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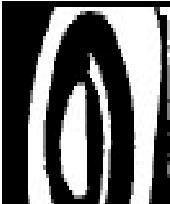
MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

**Syncretism in the Milne Bay Province
of Papua New Guinea**
Ledimo Edonie

**An Evaluation of the Evangelical Christian Fellowship
Church and Proposal for Its Future Development**
Philip Bungo

Biblical Justice and Mission Theology
David Hodgens

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology by Melanesians for Melanesians. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at 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.

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EDITORIAL

All pieces of writing have been provided by the Christian Leaders' Training College. The first two articles are by Melanesian graduates of the College. An Australian faculty member wrote the third. All articles deal directly, or indirectly, with the churches of Papua New Guinea.

Ledimo Edonie looks at the adaptation of Christianity to the culture of Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. For instance, many professing Christians still employ magic in their daily work: gardening, hunting, and fishing. Ledimo concludes that only after serious Bible study and discussion should the Milne Bay people decide which customs to accept and modify, or reject and replace.

Philip Bungo writes on the establishment and growth of the Evangelical Christian Fellowship church (ECFC). He begins with a riveting personal testimony of how he became a Christian while in jail. After his release, he began a home Bible study. This eventually led to the creation of the ECFC denomination. He then discusses the reasons for the growth of ECFC, and some challenges for the future.

Based on criticism that the evangelical church worldwide has largely ignored issues of justice, as they relate to the mission of the church, David Hodgins explores what justice means, particularly in its application to mission theology. He demonstrates that an application of the biblical context of justice into our ministry context is an essential element of any ministry.

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.

SYNCRETISM IN THE MILNE BAY PROVINCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Ledimo Edonie

Ledimo Edonie graduated with a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Christian Leaders' Training College. Ledimo is pastoring in a United church on Woodlark Island, in Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea.

Introduction

The gospel has been around Milne Bay Province in Papua New Guinea for nearly 110 years. Many people profess to be Christians, and are members of a church. They are expected to attend Sunday services, to listen to the sermons, work for the church, and to have their names registered in their church common roll.

However, the reality is many of these people still employ magic in their daily work: gardening, hunting, and fishing. They acknowledge the use of magic as authentic. They blend elements from traditional religion with Christianity in their everyday endeavours. These people think it is all right to pray to God, the source of power, before employing their magic.

What has the church to offer? How can the clergy involved accept this practice without it seriously colliding with God's righteous will? Can God work in agreement with what He has resolved to destroy? In other words, how can the church clergy help such people experience true conversion, and be transformers in their culture, without being totally immersed in their society.

Motivation

The above questions are a result of a living reality that the writer has seen and experienced in his own area, the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. He grew up with the belief that God approves magic. He even was a recipient of a magician's healing charms. After his conversion experience, he saw God's power repel the powers of the

traditional practices – in other people’s lives, and his own life. This call is for the church to scrutinise its own faith and practice among its followers. Nevertheless, the call involves a better understanding of the people’s worldview and culture, before one can successfully reach them with the gospel.

1. The Spiritual Beliefs and Cultural Practices of the Milne Bay People

The evening clouds drifted slowly over the dense forest to hide the retreating sun. It was time for my mother and me to hasten home from the garden. Every time we came across a track that led into the deep woods, she would stop and sprinkle ashes over the track with these words, *Natudee . . . daked kadewene-ee, kum tayum oo*, which literally means, “my child, this is our track, come with me to our home”. She adhered to this ritual, believing that the spirit of my younger sister, still an infant, whom we had left at home, was following us.

Such awareness and interaction with the spirit world was, and is, part of the pre-Christian culture of Milne Bay. It is the result of the people’s perception of the universe. This perception of the universe is what anthropologists call “a worldview”.

Worldview of the Milne Bay People

It is necessary to know people’s worldviews. A worldview carves out appropriate, and meaningful, belief systems, norms, and values that are activated in an acceptable behaviour of a culture.¹ For cultural transformation to take place with minimum negative effects, the missionary must be aware of the influence his culture had upon the gospel, and learn more about the people he wishes to reach, so that he can successfully communicate the gospel.

The Milne Bay people view the universe as a living blend of two worlds, the empirical and the supernatural. The physical world is the world of humans, which includes the environment, geography, plants,

¹ Charles Kraft defines worldview as, “the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/allegiances underlying a people’s perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions”. C. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 52.

waters, land, animals, fish, and man, with his communities and structures. These communities and structures are governed by norms, value systems, and principles, generated from people's perceptions of reality. The functioning of these elements, in an acceptable level of human behaviour in a community, is called culture. All their physical elements, the nature, and the systems that regulate a human community, belong to the empirical world. This world owes its origin to the spirit world. For this reason, "much of their life is spent maintaining and promoting that spiritual order".²

The supernatural world is the world of the spirits. The people believe that these spirits dwell in some physical abode. People promote this view through legends, myths, songs, and dances, and their vivid expressions of pragmatic interaction with the spirits. In this, people find meaning and substance in their cosmos. As Ketobwau wrote, "Nothing happened without the spirits, and nothing was possible without their powers. Their total being and existence depended entirely on the spiritual order that was born in and with them from the very beginning."³ Thus, the world of the people has its meaning and existence from the spirit world. Everything that happens is a result of the spirit world. Moreover, whatever is done in the physical world will affect the spirits. The border between the physical and the supernatural is "blurred",⁴ because the universe is not closed to them.

Beliefs in Spirits and Their Powers

The Milne Bay people believe in three categories of spirits: the pre-existent spirits, the spirits of the dead, and the spirits of the living people. The pre-existent spirits are unborn, metaphysical beings. These spirits are departmentalised, because they are confined, and operate in their own geographical locality. Ketobwau wrote, "traditionally there were many different spirits responsible for different

² Simeon Namunu, "Spirits in Melanesian Tradition and Spirit in Christianity", in *Melanesian Theology Course Notes*, Banz PNG: CLTC, 1999. See also James Knight, ed., *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues, Point* (1977-1&2), p. 110.

³ Ignatius Ketobwau, "Tuma: The Trobriand Heaven", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1997), p. 36.

⁴ David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers*, Eastbourne UK: Monarch Publications, 1992, p. 19.

departments within the spiritual sphere”.⁵ Thus, these spirits exercise their powers within their own locality, when they are called upon, through chants and rituals. They not only exercise their powers in a limited sphere, but they are also confined in their locality⁶. Hence, it is important to know the spirits, and learn how to interact with them. The more informed a person is about the spirits, the better the chances of avoiding disruptions.

The ancestral spirits are spirits of their deceased relatives. These spirits leave at death, to reside in their paradise.⁷ However, the spirits still return to their physical families to help, protect, and bring luck for success. They communicate with them in dreams, visions, and audible voices, when the spirit enters into a relative to reveal a message.⁸ The ancestral spirits are venerated and worshipped by the people of Milne Bay.

Thirdly, there is the spirit of a living person. This spirit, which lives inside a person, is the true essence of life. Without it, the person will cease to exist, and the person will die.⁹ This intrinsic nature of a person is the very core of life and moral judgment. The spirit of a person can leave his body and move. They can move a great distance, and accomplish things, when empowered by supernatural powers. This is

⁵ Ignatius Ketobwau, “The Trobriand Understanding of Gods/Spirits Compared with the Christian Concept of God”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (April 1993), p. 24.

⁶ The spirits are believed to be owners and original occupants of their abode. The term *totowoho*, a reference to these spirits, has its semantic roots from the word *towoho*, which literally means, “the original owners”. The people of Woodlark Island call them *Legw tanuges*. Those people, who own land, in which the spirits live, usually associate and align with them. The people’s magical powers are believed to be from these familiar spirits.

⁷ The Trobriand Islanders call it *Tuma*, and the Misima people call it *Bwebweso*.

⁸ Usually, the person who was possessed by the spirit will fall unconscious, sometimes crying. A diviner would use magic to cause the spirit to speak audibly to the relatives.

⁹ On Woodlark Island, this intrinsic element of a person is called *Mwayon*. This is the very essence of human life. This understanding can be equated with the Hebrew terms *Ruach* (רוח) and *nephesh* (נפש), which can be used interchangeably to mean, “the very element of life in a person” or the “inner man”. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984, pp. 1615 and 1637.

the very element of a person, who is initiated into, and engages in, activities, such as magic, sorcery, and witchcraft.

