⁷

We should rise up and take the challenge of using this form in the Christian church. Drama and stories make it easier to comprehend spiritual teachings and theology. In reality, the Gula'ala Sunday School, and the youth ministry, have revived this method of dramatising biblical stories, the teachings of Jesus about discipleship, and the theology about the eschatological event. For example, our church youth group dramatised two powerful messages from the Bible with these themes "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:11-27) and "The rapture day, Jesus is coming soon" (Matt 24:36-51, 2 Thess 4:13-5:11). Through these dramatised stories, enacted throughout the Solomon Islands, Nauru, and Australia, many people came to know the Lord.

1.5 Music and Songs

These forms were described as the vehicles that the people use to convey important messages among them, and also to the ancestral spirits. They play an important role in oral communication, because they express the language of the heart to other hearts. The Gula'ala people have their style of music and singing. They make instruments out of bamboo, split wood, and the fruit of a *Falake* tree, from which they construct their rattles. Thus, in relation to their songs, the song composer has to be sensitive to the ancestral spirits. We believe the lyrics of the song are the product of having a special revelational insight from the spirits, transmitted into the mind of the person. As a result of the supernatural revelation, there is music and song for various occasions. The funeral dirges for death give comfort to the family during their bereavement. The war song of victory encourages the warriors, as they prepare to go and fight against their enemy. The love songs about human relationship express love, the dancing song adds joy to celebrations during the annual traditional ceremonies. Music and the songs give the people the emotional freedom to express their inward feelings of what they believe about themselves, and their relationship to the world in which they live. Andrew Midian comments,

³⁷ Luke 10:25-31; Matt 5:13-16; 13:1-43.

The music of the people is valuable. It heightens the consciousness, and awareness of the spirit presence, and creates in them faith to cope with life's challenges. It is both genetic and intentional. . . . Music and songs were inspirational, because they denote some connection with the spirit world.³⁸

Therefore, it is helpful to encourage the church in Gula'ala to make good use of this cultural heritage in music and songs. They are vehicles for effective communication of the gospel message to the indigenous congregations of Gula'ala. They also provide a sense of true freedom for self-expression, where the indigenous church is able to worship God in their cultural style in praise and worship to God. It is encouraging to see that the people are reviving these forms with the Christian gospel. They composed a variety of songs to replace the traditional songs marked out for various occasions.³⁹ The purpose of this action is to bring the gospel to the heart language of the receptors. However, the trends of Western music and songs, flooding into the indigenous church, have an influence on the young generation. This is a challenge for the churches in Gula'ala.

The author recommends that the church have balanced teaching on this topic. We should consider the need of our receptors. We must encourage the song composers, or writers, to provide balanced teaching on biblical doctrine. In this way, we are communicating the full gospel, in music and song to the people, and the indigenous and Western musical instruments, for the glory of God.

1.6 Using Names

In a paternalistic society, like Gula'ala, it was the father's prerogative to give names to the children. It is a traditional practice in the Gula'ala community, because the name of the person communicates a message. It is a cultural art of educating the younger generation about genealogy, about the possession of oral history, about cultural status, and about cultural

³⁸ Andrew Midian, *The Value of Indigenous Music of the Life and Ministry of the Church*, Port Moresby PNG: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1999, p. 21.

³⁹ Timothy Anilafa, one of the prominent indigenous leaders, translated the English sacred hymn book into the Gula'ala language.

trade. We believe that the form of using traditional names makes us feel more secure, because the ancestral representatives are with us. The name can also testify on behalf of the people. This is one of the very important areas, because in the so-called primitive society of Gula'ala, there are a lot of disputes over land and sea boundaries. Therefore, the parents must name their children according to the traditional family tree pattern. This practice is also true for other Melanesian societies.

In the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea, people are named after very prominent leaders of the clan, or even land, to show their role in the society. The name *Katumapula Guyau* denotes that the person would be the next kin by right to be the clan's leader.⁴⁰ . . . This personal identity, for Melanesians, not only binds the living with the living, it also binds the living with the living-dead. It is this ongoing identity that allows Melanesians to relate to their ancestors, through such concepts as history, time, and space.⁴¹

If indigenous names connect to our cultural heritage, how can we use this form to communicate the gospel in the church today?

We need to carefully consider this important question, if the church is intending to adopt the use of meaningful names today. Some indigenous names simplify the gospel message to the level of the receptors, and convey spiritual truths.⁴² It reminds the Gula'ala community about the One who delivered them from physical and spiritual plight. We also learn that biblical names do communicate spiritual messages.⁴³ It speaks about the character of the person.⁴⁴ It gives new insights to the church to reflect upon God's salvation for them. It assures the people, because God is near to them. Thus, the concept of using indigenous names works to enhance the people's relationship with God. Therefore, indigenous names, with biblical

⁴⁰ Ledimo Edoni, informant of Trobriand culture (student of CLTC, PNG, 2000).

⁴¹ Joshua Daimoi, "Hebrews course notes", Banz PNG: CLTC, 2000, p. 47.

⁴² The Gula'ala name *Aofia* means a "saviour" to the salt-water people, and the Kwara'ae people, of Malaita.

⁴³ The biblical name "Peter" means "rock", a prophecy about Simon Peter's faith and ministry (Matt 16:17-19).

⁴⁴ 1 Sam 25:25, Ruth 1ff, Acts 11:26.

meanings, need not necessarily be replaced by biblical equivalence, unless a person chooses to, because of the evil connotations of his/her indigenous name. This is one of the meaningful forms God used to communicate the gospel to the whole world, and to every culture (Is 7:14).⁴⁵

1.7 Blowing Conch Shells, Hitting Wooden Gongs, and Beating Paddles

These three objects were used in Gula'ala culture for community gathering. Although they were used on different occasions, they all have a connection. They all help to signal to the society to do the right things, at the right time, and move to the right place, at the right time.

Firstly, the blowing of the conch shell calls for a fishing trip. Whenever the saltwater people hear the sound, they pick up their fishing gear, and move toward the person, who sent the message. To the islander, fishing together is necessary, and helpful, because it benefits everyone in the community, including the fatherless, and the weak ones. So, as they prepare to set off for a fishing trip, it is necessary to give the signal by blowing the conch shell. This is to avoid bad feelings from those left out of a successful catch. The object can also be used in a marriage ceremony. On such an occasion, it echoes a public invitation for the whole community to the marriage celebration.

Secondly, the hitting of wooden gongs is another cultural instrument to call the community together for special meetings. The people communicate the message by the different rhythm of beating of the wooden gong. We use it to communicate a message about someone who has died, or dancing ceremonies for welcoming visitors. Sometimes, the hitting of the gong, or the sounding of a conch shell, warns of an approaching danger.

Thirdly, the beating of paddle against the canoe conveys a message about the result of a turtle-fishing trip. When the people hear the sound, they gather together to welcome the fishermen. It is a time of great celebration

⁴⁵ "Immanuel" means "God is with us", and refers to Jesus as the Saviour of the world (Matt 1:23).

for the whole community. For the people of Gula'ala, these objects were very useful, because they played a role in communication.

In today's context, they can be useful to give a signal to the people for different church activities. They could work in parallel to the trumpets and horns, which were used by the Hebrew community in the Old Testament.⁴⁶ The priests were appointed to sound the trumpet in worship.⁴⁷ We see that the sender of the message has to be a reliable leader in the community, because the purpose of the forms is to benefit the whole community. Therefore, if we narrow our discussion to the church, the pastors or elders in the indigenous church of Gula'ala are in the better position to use the objects, especially to blow the conch shell, or to beat the wooden split gong, for Christian meetings.

It is good for all the churches in Gula'ala to use them, because we know that not all the people in the church have the money to own a wristwatch, or the ability to read the time. Since the instruments have a part to play in the church, it is better for the church to use them, along with the instruments of today's technology. The two are necessary to give a signal for the illiterate and the semi-illiterate people to come together, and help them to arrange their programmes in such a way as to suit everybody. If we firmly believe that the Christian gospel is for everybody, and is beneficial for everybody, then it is very important to give a signal to remind the people to come and feed from the word of God in the church.

Category 2: Visual Forms

The traditional communication network does not only channel information, through audible forms, but works effectively through visual forms. "This means that the message has been passed, encoded and decoded, putting the message into a form that the respondent can understand."⁴⁸ The signs that we use will depend on the person with whom we are communicating. Thus, the encoding process, and the decoding, must be compatible, that is, they must be able to agree with each other. If they don't, then a wrong message is conveyed, and it causes misunderstanding between the sender and the

⁴⁶ Judg 3:27; Num 10:2; Neh 4:18-20; 2 Sam 15:10; 1 Chron 15:28.

⁴⁷ 1 Chron 16:6; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:35, 41.

receptor. These are some of the meaningful visual forms in the Gula'ala context: fire, small sticks, and decoration. These forms pass on the message to the receptor, by action or sign, rather than spoken words.

2.1 Fire

Fire shows the way, by giving direction to lost fisherman in stormy weather. It is a sign used to call people for help with transportation. It conveys a message to the neighbouring village along the main coastline about a dead person in the community. It is also a sign of a terrible crisis in the community. In regard to the different messages, the saltwater people have marked out certain areas on the island for such occasions. We are still using this visual form of communication today.

Therefore, as we consider the use of fire, we see it has contributed to the art of communication. As well as being used for things, such as, cooking our food, providing light and warmth, and for preserving food by smoking it, fire is also used for reviving a drowned person, one who has suffocated by submersion in water.

There are certain elements of truth in this visual form, which we can use in our preaching and teaching of God's word in the church. Fire has been used in various ways in the Bible, and communicates different messages to the receptors.