Apart from these spirits, the people also believe in a supreme being, and many names are attributed to him, which are given to none of the other spirits. He is the creator and sustainer, and is powerful and everlasting. When all spirits fail, people always turn to him as the last resort.¹⁰

The spirit world is the source of life and success in everyday endeavours. If spirits are not venerated, then a taboo is broken. The spirits would bring punishment to the communities. The observance of rites, and the offering of sacrifice, are important to manipulate or appease the spirits, for a good cause. At other times, incantations are used to call for power, or to repel disruptions caused by supernatural forces. In this way, people maintain order, bring wealth, fertility, protection, and production into their society. This pragmatic system of beliefs is very much part of people's lives. They are born in, and will live with it, until death. But that does not mean that people are without a rational outlook, and mastery over their environment, as Malinowski acknowledged about the Trobrianders.

The success in their agriculture depends . . . upon their exclusive knowledge of the classes of soil, of the various cultivated plants, of the mutual adaptation of these two factors, and, last, but not least, upon their knowledge of the importance of accurate and hard work.¹¹

Cultural Practices

Culture is a product of beliefs, thoughts, actions, and will. All these are formulated into an integrated whole. These elements distinguished man, as a cultural being, from animals. Milne Bay people have developed their culture into an acceptable level of behaviour, to

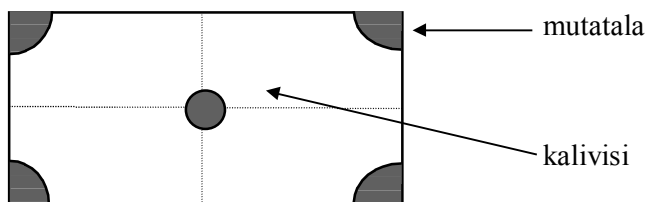
¹⁰ Ronny Tomilesi, CLTC student, May, 2000.

¹¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic Science, and Religion*, New York NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955, p. 27.

maintain order, and promote human dignity through their value systems.¹²

The Trobriand Islanders have complex gardening rituals. They use herbs and incantations to call their ancestor spirits to come and bless their gardens. From the first clearing of the bush, the burning of it, the division of plots, the planting of seeds, and up until the harvest time, all are blessed with rituals, symbols, and chantings. The magic is performed and buried at the *mutatala* (corner) and *kalivisi* (centre) of the garden. The *tolibagu* (owner of the garden) will continue to incite power for fertility, productivity, and protection from curses until the harvest time.¹³

A garden map



The Kula trade expedition involves a lot of time of preparation. The greatest one is canoe preparation. From the cutting down of a tree, to its shaping and finish-off touches, the whole process is vested with incantations for protection from dangers at sea, and witchcraft. At the actual departure, the *toliwaga* (canoe owner) employs more magic for extra measures. Taboos are placed over the canoe for every *usagelu* (passenger) to comply with. The traders would fast, and call upon their ancestors, or other supernatural powers, for successful trade results. The extremist even abstains from sex with his own wives. All these are

¹² “Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of, and for, behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically-derived and selected) ideas, and, especially, their attached values; the culture system may, on one hand, be considered as a product of action, on the other, a conditioning elements of further action.” Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 46.

¹³ M. Kadamwana, Vice-principal of Fatima school, Fatima, PNG, April 2000.

performed to ensure safety, bestow courage, and to provide appeasement, or repel the power of evil forces. Everyone, going on the expedition, one way or another, takes part in communal ritual performances. The magicians always take responsibility in this respect.¹⁴

Their daily and special vocations, even from a simple woman's chores to a complex man's job, are all interwoven with spiritual meanings. Their belief systems are programmatically activated, to acknowledge, venerate, and worship that spiritual reality. In return, these spirits give power, knowledge, wisdom, wealth, healing, and so forth, to the people. When they are angered, they cause social disruptions that can only be repelled through sacrifice. Thus, the peoples' work and relationships are strongly influenced by this cosmology. Their knowledge and technical skills are second only to their understanding and dealings with this myriad of spirits. To promote a relationship with them is to maintain sociality, stability, and morality, at least according to the belief systems within a society. Thus, the people seek to acquire extra powers from magic, sorcery, and witchcraft to obtain that desired end. However, these arts demand a certain degree of influence from, and obedience to, the spirits that one deals with.

Magic

Magic is a universal phenomenon, defined in many ways. We will take it, here, to mean using herbs, symbols, and incantations to acquire supernatural powers to accomplish missions and work. People use these magical elements and chants to call down spirits and ancestors, to bring forth good. Magic is seen as having individual and communal benefits to a society. Hence, it is passed down from generation to generation, through their lineage.¹⁵ The incantations are verbally transmitted, and the herbs and other elements are introduced to the initiate. The spirit associated with a particular rite or spell is introduced to align with the apprentice. The magic, described above, is common in

¹⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the West Pacific*, New York NY: E. P. Dutton, 1961, pp. 334-337.

¹⁵ This is further exemplified in the comparative study between Trobriand magic and the Azande of Africa. E. Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 185.

Milne Bay. Without it, gardening, hunting, and so forth, would never be satisfactory. As Malinowski puts it: “All important economic activities are fringed with magic, especially such as simply-pronounced elements of chance, venture, or danger.”¹⁶ Thus, magic is a matter of blending activities between the two worlds, to bring about results, and avoid disruptions, because any activity from man affects, and ignites, repercussions from the spirit world.

Sorcery

Sorcery is a bad magic. A person uses words and objects, invested with supernatural power, to harm others. A sorcerer’s power depends upon his ability to control the powers, to which he has access. They can transmit evil powers into objects, with incantations and activation. When the victim receives the object, like *buai*, he or she will die after consuming it (in the process of imitating the same action cursed by the sorcerer).¹⁷

Sorcerers can also move, in a metaphysical form, to execute evil, and even visit relatives in distant lands. They possess totemic objects, stones, and hairs of a deceased, to consult spirits, to cause harm and healing.¹⁸

These people live in a strictly-ordered, yet fearful, life. To break a taboo would mean sickness, and even death. Both the human agent and the spirits interact on daily basis, through chants, rites, sacrifice, and fasting. Sometimes the spirits enter into the agent, as the protagonist in evil activities. Their transfer of power to their next of kin is similar to magic, but with strict taboo. Sorcery is used for accumulating wealth, through bribes, and as protection from supernatural powers and enemies.

¹⁶ Malinowski, *Magic Science, and Religion*, p. 190.

¹⁷ M. Kedamwana, April 2000.

¹⁸ Yodyod, a sorcerer from a village next to my village, has a walking stick that he used to consult spirits, to kill, and also to heal. He used his powers to control and move the stick independently, and, with it, he called spirits into his house, and, as Simeon Namunu would say, “he owns the spirits”. Namunu, “Spirits in Melanesian Tradition”, p. 111.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft is notable for its malevolent activities, derived from jealousy, hatred, greed, pride, etc. Witches, who are usually women, use supernatural powers, and evil will, to kill. They move through great distances in their non-corporal bodies, to harm, and even rescue, witch victims.¹⁹ They also meet in coven, to engage in gross immorality, having sex with celestial beings.²⁰

Their powers are transmitted from mothers to daughters during infancy. The *Misima* witches take their infant girls into deep bushes by waterfalls. They throw the girl up and down, and, in the course of that action, powers are spiritually transmitted. When the girl grows up, and gives birth to her first child, then the power would be manifested in her. She can see through her spiritual eyes, and move invisibly through great distances.

Witchcraft is invested with evil, to do harm, to lust, and to adulterate with other spirit beings. Their activities are evil in intent, influenced, and controlled, by spiritual forces of evil.²¹ They move freely to kill, or even rescue. Witchcraft is considered dangerous. However, at other times, the activity is useful, when used to counterattack others, to rescue witch victims. Finally, not all Milne Bay women are witches; the same with sorcery and magic; only some people practise the arts, and people tend to use them by paying bribery.

To conclude, the Milne Bay people have a pragmatic belief system that is enhanced through rituals, symbols, and chants, to cause the spirits to act on their behalf. Their knowledge and skills, however important, are

¹⁹ J. Taruna tells of a small girl's soul being removed by a witch, in an attempt to kill her. Another witch went in and rescued her soul. Joseph Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Powers", B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, p. 7.

²⁰ Ronny Tomilesi said that the *Misiman* witches meet with *Tamudulele*, and other spirits on Walay Island to have sex and coven. In this way, the witches align with many spirits to kill. *Tamudulele* is renowned for his killing activities through Milne Bay area. Tomilesi, May 2000.

²¹ My cousin's wife, who was a witch, travelled invisibly from her island to ours, to kill her husband for not visiting her. A sorcerer saw her and learned of her plans, came and warned my cousin. He was angered, and told the sorcerer to kill her, and he did it. A couple of days later, the news of her death reached us.