We can see that the theophanies of God were sometimes accompanied by fire (Ezek 3:2; 13:21-22; 19:18; Deut 4:11). We see that the image of fire is used to symbolise God's glory (Ezek 1:14), God's protective presence for His servant (2 Kgs 6:17), God's holiness (Deut 4:24), God's cleansing for His servant (Is 6:7), and God's wrath against sin (Is 66:15-16). It is also used for the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11, Acts 2:3), and, in other contexts, the form is used as a literary symbol of sin (Is 9:18), lust (Hos 7:6), and affliction (Ps 46:12).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ David J. Hesselgrave., *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communications*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 31.

⁴⁹ I. H. Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1997, p. 368.

In such cases, it is very important to present balanced teaching of the gospel message. We need to explain how the form symbolises God's attributes, and also how it relates to God's judgment. The Bible teaches us that God loves us, and by His grace He offers us His great salvation.⁵⁰ Those who believe in Him have experienced the blessing of God. He will show His glory to them, and lead them. His presence will be with them forever.⁵¹ But God is against sin, He will turn His face against those who ignore this great salvation. He is preparing a judgment of fire for the evildoers that will never be quenched.⁵² In this context, we are communicating the full gospel to the whole person, and the person needs to make his own decision. We can use this form as an object lesson. It will draw the Gula'ala people to learn more about the message of God's salvation, and help them to be mindful of their relationship with God. The visual form provides a deep theological insight for the preaching and teaching of God's word.

2.2 *Small Sticks*

This method of communication is commonly used for travelling on bush tracks. Whenever the people of Gula'ala want to follow a bush path on the mainland, the leader needs to put small sticks at crossroads. In this way, they are passing on a message to the next group. The small sticks give this message, "Don't follow this path." Sometimes, they put small sticks along the right path. So, it is very important for the leader to explain the code of communication for the team members, as they prepare to go on the mission.

This form is used in the Melanesian region, but it may communicate different messages. "In Vanuatu, if a relative is approaching another, and throws a small stick in front of him, this action communicates sad news, especially the death of a family member."⁵³ In the Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea, the form is used for traditional bride price, as described in this case.

Case three: Kevin Hovey was a missionary, who worked among the Sepik people of Papua New Guinea. One day, the

⁵⁰ John 3:16.

⁵¹ Matt 28:19-20.

⁵² Matt 9:48, 25:41; Jude 7; Rev 20:14.

⁵³ Roy Yosef, informant of Vanuatu culture (student of CLTC, PNG, 2000).

people invited his family to a traditional bride price ceremony. As they were observing the ceremony, his wife saw a bundle of small sticks, and how the people used them to share the price according to the tribe's genealogy. She was impressed about the cultural form, and suggested that they should use the concept with biblical teaching about the genealogy of Christ from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Thus, the theory of the sticks that talk was born. As they used this method of communication, they found that the older people understood the message, so the fame of the ministry spread far and wide in the Sepik province.⁵⁴

One can see how important it is for the church to use this form. For the Gula'ala people, the message of this is to give guidance, or direction, for the people. It can be contextualised to speak about the authority of the word of God, because it gives guidance for them to "Do" certain things, and also a direct "Don't", to stop us from going along that path, or doing that thing. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will help us to discern these things, and to be mindful in our walk with God.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the people used small sticks to make the symbol of the cross. It is meaningful, because the cross reminds the people of Gula'ala about God's salvation for the whole of humanity. It portrays the believer's identity, status, and faith in Christ.⁵⁶ In reality, the symbol of the cross communicates a powerful gospel message for the whole world, about God's love, redemption, reconciliation, peace, and triumph.

The spiritual and physical realms have acknowledged that the cross is the foundation of Christianity, the emblem, which speaks of God's grace, and is the starting point for the Christian walk. Therefore, it is appropriate for the churches in Gula'ala to put the symbol of the cross on the front of, or inside, the church building. It is a public testimony of their identity, status, and faith in Christ, and what He has done for them.

⁵⁴ Hovey, *Before All Else Fails*, p. 156.

⁵⁵ John 16:12-15; Rom 6:11-14.

⁵⁶ Gal 6:14.

2.3 Decoration

As far as the Gula'ala tradition is concerned, there are certain occasions, where people dress up to communicate a message. In a wedding ceremony, the bride will be decorated with the traditional shell money (*tafuliae*). In time of death and bereavement of a loving husband, the widow will dress poorly for 100 days as a sign of mourning (*to'oboni*). For dancing, they will put on traditional costumes, to celebrate the annual festival (*maoma*). This form is practised in the Melanesian world. I have seen this in Papua New Guinea, and I am convinced that it is a cultural heritage in Melanesia.

Though the younger generation tends towards the Western fashion of decoration, they are meaningless in the Melanesian context, because they are not our cultural decoration. I am aware of the trend of civilisation that has affected the culture. However, the way people dress speaks of their identity, and is part of the whole concept of communication. Therefore, we should encourage the people of God to dress modestly,⁵⁷ to please God, and not to offend their neighbours. Let us be mindful and considerate to others.⁵⁸ It is better to understand that God's standard for decorating His church is an inside-out activity. It consists of the spiritual qualities of life.⁵⁹

These visual forms help us to learn that the art of communicating the gospel is an effective educational activity. They create a point of reference for the indigenous church of Gula'ala, to help them understand the gospel message, and to gain theological insight.