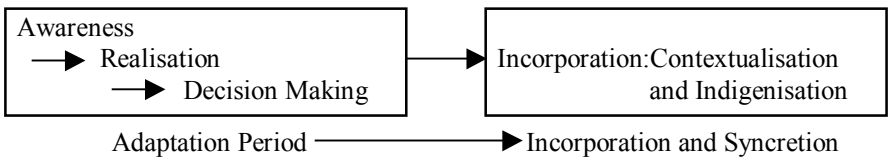
second to these belief systems. They grow up with this knowledge, and to promote, venerate, and worship, the spirits, for success and meaning to life. Others are aligned with the spirits, like the magicians, sorcerers, and witches, and are greatly influenced, and even possessed, by them. However dangerous it may seem, these are considered important associations for them and their well-being, at least from human point of view.

To reach them with the gospel in a powerful and meaningful way, one has to know this. They cannot be converted easily, through demythologising them, but by allowing the gospel, with its surpassing power, to challenge the very core of their pragmatic belief system. As Tippett correctly observed; “Western missions might do well to face up to the statistical evidence that animists are being won today by a Bible of power encounter, not a demythologised edition.”²²

2. The Gospel’s Impact Upon Milne Bay Culture

This section discusses the interaction and impact between the gospel and Milne Bay culture. What changes have, or have not, occurred? Has spirit worship been eradicated, and the culture transformed? The answer is not a straightforward “Yes” or “No”. Many professing Christians are still syncretistic. They have not experienced true conversion. Their inclusion in the church, as members, is only through adaptation, and not genuine saving faith. Power encounter is an ideal religious phenomenon to precipitate a true conversional experience.

Model One: Typical Milne Bay Christian Experience

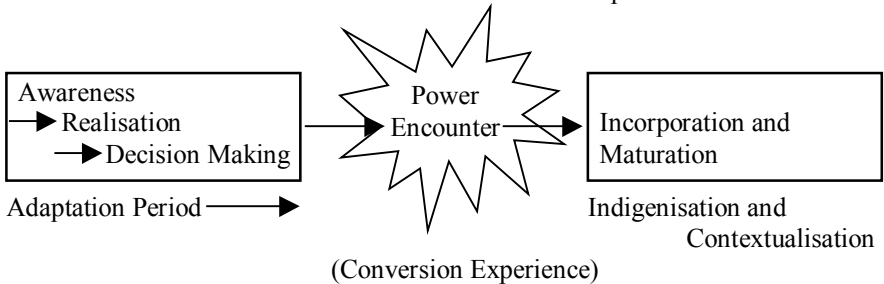


Many Milne Bay people are incorporated into the church membership through this process model. They have not had a true religious

²² Alan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1987, p. 312.

experience, through a power encounter, to precipitate genuine conversion. Thus, they end up syncretistic.

Model Two: The Ideal Christian Experience



Some, or even just a few, have gone through this process. They have adopted the faith, after receiving it. At their conversion experience, they were challenged to lay down their cultural goals, worldview, and allegiance, to take on the goals of the gospel, and to change their worldview, and allegiance, to Jesus Christ.²³

Adaptation

The adaptation period is when missionaries, through their evangelism attempts, their Christian presence, and their Western benefits, introduce the receptor culture to Christianity. Both the Western Christian culture and the receptor culture (in this case Milne Bay) had met to establish a dialogue for acculturation.²⁴ In accommodating the Western Christian

²³ David Price, "The Protestant Understanding of Conversion: and its Implications for Missionary Obedience", Ph.D. dissertation, Pasadena CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979, pp. 396-408.

²⁴ Acculturation is a process of accommodation by any one culture when in confrontation with another culture. Effective acculturation will allow the people of the receptor (and the incoming) culture to maintain their own principles, values, norms, beliefs, and allegiances, while coping with the challenges and opportunities of the incoming culture, with minimum strain. Marvin. Mayers, and Stephen Grunlan, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1979, p. 85.

culture, the primitive²⁵ Milne Bay people maintained their cultural goals, while trying to benefit from the counterpart.

The missionaries administered peace, and supplemented the people's traditional tools, clothing, medicine, and education with their Western ones. With these benefits, and the enforced rule of the colonial government, the people of Milne Bay were drawn into accepting the missionaries, and adapting their religion. Later, the missionaries reported that, within two years, they had a following of 5,790 attending Sunday services, but they also wrote, "this was first merely the adopting of the external forms of the new religion".²⁶ The missionaries realised this, and were working hard to convert the people. It was, and still is, not enough, at this adaptive point, to assume a genuine conversion.²⁷

It was said that the church was planted, and bloomed, because of a woman, who had died, and came back to life.²⁸ This event precipitated the first conversion of the Milne Bay people, after years of evangelistic attempts. Many such *ad hoc* experiences had furthered the growth of Christianity.²⁹ Without these experiences, people would have continued in their superficial adaptation of Christianity. It is possible that some lived and died without this true conversional experience.

There are reasons why not everyone in the church has had a true conversional experience.³⁰ For example, Dian said that many of the

²⁵ I used this word to mean the virgin, unexplored people, and not to be the negative extreme of ignorant barbaric people.

²⁶ R. Williams, *United Church Papua New Guinea and Solomon Island*, Rabaul PNG: Trinity Press, 1972, p. 187.

²⁷ J. H. Bavinck said, "Adaptation of customs that are not necessarily essential to the gospel will scarcely lead to anything other than a syncretistic entity." J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Philadelphia PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960, p. 178.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁹ Simeon Namunu, in his paper, "Spirits in Melanesian Tradition and Spirit in Christianity", pp. 109-112 and 118, argued that the Melanesian need for religious experience should be legitimised by a guided Christian experience, in order for the people to wholeheartedly embrace Christianity in a deeper meaningful way, other than observing the liturgy of the church at a superficial level.

³⁰ This includes all denominations existing in Milne Bay area.

United church members in Suau were brought into the church through its catechism programmes. They did not have a meaningful conversional experience.³¹ As a result, many are leaving to join the Pentecostals.³² This implies that the church must help those “unconverted members” change their allegiance to Christ alone. It is not enough to bring people into the church, through mere observance of the church programmes and liturgies. To do this, without meaningful individual, or communal, religious experience, is to bring more unconverted members into the church. The unconverted members will result in a less-pure church, liberal doctrines, and other kinds of unbelief practices.³³ People should be led from this misconception, into a true conversional experience, through a power encounter.

Power Encounter

A power encounter involves ministry of the word, counteraction by the Christian’s life, and manifestations of power by the Holy Spirit, against the evil forces, in order to rescue people from the dominion of darkness.

Power encounter is the demonstration by God’s servant of God’s incomparably great power for us who believe (Eph 1:19), based on the works of Christ (Col 1:15), and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), in confrontation with, and victory over, the works of Satan and demons (Luke 10:19) . . . resulting in the glory of God and the salvation of the lost.³⁴

³¹ “We are clear that the fundamental meaning of conversion is a change of allegiance. Other gods and lords . . . idolatries, everyone . . . previously ruled over us. But now Jesus Christ is Lord. The governing principle of the converted life is that it is lived under the Lordship of Christ, or the kingdom of God.” “Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture”, in *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation: The Willowbank Report*, Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee, 1978, p. 19.

³² H. Dian, “Encounter with the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1997), pp. 12-14.

³³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 980.

³⁴ K. Baker, “Power Encounter and Church Planting”, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 26 (1990), p. 310.

In the Milne Bay area, churches have been planted, and now flourish, because of God's manifested power, and continuous ministry of the word, and authenticating actions of the believers. In the past, power encounters have led to conversions. In the contemporary church, there are also examples of power encounters that have resulted in spiritual renewal.³⁵ However, the point is that a power encounter precipitates a true conversion for a Milne Bay person.³⁶

A power encounter authenticates the claims of the gospel; it also affirms, and correctly debases, the Milne Bay people's perception, and spiritual pragmatism. To demythologise them, is to forcibly submerge their pagan practices. As a result, we will bring more unconverted members into our churches. "A power encounter is the natural outcome of a correctly-gearred ministry."³⁷ It challenges, and changes, people's allegiances from spirits to God, in Jesus Christ. Without this conversion, people cannot, and will not, be able to know God, and experience a true transformation and maturation in Christian life.³⁸

Indigenisation and Contextualisation

These two terms have the same purpose: to meaningfully incarnate the word of God into a given culture, to bring about growth, to address

³⁵ A local church in Divinai experienced spiritual revival through power manifestations during camps and crusades. In 1993, the church in Woodlark bloomed, when the power of God moved to heal, reconcile people, and challenge the power of darkness. Many such reports can be said about other areas within the province.

³⁶ In stating the place of a power encounter in conversion, the *Lausanne* papers quote, "A number of us, especially those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, have spoken both of the reality of evil powers, and of the necessity to demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus over them. For conversion involves a power encounter. People give their allegiance to Christ, when they see that His power is superior to magic . . . and the malevolence of evil spirits, and that His salvation is a real liberation from the powers of evil and death." "Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture", p. 21.

³⁷ Kevin Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions*, Brisbane Qld: Assembly Press, 1986, p. 87.

³⁸ In 1998, a family told me that my own village pastor had advised the family to seek healing for their teenage girl from a witch doctor. Evidently, many clergy are holding to this compromised view, and they are denying any such need for conversional experience to many of the incorporated, yet unconverted, members of the church. However, there are others, who are enjoying fullness of life, because of their personal, or even communal, experience with God.

each culture's issues, and to reach spiritual heights, in all spheres of life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both coexist in this frame of reference.

Indigenisation, a term used first by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, means, "a national church has been produced, which shares the life of the country, in which it is planted, and finds within itself the ability to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself".³⁹

Contextualisation, which has its roots from incarnational theology by Karl Barth, and ethnotheology,⁴⁰ seeks to recover an effective communication of the gospel, and endeavours to extricate the gospel from Greek epistemology, and Western scientific thinking, into a specific cultural context.⁴¹ The pioneering missionaries employed these two disciplines in Milne Bay.

We aim at saving Dobu (another island in Milne Bay), not by restrictions from without, but regeneration from within; we sought not to abolish, but to redeem. Native customs, not, in themselves, essentially debasing, were to be made points of Christian contact and instruction, and the older order, where possible, the vehicle of the new spirit.⁴²

Down through the generations, faithful messengers and believers have shared the gospel, and lived a godly life. The matter of concern is for those who have not made a clear break from past spirit worship and magic. They profess to be Christians, and, at the same time, show compatibility with the old religion. Thus, indigenisation and contextualisation, especially for those who are ministering God's word,

³⁹ Melvin L. Hodges, "Why Indigenous Church Principle?", in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles Kraft, and Tom Wisley, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Richard L. Heldenbrand, *Christianity and New Evangelical Philosophies*, (Indiana: Words of Life, 1989, p. 111.

⁴¹ Simon Chan, "Second Thoughts on Contextualisation", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9-1 (1985), p. 50.

⁴² Williams, *United Church Papua New Guinea*, pp. 91-92.

are never successfully achieved. It is a polluted exercise, a compromised hermeneutics, and a syncretistic faith.⁴³

If this is the common view of many of the people within the Milne Bay churches (and I believe it is), how can the church address the issue? If contextualisation is aimed at addressing contemporary issues, then the church is in a right position to be prophetic, to call people back to the word of God, and to challenge, and change, the situations it is in now. If the church calls for, and precipitates, a turn away from traditional religion, and a turn to God, then the church would become a true witness in faith and in action, then indigenisation and contextualisation is authenticated. To ignore this, is to be ineffective, compromising, and syncretistic; at least for those who are unconverted.

Syncretism

Syncretism is an attempt to reconcile two or more opposing elements of religion, in hope of creating a new one. It denies any unique revelation, thus blending traditional religion and Christianity, as ways from and to God. It is the adding of traditional elements, and leads to the watering-down of the uniqueness of Christ.⁴⁴

Syncretism in Milne Bay is an addition, and accommodation, of traditional elements with Christianity. They acknowledge God's work, supremacy, salvation, and even His lordship, through Jesus Christ. That is why people pray to God, before employing their magical powers. They believe that good spirits, and their powers, are from God, the people see it is fitting to seek power from spirits, and get affirmation from the true source of power. However, people's eschatological hopes are still upon God, whom, they believe, will determine all things.

Thus, we see that people are seeking pragmatic powers, to necessitate the desired ends. Their worldview has programmed such a belief and

⁴³ An informant said that magic is not totally bad, there is good magic that must be maintained and used for gardening, fishing, and healing. The people should pray first to God before employing the good magic. But the bad magic, used to kill or harm others, should be totally eradicated. Kadamwana, April 2000.

⁴⁴ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name*, London UK: SCM Press, 1963, p. 10.

practice. As animists, they see it as fitting to consult all sources, for power, and to avoid angering any that might disrupt the physical society.⁴⁵ All these are a result of wrong teaching, ineffective witnessing by those, who, themselves, are immersed in that depravity, suppression, and blinding of sin by Satan, with his demons, who are directly capitalising on these practices, to keep people in this abyss.⁴⁶

For a century now, the gospel has been in Milne Bay. We acknowledge that God has done great things throughout this history. People have been converted, and they have impacted their culture and society, through their words and actions. That is why the light of such faithfulness is still existing and impacting now. But it shows here that there are still unconverted people within the church, whose allegiance and beliefs are divided.

The call now is more than just urging people to turn away from their pragmatism – their traditional beliefs and practices. It is not a call out of culture, but a call for people to let go of their intermingling with spiritual forces of darkness. It is a call to total allegiance and love to God. To be in their own culture and society, impacting it by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not be immersed in its antagonistic lifestyle.⁴⁷

3. Biblical Answers to the Above Challenges

To begin this discussion, we will examine the relationship between Christianity and culture, according to Richard Niebuhr. It gives us an understanding of where to start. Then we will deal with the problem of syncretism in the Milne Bay area.

Christ and Culture

Richard Niebuhr suggests five models, in an attempt to try and describe the relationship between Christ and culture.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bruce Blowers, *Religious Syncretism*, a paper, Kudjip PNG: Nazarene Hospital, March 1972, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Hinton, "Cross-Cultural Communication Course Notes:.

⁴⁷ Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York NY: Harper Brothers, 1951. (1) Christ against culture is a position that denies any relationship between the two, pp. 45ff. (2) Christ of culture is the opposite of the above view, the two are totally immersed in each

The Syncretic Milne Bay Christians' Position

It may seem that this particular people interchangeably hold onto the third and the fourth views. However, it is impossible to determine this presumption without any adequate primary data. It is evident that this particular group has held, and are holding, to the fourth view – Christ and culture in paradox.

Being informed basic biblical truths, the people are aware of the tension between their cultural beliefs and practices and the biblical faith. There are some parts of their culture that they do realise as good, and worth preserving. The art, skills, knowledge of work, social systems and values, that promote communal relationship and morality, are all worth holding on to. On the other hand, the reality of the tension that Christianity is in conflict with some of the Milne Bay practices does not compel the people to abstain from such practices. There is very little preaching against such practices. People either react negatively, or submerge the practice,⁴⁹ when there is a mention about these malevolent acts.

Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are practised within Christian circles. These are done, either in secret, or openly, where certain clergy speak well of such things, especially good magic. A person prays to get some kind of affirmation in practising his own magic for healing, gardening, or so forth. Protective magic is used in guarding one's property (called *silami*). These are commonly practised in many parts of Milne Bay, and especially by those mere churchgoers.

other, pp. 83ff. (3) Christ above culture is a synthesist position, which recognises the need to obey both as requirements, pp. 116ff. (4) Christ and culture in paradox realises the tension between the two, but live in obedience to both Christ and culture, pp. 149ff. (5) Christ the transformer of culture is a conversionist, and the traditional church view. Culture is tainted by sin, but it can be redeemed by a redeemed man, pp. 190ff.

⁴⁹ Premarital sex is allowed in many parts of Milne Bay, and young people get married in this way. Very little is said against such practice that really is an important truth that links with the sacredness of sex only within marriage circles. People obtain magical portions for love to lure the opposite sex into premarital sex. In 1998, I was confronted with a case, where a young girl, who was faithful in her Christian walk, was involved in premarital sex. This gave me a chance to speak strongly against such practices with a gentle, but firm, private rebuke.

The Bible clearly teaches that these antagonistic practices (against God) should not be held, hand in hand, with Christian beliefs and practices. People go to Sunday services, they embrace and acknowledge the Lord Jesus and His works, and they try to please God by being obedient to the requirements of the church, and by working for the church. However, they still hold on to the other tension. Moreover, the result is that church life is dwelling in a grey, obscure area, regarding faith and practice. The allegiances of the old are not transferred, in their entirety, to Jesus Christ. There can be no real transformation in the culture without this change of allegiance. As the Lausanne papers contended:

once Christ has taken His rightful place, everything else starts shifting . . . this new, liberating allegiance leads inevitably to a reappraisal of every aspect of our lives, and, in particular, of our worldview, our behaviour, and our relationship.⁵⁰

The people of Milne Bay cannot, and will not, experience the real power of God, a transformed life, if they continue to hold on to this paradoxical faith and allegiance.