3. God and the Cultural Forms

In this section, we will discuss the relationship between Christ and culture. If Christianity has any influence at all, it should touch culture every time it speaks. It is important, then, to have a biblical view of Christ, and also of culture. We have to understand that every culture has elements of divine order, and satanic rebellion. Each has the potential for revealing God's truth, and for concealing, or destroying, it. This issue has created a dilemma that has caused a lot of confusion for the church in Gula'ala.

⁵⁷ 1 Tim 2:9.

⁵⁸ 1 Cor 8:12; Eph 5:15.

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 3:3-4.

Thus, some of the prominent church leaders have raised similar questions as the famous anthropologists,

Is God negative toward human culture? Is He positive? Is He neutral? Does He have a single sacred cultural ideal in mind, such as Hebrew culture? Is He grieved, because we have departed so far from this ideal? Is He in the process of leading the church to produce an ideal Christian culture, or doesn't He care?⁶⁰

If we, the church, affirm to use the cultural forms as the milieu for preaching and teaching of God's word, these questions need to be answered. The church of God will then be balanced in its teaching concerning God's relation with mankind, and God's relationship with creation. People will grow in their understanding of the core purpose for using cultural forms, when to use them, and to whom they belong.

To answer, the controversial issue, H. R. Niebuhr has categorised five views of the relationship between Christ and culture, taken by various theologians.

1. Christ against culture – i.e., Christ is the sole authority; the claims of culture are to be rejected.
2. The Christ of culture – i.e., the Christian system is not different from culture in kind, but only in quality, the best culture should be selected to conform to Christ.
3. Christ above culture – i.e., the reception of grace perfects, and completes, culture, though there is not a smooth curve, or continuous line, between them.
4. Christ and culture in paradox – i.e., both are authorities to be obeyed, and the believer, therefore, lives with two tensions.
5. Christ and transformer of culture – i.e., culture reflects the fallen state of man, in Christ, man is redeemed, and culture can

⁶⁰ Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: a Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 103.

be renewed, so as to glorify God, and promote His purpose.⁶¹ In addition, C. H. Kraft has described the “relationship between God and culture that sees God as above culture, but as using culture as the vehicle for interaction with human beings.”⁶²

These categories are not a rigid area of belief, but are representative of thoughts that have been suggested. Thus, from a biblical point of view there are certain values in one, four, five, and maybe three.⁶³ In the context of this proposal, the author is convinced of the validity of the fifth point for three reasons.

Firstly, we cannot put God and culture in one category, to be treated as equal. God is infinite, and culture is finite. God is holy, and culture has been tainted with sin. If we put them together, it leads to the same disastrous end, in which the church-produced culture tends to be absolutes, while the infinite is reduced to mere finiteness, and the true dynamic of the Christian faith is lost.⁶⁴

The Bible teaches that God communicates to people through Jesus, who portrays His attributes.⁶⁵ The Holy Spirit indwells the hearts of all believers,⁶⁶ and the holy scriptures reveal God’s revelation to us.⁶⁷ We learn that God is sovereign over culture, yet He chooses a simple way to communicate His message. He chooses the cultural milieu, in which humans are immersed, as the arena of His interaction with people.⁶⁸ We cannot put God down to the Gula’ala culture. He knows the right way to reach the heart of the people. The account of the incarnation of Jesus Christ has provided a biblical reference to this argument.⁶⁹ God sent His Son, to

⁶¹ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*, pp. 79-81.

⁶² Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 113.

⁶³ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*, p. 81.

⁶⁴ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69.

⁶⁶ Eph 2:7.

⁶⁷ Hebrews 1:1-4.

⁶⁸ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 114.

⁶⁹ John 1:1-5; 1 John 1:1-5.

immerse into the Hebrew culture, to reach the people with the gospel message.

Secondly, we must know that God is the originator of culture. In Gen 1:31, we read that, after having created the world and mankind, God pronounced that everything was very good. This was the summary of God's relationship to mankind and the environment. He gave mankind a cultural mandate of control over the environment. However, God did not remove Himself from the scene. He continues to have fellowship with His creation, and provide for them. God is sovereign over the whole of creation. But this relationship was interrupted by the fall of man.⁷⁰ Satan took advantage of the situation to manipulate mankind. This caused people to abuse the form of communication, for his purpose, and not for giving glory to God, the Creator. Yet, the story does not end with the fall of man. It continues to show us the grace of God, because God desires to communicate with His people. The fall did not change God's passion for mankind. He demonstrated His love for the whole world by sending Jesus, to come into the world to redeem mankind from the power of Satan.⁷¹ The blood of Christ cleanses our hearts, and by His power, transforms our minds, so that we can use this form of communication for the honour of God.