The Ideal Model for Milne Bay People

Christ, the transformer of culture, is a conversionist view, which recognises that culture was good, but now it has been tainted with sin, and some of it is evil. God created man a cultural being. The fall has brought about the distortion of God's image within a man, and evil effects upon his culture.

The problem is not the cultural forms, but it is within man himself.⁵¹ Man's allegiance changed from God to Satan, and self, right from the fall. As a result, the focus of culture has deviated, and is immersed in sin. However, Jesus' death paved the way for man to be reinstated to his former allegiance with God,⁵² and to transform his culture, to the glory of God, by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' incarnation is the undeniable fact of a redeemed person living within the corrupt world, yet not be part of its evil practices. This same God can empower

⁵⁰ "Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture", p. 20.

⁵¹ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, pp. 103-106.

⁵² 2 Cor 5:17-20.

all, who are redeemed, to be salt and light of the world.⁵³ When the heart is in its right place, then the words and actions will be right.

The skills and knowledge of work is important for survival. Trading, feasting ceremonies, and singing are places for the expression of joy, sorrows, and a time of building of relationships. Such cultural practices should be retained, modified, and used to the glory of God. The people of Milne Bay need only to transfer their primary allegiance, in the course of these practices, from the myriad of spirits to God. The change of allegiances does not mean eradicating, or explaining away, the awareness of the spirits, and the spirit world. The knowledge and awareness of the spirit world should be corrected and enhanced by Christianity.⁵⁴ The sense of the spirit world should be used as a point of counteraction between the Christian worldview against an animistic worldview, to bring people to salvation in Christ. This will be elaborated upon later. However, with their changed allegiance, the people of Milne Bay will be led by the Holy Spirit to live transformed lives in their own society. Ketobwau said:

For only a Trobriand Christ can change the Trobriand culture. His spirit, which indwells Trobriand Christians, will enable them to bring forth reformation and change to their own society.⁵⁵

However, there are other practices within the Milne Bay cultures, which cannot be redeemed at all, because they are morally and ethically wrong. In the Kula trade expedition, there is the practice of *Buyavin Kuwsilay*. In this, the traders are involved in celebrations, and immorality, that is believed to be the result of the successful working of the magical charms for the Kula trade. This kind of immorality is to be renounced, and destroyed. Such practices are biblically condemned as immoral, and as pervasive acts. God hates sexual sin, such as

⁵³ Matt 5:13.

⁵⁴ Morris Inch may have had the same thought when he quoted C. S. Lewis' idea of sensing God (nominous). He wrote, "we may sharpen our recognition skills by reflecting on the fear we experience concerning wild animals, introduce a supernatural aspect by substituting ghosts, and finish off with a sovereign Spirit, who controls our life and destiny". M. Inch, *A Case for Christianity*, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1997, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Ketobwau, "*Tuma*", p. 35.

fornication and adultery. When a person joins his or her body in sexual sin, the person is sinning against God, and himself (1 Cor 6:18-20).

Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft

The Bible is explicit about God's condemnation against practices, such as magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. The Lord warned His people, the Israelites, to be completely free from all such practices. Anyone found practising such things should be stoned to death.⁵⁶ He considered such practices as an act of spiritual adulteration, because He is a jealous God, and tolerates no rivals.⁵⁷ God desires His people to be completely loyal to Him (Ezek 13:23).

The New Testament advanced these directions, showing antagonistic confrontations, and condemnation, towards such practitioners.⁵⁸ God's word never made distinctions between good and bad magic, both are considered magic, and are, therefore, an abomination to Him. There is no compromise between light and darkness, between God and Satan. The Bible shows this is an irreconcilable difference. Satan is the source of every evil, and God is the source of every good. To think that praying, before administering magical charms, is all right, is to try to reconcile Satan and God.⁵⁹ How can God work together with what He will destroy in the end? It is either God, or the people of Milne Bay, who are falsifying the truth about reality. In all matters, "let God be true, but every man a liar".⁶⁰

Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are powers, derived from the spiritual world. The Bible identifies these as from deceiving spirits. Christ came to set the people free from their bondage.⁶¹ He came to deliver people from the influence of these spirits. The influences of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft bring about false hopes and fears. However, the influence of the Lord Jesus Christ is one full of true hope and love.

⁵⁶ Deut 18:10-12; Lev 20:6, 27; Is 2:6; Jer 27:9; Ezek 13:18-20; Mic 5:12.

⁵⁷ Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 6:15.

⁵⁸ Acts 8:9-24; 13:16-ff; 16:16-18.

⁵⁹ Gal 5:20; Rev 21:8b; 22:15.

⁶⁰ Rom 3:4.

⁶¹ Col 1:13-14.

The true transformation of culture occurs when Christ comes into one's life, and delivers the person from the powers of the beguiling spirits, and their false notion about life. Then the Holy Spirit will instil the mind of God⁶² into the person, to live in accordance with God's will and glory. Any part of a culture that does not bring glory to God, or promotes immorality and knowledge against God,⁶³ is of the enemy. It should be challenged, and people must be rescued from the devil's grasp.

4. Deliverance Ministry in Focus

Deliverance is a form of power encounter, because it involves counterattacks by the servants of God upon the grip of the enemy, with the aim of freeing the people from malevolent spirits, allowing them to be open to Christian faith and practice.⁶⁴ To engage in such ministry, one has to be well prepared.

Preparation for Deliverance Ministry

Jesus' words, in Mark 9:29, stress the importance of committed prayer and fasting. Earnest prayer involves confession of sin, and a genuine seeking of God's mind, for answers to problems and situations. Jesus' earthly life was soaked with prayer,⁶⁵ so that He was able to minister with authority and power. His authority and His power were always authenticated by healing, exorcism, and many other signs and wonders. Prayer accomplishes great things for God. Down through the centuries, great revivals, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, have occurred, because of prayer.⁶⁶ Ronald Dunn writes,

Prayer is not a religious exercise, it is a human necessity. . . . I discovered that prayer is the secret weapon of the kingdom of

⁶² 1 Cor 2:15.

⁶³ 2 Cor 10:4-6.

⁶⁴ Power encounter is more than just a challenge between two deities, or religions it is a challenge between two worldviews, two belief systems, and two cultures. The weaker side will always sway towards the victory side (see Ex 7-10; 12:29-36; Josh 1:8-13; 1 Kings 18). David Burnett, *God's Mission: Healing the Nations*, Bromley UK: Send the Light OM, 1984, pp. 84-88.

⁶⁵ Heb 5:7.

⁶⁶ P. Yonggi Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival*, Milton Keynes UK: Word Publishing, 1984, pp. 8-10.

God. It is like a missile that can be fired towards any spot on earth, travels, undetected, at the speed of thought, and hits its target every time. . . . Satan has no defence against this weapon, he does not have an anti-prayer missile.⁶⁷

Paul said that true spiritual battles are not won simply by putting on the whole armour of God, but are won by the mighty power of God, drawn upon through prayer.⁶⁸

Fasting is an important ingredient of prayer. When these two are mated together, God's power can accomplish mighty acts. Andrew Murray said that prayer and fasting are like two hands. To fast and to pray is to surrender oneself, and allow Jesus' presence to come down to our situation.⁶⁹ Both prayer and fasting sharpen our spiritual vitality, to discern, and to react, accordingly, when engaged in deliverance ministry.

Secondly, a person needs to be grounded in the word of God. Since the enemy does use the word to attack any genuine work of God,⁷⁰ a Christian must be thoroughly equipped, and correctly handle the word of God, in order to use it to reclaim the ground, formerly held by the devil.⁷¹ The word of God sharpens the effectiveness of a Christian to discern every pretence and falsehood, within and without. It has the potential, within itself, to remove spiritual bondages and influences.⁷² As F. MacNutt says, "The gospel is not meant to merely teach doctrine, but, necessarily, includes the power to free, save, and heal."⁷³

Thirdly, a Christian, who desires to engage in deliverance ministry, should exercise love. Compassion must be shown to those who are

⁶⁷ M. Bubeck, *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1995, p. 95.

⁶⁸ Eph 6:10, 18-19.

⁶⁹ D. F. Kelly, *If God Already Knows: Why Pray?*, London UK: Cox & Wyman, 1995, p. 177.

⁷⁰ Matt 4:1-11.

⁷¹ 2 Cor 10:3-6.

⁷² A spiritual bondage of infirmity was broken by the power of the word during Paul's ministry in Lystra, see Acts 14:8ff.

⁷³ Francis MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1996, p. 66.

ministered to. Jesus showed it, and Paul commended it.⁷⁴ Love and compassion in ministry will guard against abuse of gifts, and the pride of heart. It also shows a need for guarding people's dignity, when ministering to them. Love helps restore inner healing, especially to those who are emotionally, or psychologically, upset. In deliverance ministry, one must know that the struggle is against evil spiritual principalities and powers. We are waging war, by God's divine power, to help people to receive their full restoration in Christ Jesus.