The church in Gula'ala needs to understand that sin is conceived within the hearts of people, and not in the form of communication. "Culture is not sin, nor, of itself, either an enemy or a friend to God or human. It is, rather, something that is there to be used by personal beings, such as humans, God, and Satan."⁷²

The problem lies in the people's doubt of God, and the people's creation of other images and systems to replace God. Acts 17:16-34 shows us searching for God, like the Gula'ala people during the pre-Christian era. Now, the light of God's word has come, and shows us that we must give our allegiance to the Creator. Kevin Hovey says, "Christianity is comprised of primary allegiance not cultural forms."⁷³ He does not disqualify the

⁷⁰ Gen 3:14-19.

⁷¹ Rom 2:23, 24; 5:8; Eph 2:8.

^{xx}⁷² Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 111.

⁷³ Hovey, *Before All Else Fails*, p. 79.

value of using cultural forms, but he wants to emphasise the point that it is important to whom we give our allegiance, as we use the forms. Therefore, we need to be clear-minded, and use the forms for the glory of God.

Thirdly, we know that God is superior, but He is working through culture. The concept of “through culture” is not an event of life, but a process that involves the transformational work of Christ, because we are living in a changing world. “The transforming work of the gospel must begin with its active challenge to the existing cultural system or worldview, which is carried by each individual.”⁷⁴ It is a fact that we should grab hold of it, because it prepares us to communicate the gospel message to others cross-culturally. If we, ourselves, do not experience the transforming power of God in our lives and culture, then we cannot easily preach about this concept to others.

Jonathan Edwards, with his sensitive and profound view of creation, sin, and justification, with his understanding of the way of conversion, and his millennial hopes, became, in America, the founder of a movement of thoughts about Christ, as the regenerator of man in his culture.⁷⁵

I believe this is theologically correct, because Christian conversion is an inward revival within man’s heart. The result of what is happening inside will be reflected outside, through his attitude towards God, his neighbours, and his culture. He is no longer the same person.⁷⁶ He has a new worldview, and the knowledge to take possession of the cultural forms for communication and make them new. Thus, we should know that conversion must also result in new attitudes and relationships, and lead to a responsible involvement in our church, our culture, and our world.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ S. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1995, p. 208.

⁷⁵ David Hoekema, and Bobby Fong, *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 5.

⁷⁶ 2 Cor 5:17.

⁷⁷ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, *The Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee, 1978, p. 22.

God is able to redeem humankind and his culture. He is able to renew a person's mind (Rom 1:1, 2) so that he/she can use meaningful cultural forms for communicating the gospel. Although this is true, the early expatriate missionaries, who worked among my people presented the gospel with their Western culture, because Christianity and civilisation came together. They forbade my people from using traditional instruments. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, He revived the church in 1986, and gave our indigenous leaders a new understanding of our cultural heritage. Through new insights, the musical instruments were reclaimed, and used to accompany Christian worship to the Supreme Creator (Ps 150:1-6).

4. Recommendation and Conclusion

So far, we have learned about the significance of meaningful cultural forms, and their relevance for Christian ministries in the church. As J. H. Bavinck states,

Christ must take possession of heathen forms of life and make them new: Christ takes the life of the people in His hands, He renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated, He fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning, and gives each practice a new meaning, and gives it new direction.⁷⁸

Therefore, I want to make the following recommendations to the South Sea Evangelical church:

1. We are responsible for the work of communicating the gospel in the cultural frame of reference, because God has set an example for us to follow. "For when God speaks He chooses to employ the cultural and linguistic frame of reference, in which those, to whom He speaks, are immersed."⁷⁹ The Bible tells us that God communicated to the patriarchs (Gen 3:9; 4:9; 6:13; 12:1-12; Ex 3:1-4; Num 13:1-4), to the prophets (1 Sam 3:1-21; Jer 1:1-9; Is 6:1-9; Ezek 2:1-10), to the kings (1 Kgs 3:5; 2 Kgs 20:1-11), to the apostles (Acts 1:7-8), and to

⁷⁸ David J. Hesselgrave, *Counselling Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Theory & Practice for Christians*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1978, p. 229.

⁷⁹ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p.171.

individuals, whom he called to serve Him (1 Sam 3:1-21; Acts 9:1-6). These are but only examples for us to see that God is a God of communication.

Therefore, the church must take up the ministry of preaching and teaching God's word to all men in every culture (Matt 28:19-20), either at home, within its culture, or further away, in another culture. We are Christ's ambassadors for our generation today (2 Cor 5:20,21).

2. We should imitate the life examples of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our model for the ministry of communicating the gospel meaningfully, in the cultural frame of the people. "His teaching was conducted entirely within the philosophical, cultural, and sound orbit of the recipients."⁸⁰

These principles will guide us to communicate effectively, as we learn from our Master. Jesus used parables to explain deep spiritual truths, and uphold the norms of their society. He reached out to meet people's felt need, and identified with His recipients.

3. If the South Seas Evangelical church firmly claims to be an indigenous church, meaningful cultural forms must be part of the church's worship and ministry. Klem comments:

In a predominantly oral society, the church ought to minister and teach, primarily through indigenous oral media. . . . If a denomination, which has a predominantly-oral society, depends primarily upon written material for most of its Bible study and teaching, then, at the heart of its ministry, such a denomination is not indigenous.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Herbert Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1982, p. 86.