Deliverance and Exorcism: Teaching the Word of God

The faithful ministry of God's word is important to correct any misconceptions of the people about the truth of God. The Israelites were in total depravity, because the priests failed to teach the Law of God.⁷⁵

The problem of syncretism in Milne Bay is clearly an evidence of the lack of faithful teaching of the word of God. Some clergy cannot teach the truth of God, because they, themselves, are not truly converted. Thus, the members they lead, are compromised in their minds, they are not convinced about the things of God. They still see it fitting to consult many spiritual sources for power and success, and yet maintain some form of allegiance to God. They still use magic, and acknowledge those who practise it. No one, who has gone into serious study of the word, can ever come out with a compromised mind. The word of God is powerful in itself; it can change one's life, and influence those who hear it.⁷⁶ As Spurgeon wrote,

Our own reading can have a profound effect on us as individuals. To understand the message of the word of God is, indeed, to let loose forces in our lives as powerful as a lion.⁷⁷

The word had great impact upon many people, because it was accompanied by praying and fasting.⁷⁸ The powerful word of God

⁷⁴ Matt 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 15:20; 1 Cor 13.

⁷⁵ Hos 4:6.

⁷⁶ Kelly, *If God Already Knows*, p. 191.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

judges the mind and the heart of every person, and corrects all false knowledge, in order to impart the true knowledge of God. The church in Milne Bay must assess its own situation, discern its own problems, and give ear to what the Holy Spirit has to say. The Holy Spirit has the mind of God, and, whatever word He gives, it shall not go unchecked, but shall accomplish what God desires for His church.⁷⁹ The word of God, given by the Spirit of God, has its own appealing powers, because it is the message of deliverance from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of God.⁸⁰

Deliverance from Spiritual Influences

Deliverance involves praying to break the yoke of bondage, so that people may be freed from compelling, sinful actions and practices, influenced by the beguiling spirits. Secondly, deliverance also involves exorcism of possessive spirits.

It is undeniable that sin is the result of human weakness. Sinful actions can become an open door for enslavement by the enemy and his evil forces. Hence, people become slaves to that spiritual struggle. Scott Peck says,

there is a struggle going on between an intact human soul and the infesting demonic energy . . . that all causes of what we call possession ought, more properly, to be referred to as partial possession, or imperfect possession.⁸¹

In other words, the spiritual influences are not from within the people, but rather from without. The spirits that align with the people of Milne Bay, in all endeavours of their lives, continue to imprison the people, to operate in their own defined spheres. The spirits blindfold the people to the truth of God, in order to enslave them in sinful actions against God. The people are consulting their familial spirits, and spirits of the dead,

⁷⁸ Many Milne Bay people had experienced true freedom from spiritual influences, and their compelling forces that imprisoned the people in magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. Some people renounced, and destroyed, all their objects, after listening to the word of God. Others, however, kept them, even when the word was preached to them.

⁷⁹ Is 55:10-11.

⁸⁰ Col 1:13-14.

⁸¹ MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, p. 68.

for success, and meaning to life, without realising that such activities have contributed to, and resulted in, their own ineffective Christian life. Such people should be delivered from the outside, compelling, and fearful awareness of the spirits that keep the people in their forbidden practices. The people are fearful of possible repercussions, if they desert the spirits and magic.

The Christian minister must show conviction in heart, through the word and Spirit of God, in order to confront, and break, spiritual bondage, in the name of Jesus.⁸² The opened door, undertaken through initiating rites, to align with the spirits, must be closed, or totally renounced, and eradicated, by the power of the Spirit, through counselling and prayer. This will help a counsellor to avoid aimless praying and misunderstanding if certain manifestations occur during the prayer, or counselling, session.⁸³

We must realise that, no matter whether the person maybe a professing Christian, or even a clergy, if he/she is involved in any spiritualism, he/she must receive deliverance. MacNutt wrote:

Most people we meet who need deliverance seem to be good people, not evil people. Most of them are Christians, and go to church on Sunday, but, in some part of their lives, they are not free.⁸⁴

Deliverance is, in a sense, experienced at conversion, but, if one part of our life is not surrendered, then we need to resurrender it to the Lord. This does not mean only magic, sorcery, and witchcraft practices, it

⁸² Further exemplification of the authority and the power of the name of Jesus can be read in Don Gossett's book, *What You Say Is What You Get!*, Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1976, pp. 87-94 and 97-107.

⁸³ I was in a counselling team in an evangelistic crusade to my own island. In one particular village, I was asked, with a Christian friend, to pray for recommitment and infilling of the Holy Spirit upon a man. Without further questioning, we went ahead, and half-way through the prayer, the person started to convulse and groan like an animal in pain. We directed our prayer to deliverance, and, after a while, he was free. Later on, we learnt from his wife that he was a magician, who practised white magic. He was a full member of the church.

⁸⁴ MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, p. 68.

may be sexual sin, a covetous attitude, hatred, jealousy, theft, and so forth. If these sinful areas are not renounced, and the powers not broken, then it becomes an open door for the enemy to counterattack us, and make us ineffective in our Christian walk. These areas would become the point of attack and intimidation of the people by the spirits.

Exorcism of Spirits

Exorcism is an act to cast out evil spirits that have entered into a person. When an exorcist confronts the person, the person will demonstrate unnatural manifestations, changes in facial expression, and tone of voice. Sometimes, the person will show excessive fear, and may act abnormally, with eyes rolling, unsettled, and staring blankly.⁸⁵

The Christian or clergy exorcist(s) should prayerfully confront the counselled, in order to get relevant information about the nature of the problem that caused, or resulted in, the spirits' intrusion. If it is associated with any of the initiatory rites of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, then prayer should be offered, after renunciation, to reverse the powers, and destroy the legal grounds of intrusion. Then the spirit(s) should be expelled, and sent to a far-away place. We cannot send them to their eternal place of damnation; only Jesus will do that at the end time. Prayer for deliverance binds the spiritual powers, renouncing and destroying any legal grounds the spirits have to continue their influence. Exorcism is an actual confrontation, taking authority over the intruding spirits, in the Name of Jesus.

Some people cast demons out in a loud voice. But, even with a gentle, yet firm, voice, one can cast out the spirit speaking its identity. Weak spirits will leave easily, but stronger spirits may take considerable time before they can be cast out. This is when team ministry becomes useful. The group should always support the exorcist during the time of ministry by prayer and fasting, to exert continuous spiritual attacks, in the spiritual realm, to demolish the power of evil over places and territories. Furthermore, team ministry can provide relief for each other, in prolonged prayers of exorcism, or even others can use their

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

gifts to discern the problems, in order to deal with it simultaneously.⁸⁶ When deliverance is attained, then the person is ready to be mentored in his/her Christian life.

Discipleship

Discipleship is not optional. It is a necessity for Christian growth and maturation.⁸⁷ Great potential is realised through discipleship. Obedience, fruition, perfection, and intimacy with God are the results of discipleship. These elements are not acquired through a series of lectures, or Sunday sermons. They are the result of a truly, nurtured and cultivated life. Thus, the church of Milne Bay must realise the indispensable ministry of discipleship. It is the heart of the gospel's ministry, and should glorify the Father.⁸⁸ Alice Fryling describes discipleship thus:

The ultimate task of a spiritual director is to help younger Christians find the will of God. In the process, the director may help the person develop disciplined habits of prayer and spiritual reaching . . . and may encourage the growing Christian in many areas of life.⁸⁹

Prayer shows one's trust and dependency upon God, and it also enhances spiritual vitality. Prayer draws one closer to God, to know His will, and to receive direction and empowerment in any daily endeavours. This shows that it involves talking to, and listening to, God. It becomes a merely-manipulative routine, when it is administered in one direction only.

This is the problem with many professing Christians in Milne Bay. Prayer has become a Sunday morning, or a religious, routine. I am not against what we are praying for, but, in the course of our prayers, God should be central in our thinking, and not man. Genuine prayer will

⁸⁶ MacNutt deals with (1) formation of a ministry team (pp. 52-156); (2) how to prepare for deliverance (pp. 57-164); and (3) how to engage in actual exorcism (pp. 167-182).

⁸⁷ Matt 28:18-20; Luke 11:24-26; John 15:1-10.

⁸⁸ Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Discipleship*, Carol Stream IL: Creation House, 1975, pp. 11-17.

⁸⁹ Alice Fryling, *Disciple-Makers' Handbook*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1990, p. 9.

always seek to maintain an intimate relationship with God, and a desire for the actualisation of God's kingdom on earth.⁹⁰ Prayer should be exercised privately, behind closed doors, and in genuine, communal fellowship. It can be enriched through meditational reading of God's word to seek His will and purposes in our lives. God speaks through His word.

Secondly, a new Christian should be nurtured through the word of God. The word of God is the bread of life, which exerts growth, and wisdom for godly living. It prepares the mind to be ready for action, and it acts as a spiritual weapon against the enemy's attacks. The disciple should be taught, and encouraged to read, the word, thoughtfully and prayerfully, and submit readily to do its demands. The Holy Spirit must be acknowledged as the true teacher of the word, and the transformer of life.⁹¹

Finally, the new believer should be brought into a nurturing fellowship. The Milne Bay churches must work towards establishing fellowships that have a heart to encourage, nurture, share, care, and help each other, in love. Many, who have been brought into faith, have missed out, and are more confused and discouraged, in the church than out of it.⁹² The Milne Bay church must realise its divine responsibilities, and take serious action against the identified problem of syncretism. Let us take the warning of the Bible to heart, and not share in the failures of the teachers of the Law.⁹³

The Milne Bay people must be told of the truth about the reality of the spirit world. The fears and the influences of the spirits must be broken, by the power of God. The aligning and possessive spirits are to be expelled, and exorcised, so that, with total allegiance to Jesus, the people can continue to walk in the light of God's word. "When a

⁹⁰ See Matt 6:33; John 14:13.

⁹¹ John 6:63.

⁹² Mark, a convert from a crusade, was told to destroy all his magic portions. Three years after I met him he was a discouraged person. He said that his Christian friends had tricked him into giving up his magic, and now he is unsuccessful in all his trade endeavours.

⁹³ Ezek 33:7-9; Matt 23:1-33.

believer's allegiance is changed on the inside, his actions in society are different."⁹⁴

The teaching of God's word corrects people's worldviews. It doesn't destroy it. The Bible educates, and puts right, all perspectives about the spirit world. One must understand it isn't the total eradication of such awareness and knowledge of the spirits. There are spiritual entities, such as ancestors, that must be venerated, but not worshipped. God can, and will, use this worldview, which is compatible to that of the biblical worldview, to meaningfully convey the gospel to the people. The need for their religious, pragmatical awareness should now be refocused, then, upon Jesus, with the guiding principles of Paul's word in Eph 2:8-10. With that passion in their hearts and minds, the Milne Bay people, and any persons with this same worldview, can find Col 3:23-24 a fulfilling experience, within their own societal living.

Authenticity of Milne Bay Culture

The attempt to authenticate culture is to suggest, formulate, and/or modify, old practices, giving them new Christian meanings. These suggested forms can either be indigenous, or borrowed from outside, but they must serve as vehicles to express Christianity meaningfully into the culture, to the glory of God.

The attempt to contextualise Milne Bay Christianity will be viewed through Hiebert's critical contextualisation model.⁹⁵ This model is a step towards careful examination of the old beliefs and customs, through biblical perspectives, before rejecting or accepting them. After a description of the four steps, Hiebert suggests we take some case studies as examples. Even so, within these examples, not all rites and symbols, within the whole practice of magic, etc., will be dealt with. But, what's given, will serve as examples of contextualisation. Hiebert describes contextualisation according to the four steps.

⁹⁴ Kelly, *If God Already Knows*, p. 143.

⁹⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 186-187.

To See All Practices from a Biblical View

This step is for the pastor to do, to view all of the cultural practices, and ask such questions as, “Are such practices important, necessary, redeemable, or evil, and how can it be modified or replaced?” The pastor does this to give him good knowledge of how to answer people when he finally brings people to open discussion. Two things are worth noting. Firstly, the pastor does this exercise for his own knowledge and equipping, not to use it to push it down people’s throats. Secondly, the knowledge about work, music, feasts, trade, and the skills and technology of the people for any physical work, are vitally important, in themselves, for survival and livelihood. These are neutral, and they’ll remain as they are. However, there are others, like magic, witchcraft, sorcery, idolatry, and the like, that are absolutely impossible to adapt. Other forms can be used, after removing pagan influences and meaning.⁹⁶

Believers’ Discussions

The pastor should call all believers into an open discussion. In this discussion, the pastor may only suggest those particular practices that he might have already thought about, and thus see that it is important and necessary to begin with them. He should bring the matters to the believers’ attention, and allow them to openly discuss the traditional rites and symbols. The pastor should ask whether the practices are important for them, and whether they can be redeemed and modified. It is important to note that the people are doing the talking and deciding. The pastor listens, and helps, when they ask him. He shouldn’t criticise, least he closes, and condemns, people’s openness. He acts as a resource person, to give theological advice, or any other advice.

This calls for the church to train, and equip, leaders, for tasks such as this. They should be deeply rooted, and convicted, by the word, in order to correctly handle it, and administer it to others. Unfortunately, many young, educated Christians see God’s work as a second-class vocation. The fact that technology and materialism has failed to solve the problems of injustice, corruption, lawlessness, and immorality, calls for serious thought by all levels of people in society. The church must

⁹⁶ Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, pp. 171-172.

train and nurture people in all levels of life, to stand up and address the issues of the day. This may include problems, coming into the culture through modernisation, and traditional problems, as diagnosed by the pastor.

Bible Study by the Pastor

The pastor now needs to lead the congregation in serious Bible study, related to those issues raised by the believers. The pastor, himself, must be fully informed of the word, and be convinced of its infallible authority. He needs to guide believers, as they, themselves, explore the truths of the scriptures, and apply them to their situations. This exercise is important, because the people will feel responsible for their own decisions in life, and it will also sharpen their ability to discern the truth, and grow in the knowledge and grace of God. In other words, the people need to theologise the gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and apply it to their lives.

The Decision and Action

From the result of their own findings the people will decide which customs to accept and modify, or reject and replace. Again, it's important that the people make their own choice, based on their convictions in the Word. If decisions are imposed on them, they might submerge hidden elements, and remain syncretistic. The people must take on the full responsibility of their own choices, and be ready to stand up for their own beliefs and convictions about Jesus Christ.

Case Study 1

Silami is magic, used for protection of property, and is common throughout Milne Bay. The spells are placed on an object, and the object is put in coconut and *betelnut* plantations to guard against thieves. This is done to ensure a large and quality harvest for special social and ceremonial occasions. If anyone trespasses, he will get sick, or even die.

Many parts of the Milne Bay area, especially the people of the Trobriand and Woodlark Islands have incorporated a similar practice into the church, but have given it a new name (*taboo*). *Taboo* is a new direction (pray to God), and a modification of meaning (that God would

both protect and increase its production). The people chose to retain that traditional form, but with the help of pastors, they have worked out how it should be done. The people have not actually followed all Hiebert's steps, but important elements were present in their own contextualisation process. This practice has stood out as an effective counterattack against the traditional *silami*. Many people have turned, and acknowledged God's power, when they witnessed the effects upon those who violated a *taboo* of God. Some of them got sick, while others experienced accidents. If the people modify this practice in the future, they should follow the four steps above.

Case Study 2

The garden diagram presentation includes a description of continuous employment of magic at the *mutatala* and the *kalivisi*. What would people say about such practices? Is it all right to continue the magic? What's so significant about the *mutatala* (corners) and the *kalivisi* (centre)?

The idea of employing magic at the corners and the centre means total surrender of the garden to guardian spirits. Now, the points can be used, with modified, or new, symbols, to mean a total surrender of a believer's garden to God, for protection and production. This can be done through prayers, as the people would determine. When the gardener comes to these points in the garden, he can be reminded of God, as the true gardener, not only to give physical food, but also spiritual sustenance.⁹⁷ The pastor must be discerning and creative, in order for him to weave people's everyday experience into the message of the gospel. Jesus did that in His earthly ministry.

⁹⁷ Prior to the planting of the yam seeds, there is the rite of *Vikak* (cleansing) of the seeds with water, after chanting of magic. It is a rite to cleanse the seed from possible curses by enemies, and exerting power for growth. Again, people would stop from calling the spirits, and turn to God with the same rite, but with prayer and acknowledgment to God. It is up to the people to determine. But, as pastors, we have to help, guide, and give new meaning to people's practices, in the light of biblical principles.

Case Study 3

In Kula, trade people in the past, and now, inquire to their ancestors, through chanting and fasting. This is to ensure success in trade, and protection from storms and spiritual powers during long sea voyages.

Christians need to only change the direction of their practice, and put on a new meaning. The first thing is to maintain intimacy with God. Whatever results are gained, should also be to God's glory. In the past, people acquired wealth, and they kept it for self-glory. In the *tanalele*,⁹⁸ the glory must be given to God. All accumulation of food, and even a pig, should be shared (this is always done).