⁸¹ Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture*, p. 180.

An indigenous church is precisely one in which all its practices take place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and fulfil the meaning of that society, and not any outside group.⁸²

We should encourage the church to use the forms. If we ignore them, then the claim of indigenisation is invalid.

How can we implement indigenisation more effectively? We should introduce the concept to the leaders of the church in a better way. It should be included in a seminar for leaders. I believe, if the leaders understand the message, and the different hypothesis about Christ and culture, then they will help us to transplant the idea into the church.

In addition, the subject should be taught in the Bible schools. In this way, we are educating the new generation to learn about their cultural heritage. I believe they will discover more insights about this broad subject. We should encourage the ministering of God's word in the mother language of the people, and by using meaningful cultural forms to suit the level of the indigenous people. Harry Box comments, "In order for the gospel message to be relevant to the churches in Melanesia:

1. The message must meet the receptor's felt needs.
2. The message must provide a sensible explanation in terms of the receptor's worldview.
3. The message must communicate clearly, in terms of the receptor's linguistic context.
4. The message must be compatible with traditional values and beliefs.
5. The message must be able to handle all the conflicts between Christian faith and the receptor's worldview.
6. The message demonstrates a relative advantage.

⁸² Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 2nd edn, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1992, p. 152.

7. The message can be validated, in terms of the receptor's culture.
8. The message must be presented through a medium relevant to the receptor.
9. The message must be presented by a communicator, who is respected and accepted by the receptor."⁸³

To conclude, I want to make it clear that the proposal is workable, only if the indigenous church would put these meaningful forms of communication into Christian ministry, because they are the indigenous media for reaching the illiterate and the semi-literate people in the church. While we are facing the trends of Western civilisation, the church needs to reconsider its role of communicating the gospel meaningfully. The Bible does not disqualify the concept of using the forms. It is very important that we use meaningful communication to help our people understand and grasp the gospel message. The Lausanne Covenant says:

The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures, according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. We wish to endorse this, and to emphasise that, even in this present age of relativity, moral absolutes remain. Indeed, churches, which study the scriptures, should not find it difficult to discern what belongs to the first, or direct encounter, category. Scriptural principles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will also guide them regarding the category of indirect encounter. An additional test proposed is to ask whether a practice enhances or diminishes human life. . . . It is essential, therefore, that all churches contextualise the gospel, in order to share the gospel effectively in their own culture.⁸⁴

⁸³ Harry Box, *Central Issues in Communicating the Gospel in Melanesia with Special Focus on Papua New Guinea*, Ann Arbor MI: University Microfilm International, 1982, pp. 109-128.

⁸⁴ Committee for World Evangelisation, *Willowbank Report*, pp. 32-33.

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DEVELOPING LOCAL THEOLOGY

Russell Thorp

Russell Thorp is Dean of Studies, and a Lecturer, at the Christian Leaders' Training College in the area of Bible, Ethics, and Christian Education. He holds a Bachelor of Ministry degree from the Bible College of New Zealand. He hails from New Zealand, but has spent many years in Papua New Guinea.

Introduction

One of the interesting things one encounters as one teaches theology or biblical studies is that much of the prepared material is fully accepted and needed, but there are still many questions that are asked, and need to be answered. Answering these questions is not only a challenge for the teacher, but it is a great challenge for the church, in its particular contexts.

The Apostle Paul's teaching and preaching reflects the universal message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but it also reflects an emphasis on addressing local issues and problems (Acts 17:16-33; Col 2:6-12).¹ Paul is keen that those he taught and encouraged received the whole counsel or will of God (Acts 20:27).² In Acts 17, we note that Paul addresses the people from within their way of looking at the world (17:22-23), and he even uses their own poets to make a biblical point (17:28-29). Paul, and the other biblical writers, knew that the people they wrote to saw life and faith issues through cultural eyes. The gospel message didn't change, but the emphasis on how it was communicated, and applied, and finally expressed by the local church, does show that Paul and other writers took the background, and people's way of looking, seriously.

Theology is the study of God, and His relationship to people and the world. The only authoritative source for constructing theology is the Bible. However, the way theologians think has a very real impact on the construction and content of theology. It is they, who observe what topics the

¹ There are many texts that could be cited.

² Greek βουλήν (*boulēn*), "volition, counsel, advice, purpose".

Bible deals with, or what topics to be included, and the right way to organise them. Topics that seem of little interest or importance are given little attention, or might be left out all together.

If a group of people were given a box of nuts and bolts of varying shapes and sizes and asked to sort it out we would get a variety of ways of sorting. The classification of the nuts and bolts would probably reflect the background and experience of the sorter. A recycler would arrange them by material, an artist by colour, a builder by type, and so on. Some of the nuts and bolts may even be discarded by some, because, in their classification system, they seem out of place. Each way of sorting the nuts and bolts is intelligent and useful, but we don't all see it that way. No one way of sorting gives us the whole story about those nuts and bolts.

In the same way, the theology, with which we have grown up, has been put together in response to our questions, and our way of processing them. But, when we want to disciple, and help others grow in their faith, here in Melanesia, some of the theology we bring with us doesn't seem relevant, and leaves many questions unanswered. This can make Christianity look as if it doesn't have something to say, in many situations.

We can thank God for missionaries, who are perceptive enough to teach the scriptures in a way people can understand, while, at the same time, addressing the deep issues that lie beneath the surface of the culture of those being reached. One of our goals should be to act as instruments, in raising up men and women, who can go to the scriptures with their own questions, categories, and spiritual insights, arising out of their local culture, and way of looking at the world. New understandings and deductions can be built, based on biblical truth that they and their people can grasp and live out. Much of this theology will be the same as that of Christians elsewhere, but some understandings will be new, because these people have asked different questions. This is indigenous, or local, Christian theology, theological reflection organised in local categories, and addressing local questions.

Why are Local Theological Understandings Important?

1. Biblical Answers to Local Questions Will Strengthen Discipleship

A healthy faith will grow in a climate where people's deep questions are being answered. A student reflected that when his brother lay dying in hospital, his father (who was an elder in the church), having explored all avenues of hospital help and prayer, paid for a spirit doctor to try his spells. This student and his father needed a theology of suffering and death. Failure to deal biblically with such issues hinders discipleship.

2. Biblical Answers to Local Questions Will Help Communities be Transformed

This transformation may be expressed in different ways, depending on the needs that each culture exhibits. How will a biblical view of possessions, or land, or leadership and responsibility, impact on the problems of corruption and irresponsibility, as it interacts, at a deep level, with the issues? How will these Christian understandings affect the way things are done now, and transform society?

3. Biblical Answers Discovered by Locals Will Bring Maturity to the Church

In order for each local church to grow to maturity, and function in an autonomous way, it needs to be able to find the answers to local questions and issues. This means that the role of a missionary or graduate will be one of facilitating the process, rather than always being the source of "truth", in regard to the questions, otherwise the theology and the church will fall into paternalism. A mature church will also seek to take into account the insights of others in the Body of Christ from other times and places, otherwise the theology and the church will fall into syncretism.

4. Biblical Answers Discovered by Locals Will Enrich the Understanding of Others in the Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is enriched when the exploration of biblical answers to cultural issues results in new understandings, and ways of looking and acting. Any missionary, graduate, or lay person, involved in facilitating such a process will not be unchanged. The Body of Christ, as a whole, benefits from the insights of Christians from other backgrounds.

What can be Done to Encourage Local Theology to Develop?

We can acknowledge that this process has been started. While we may not see the need for this encouragement, the fact remains that local theologies will develop regardless of facilitation. The question is what sort of theology is developing, and how biblical is it? Those who have the ability to partner local believers ought to encourage them to understand and apply scripture to their own cultural issues and society.

Where can we start? Here are some ideas to help us begin the process. Feel free to think of others.

1. Encourage Christians to Tell the Story of What the Gospel Means to Them

In encouraging people to talk about, and defend, what they believe, they begin to understand their own assumptions about faith and salvation. The gospel story of the Bible shapes those who interact with it, as it opens up a vast new way of looking at life. This can help people to “see” who they are in Christ, and renew a vision of the hope found in Christ. A deep understanding of the gospel provides:

A New Sense of Historical Perspective

Most of the people we work with have a historical perspective that consists of tribal memory and community stories. What the gospel does, in this situation, is to transfer a temporal focus, which, in Papua New Guinea, is the ancestors (the past) to the future. Rather than seeing the key to understanding (and affecting) the present, by the way of the past, through ancestor worship, they begin to look ahead to the return of Christ, and life in heaven with God (and their relatives), as the key to a good life.

Critical thought in Papua New Guinea has emphasised critique of others outside the group, while playing down that critique within accepted group relationships. In the Bible, however, voices rose, speaking out against the excesses and dangers of the times, voices God used. Much of our tradition of critical thought within Christianity comes from this tradition of prophecy.

Christ's call on our lives, who people are in Christ, and who Christ is, will become decisive for the thinking of all Christians, but they will have their own special impact on the various cultures they come across.

A Basis to Evaluate and Weigh Ideas and Ways of Looking at Life

The gospel counters the tendency to view Christian truth pragmatically – as truth to serve our own ends and us. In traditional religions, rituals and rites revolve around the temporal and spatial structures of life, so that things continue to go well (good gardens, good relationships, etc.). Religion is practised, to bring about the end-desire of the worshipper. When presented, understood, and incarnated, the gospel brings about a new way of looking at and seeing the glory and honour of God, as He begins to displace all other considerations. Worship patterns would change from a focus on manipulation and control to one of intercession, and, finally, praise.

2. Look and Listen to the Local Context

This means adjusting our ears and eyes to the local context. It means living in the context in which one is theologising. It means being part of a group, asking questions, observing. This is not so much a technique, or a step, for that matter; it is a way of life. It is what Christ modelled for us, an incarnational lifestyle. Jesus' example in Phil 2:5-11 informs us of the need to leave our own comforts, and willingly enter the world of those with whom we are in partnership. In a setting, where one is involved in everyday life with people in the local context, a discovery of the real issues and questions is likely to arise. Paul's example to the Thessalonians informs us of the need to share our lives: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thess 2:8). This incarnational lifestyle helps us with our third point.

3. Identify and Understand Discipleship Problems That Arise From the Local Way of Seeing

This is a discovery of some of the deep, underlying themes of the culture, in which people live and express themselves. These problems and themes direct us to where theological work needs to be done. Why is it that many in leadership bow to the pressure of relatives and friends to put their hands into church or government funds? What sort of relationship with the church

should a man, who has more than one wife, have? What does the Bible say about land issues, or the spirits of departed loved ones? What does the Bible teach that addresses the deep, underlying way of looking at these issues?

4. Biblically Reflect on Steps Two and Three: a “Double Listening”

John Stott talks of the need for “double listening”, tuning in, both to the voice of God, as he speaks His ancient Word, and to the various voices of today’s world, in order to relate one to the other.

In my ethics classes, we seek to understand the basis of authority in decision-making in the local culture by listening to student’s stories, then we look at what the Bible has to say, and relate it to what we have understood about the local culture. The result is an addressing of the problems related to authority in decision-making, from a biblical point of view. As we proceed, we are building a theology of the authority of scripture, and the role of the Holy Spirit, and the community of faith in decision-making.

The local culture needs to be listened to, and understood, even by those from within it, in order for people to discover their existing framework, or ways of looking. The reading of scripture should then be facilitated, allowing the participants to “listen” and “see” how the biblical story impacts their way of seeing and doing. A discovery of biblical principles will occur, which can then be applied to the local context by the people themselves. The opportunity for a real change at a deeper level has been put into place, because the very framework, or way of looking, that a local culture imbibes, has been biblically challenged and informed. This may result in the confirmation of some practices, other practices will be transformed, in a meaningful way, or replaced by theologically-informed people from the local context.

It is important that people are allowed to think. It is so easy for the trained graduate or missionary to tell people what to think. In this case people’s faith may be reduced to a list of “dos” and “don’ts”. Jesus’ way of teaching provides us an example of balance. On the one hand, He said, “If you love Me, you will do whatever I command” (John 14:5). But, as He sought to help followers and onlookers to think straight, and live right, He used, as His

teaching tool, the unexplained parable, which left the hearer with the task of working out what Jesus was really saying.

5. Read (or Listen to) What Other Christians are Saying Locally and in the “Household of Faith”

Expose those in the local context to what others are saying. This can inform and critique the theology in a local context. Read what others write, and try to understand it, even if you don't fully agree with it. In Melanesia, the Melanesian Institute has a lot of material that seeks to address local issues from a Christian point of view. Journals, such as the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* provide a forum for discussion on theological issues relating to Melanesia. Writers from similar contexts, such as Africa, are also informative.

6. Encourage the Writing of Local Theology, and Provide Opportunity for Other Expressions of it Through Songs, Music, Dance, and Artistic Work

Writers can be helped with funding for research and publishing. Local churches can be encouraged to include locally-written songs, music, dance, and artistic work in their programmes.

7. Teach and Model the Formation of Local Christian Theology

As people grapple with local issues, encourage them to formulate their questions, and then look for biblical principles themselves from the Bible. Try not to look for answers from outside biblical “experts” or books. Be brave enough to attempt to formulate local theology, in response to the issues being raised. Make sure that these responses are based on biblical principles that have been carefully worked through. Once this is done, local theology can then be clarified with what others may have formulated from outside the local area. We must not be frightened of clarifying our local theology with what the rest of the body of Christ has formulated in the past. This process can be carried out in the classroom, church building, or wherever people gather to talk through issues.

8. Make Available the Work of Local Theologians

Simplify the English, and paraphrase the material for the people. Relevant local theological issues can be explored by encouraging students to write

papers, or do projects (possibly follow some of the steps included in this paper), on these issues. Seek to include insights from local Christian theology in biblical teaching. See what can be incorporated into Christian education, counselling, preaching, and other subject areas. One student wrote a thesis on the problem of compensation, with the goal of trying to address this issue biblically, when he returned to his home area.

Conclusion

Many local believers have not consciously tried to formulate theology that responds to local issues, however, they will have a theology of some sort. The important thing is that they are able to understand the gospel, and their own way of looking, in such a way that, when given the tools, they are able to reflect biblically on their own issues, and respond, using biblical principles. Partnership is required in this task, whether that person may be a theological graduate, or a missionary, however, the goal is for the local church to discover, and own, these discoveries for themselves. The hope is that this will stimulate local believers to respond biblically to the deep issues they face, in order to encourage genuine discipleship that brings glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What other steps could be involved?
2. What place could “experience” and “power” have in the forming of local theology?
3. Where do we, as a group, go from here?