Christians can become the salt and light in such occasions. "Christians ought not to be ready to refuse to take part in harvest feasts and other sort of activities, which bring the whole community together."⁹⁹ Many Christians in my area try to avoid such activities, and this has caused condemnation in the peoples' minds. Such Christians think that to be a Christian is to be out of all such cultural practices, and, as a result, they have less chances to witness to others. We must view Jesus' earthly life as the model of ministry. Hesselgrave writes,

Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies, and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand, and turns them in an entirely different context. . . . He fills each thing, each word, and each practice, with a new meaning, and gives it a new direction.¹⁰⁰

Christians in the church, and in the world, should be transformers of the culture. Wesley said that the dynamic-equivalent church would take the indigenous forms, possess them for Christ, adapt and employ them

⁹⁸ *Tanalele* is a closing ceremony. See Malinowski, *Argonauts*, pp. 207-210 and 374-375.

⁹⁹ Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 229.

to serve Christian ends, by fulfilling indigenous functions, and conveying into the society Christian meanings.¹⁰¹

The rites and symbols, contextualised into Milne Bay culture, wouldn't be a new thing. They are aware of that need to blend their activities, in order to acknowledge, venerate, and worship the true reality – God, in Jesus Christ. This symbolism will serve as a continuous interaction of faith and practice, to be reminded of Christ's holistic involvement in their lives.

The Old Testament is full of symbolism. The Israelites put up stones as “reminders” or “witnesses” that God has acted in their history, and will continue to do so in the future.¹⁰² It was easy for the many, illiterate Israelites to see the symbols planted by their ancestors, and be reminded of who God is.

God understands that the true philosophy of education is: I hear and forget, I see and remember, I do and understand. Therefore, the people of Milne Bay should be ready to incorporate rites and symbols, to express their love and faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

I have argued that the people of Milne Bay should be allowed to weave into their Christian life, meaningful indigenous forms, to serve as Christian witnesses to the society, and to enhance their awareness and interaction with their new faith in Jesus Christ.

However, each generation of believers should be open to go through this process of contextualisation, to modify, or even change, their practices, to suit their changing environment and culture. This is what contextualisation is. It is an ongoing discipline, “each generation has to confront its own problems, and attempt to solve them in its own

¹⁰¹ Tom Wisley, “Towards a Dynamic Indigenous Church”, in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles Kraft and Tom Wisley, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 215.

¹⁰² Jacob: see Gen 31:45-54; in Josh 4, the Israelites' religious rites and symbols serve as reminders of God: see Ex 28:29-30, 36-38. Their agricultural life is also full of symbols: see Ex 23:16-19, so forth.

way”.¹⁰³ This must be done with careful study of the past history, literature, and present developments, in order to determine a proper action.¹⁰⁴

Contextualisation is more than just a mental exercise. It is to allow God to act in a particular time and context, meaningfully, to His glory. Price said, “The gospel is, therefore, not a series of abstract ideas. It is dramatic news that God has acted in history.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, He must also be allowed to act, even in the history and culture of the Milne Bay people.

Many of the reasons for the problem of syncretism are from those, who condemned peoples’ worldview and practices, without thinking seriously of the repercussions of their ignorant approach. Whether in local churches, or in theological colleges, every communicator of the gospel must know that God has left His witness in every culture, through His “common grace”, and that the communicators must appreciate the cultural bridges. Nevertheless, the church of Milne Bay must deal with its problems, through prayer, and seeking God’s will. We must heed Newbigin’s warning:

No one can deny the truth . . . that the growth of the church has often been grievously hindered, because of a failure to recognise, and honour, the differences of culture. The consequences of this failure, is that conversion separates the convert from his own culture, robs him of a great part of his inheritance, and makes him a second-class adherent of an alien culture.¹⁰⁶

To let the indigenous church attempt all that is said, above, would mean contextualisation and indigenisation is authenticated, for the betterment of the people, for God’s glory. However, the indigenous church must

¹⁰³ P. Perez, “Identification for Evangelisation”, in *Evangelical Mission Tomorrow*, W. T. Coggins, and Eric L. Frizen, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1997, p. 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Price, “The Protestant Understanding of Conversion”, p. 381.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

depend on God, and avoid likes and dislikes, from their own cultural perspectives.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁷ Blowers, *Religious Syncretism*.

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AN EVALUATION OF THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH AND PROPOSAL FOR ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Let us remind ourselves of Eccles 4:13-14, "A man may rise from poverty, to become king of his country, or from prison, to the throne." In a much simpler term, can God use a nobody like a drug addict, an alcoholic, a violent man, or a jailbird, for His glory and purpose? Would an outcast, who was rejected by society, and regarded as the scum of the earth, be of any use to God? Would a guy, who frequents the nightclubs with whoremongers, rather than having leisure with his family, be of any use to God?

What you are about to read is of how God Almighty, in his own sovereign grace, has used an indigenous Papua New Guinean, whose qualifications are listed in the above paragraph, to establish churches in this last decade, which have now become known as the Evangelical Christian Fellowship in the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Perhaps it may have been the first of its kind in the history of church planting in Papua New Guinea.

The Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Churches is unique, in that it is not affiliated with any foreign mission agencies or missionaries, but it truly originated in Papua New Guinea, for which, due glory and honour is to God. Indeed, we can say it is awesome, marvellous, and exciting for us to see how God can use nobodies, like jailbirds and outcasts, in an extraordinary way.

As you read through this article, it is my prayer that the Spirit of God will warm your hearts, motivate, and provoke you, also, to become partners in this onerous task of church planting, throughout Melanesia and abroad. This paper, though it is not lengthy, is believed to be ideal as a resource, and a legacy for readers in the years ahead.

A Church is Born

“Brothers think of what you were when you were called, not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Cor 1:26-29).

How important are those words, for they proved themselves true in my life. All the days of our lives were numbered in God’s book before the foundation of the world. God, in His omniscience, knows us all. He knows beforehand when He can use us to His glory. He works, through His Spirit, in the lives of all people, wanting all to be saved, and all to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

I can remember seeing the faithful, living hand of God. Even today, my heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving for all that God has done for me. How much patience and grace is needed on God’s part for a person to begin to realise the intention of His love. I thank Him from the depth of my heart for having opened my eyes to His wonderful love, grace, and faithfulness. May all that I write serve to glorify Him, and may it be a testimony of His abounding grace, care, and providence.

The Turning Point in My Life

I will never forget what happened on Friday, April 7, 1982, which was to change the course of my entire life. The judge’s deep voice broke the silence, thundered, and echoed throughout the courtroom, “Defendant found guilty as charged. To be imprisoned, with hard labour, for two years.” The unexpected happened, I almost had a heart attack. How well my defence counsel, and my witnesses, defended me was all in vain. I couldn’t believe the sentence that was pronounced on me. I assumed that the judge had erred in his verdict.

But why did this happen? The day before the case, I consulted my ancestors, for their aid and protection, I had gone through the ritual with the magic man, I had prayed to Mary, and the saints, to pave the way for victory in my coming court case. More than that, I had my defence counsel. If I have done all these, why were the gods so annoyed as to allow my imprisonment? Surely, something must have gone wrong within the system. My faith, confidence, trust, and respect for my religion, and my ancestors seemed to mean nothing but a fraud. But no, I must not dismiss Mary and the saints, otherwise, I might enter into more and deeper mischief.

My heart was broken, my hopes, dreams, future, and my beloved wife and infant son, were all but a shattered dream. Would I be able to ever see them again? Let the gods alone decide. She can go for some one better than me, and raise her child. It would be many months before I would see her, and, by then, I would be totally forgotten. Who am I anyway? My reputation, credibility, seniority, and status had already being smeared, and stamped with the sentence imposed upon me. The world does not need me anymore. Let me go to whatever is called prison, be forgotten, and never return, and perhaps die at the hands of the brutal jail keepers.

As I was escorted toward the awaiting prison van, the April sun, shining brightly in the clear blue sky, seemed to fade, and became dim. The atmosphere, the environment, and the scenery that used to be charming and lovely, seemed distant to me. I felt, deep down in my heart, that the whole world was uncompromising. As I walked past the crowds, and my fellow colleagues, police friends, and others shook their heads, and nodded, which, I guessed, was an expression of sorrow and farewell. The whole scenario was but gloom and doom.

My First Prison Inmates Fellowship

Barawagi jail at Kerowagi, in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea, was well situated on a hill toward the national highway. It was well fenced, so that not even an animal would gain entry. Those inside would have their flesh torn to shreds, if any attempt was made to cross over the razor-sharp, barbed wire. Tears filled my eyes as I stood staring at the sun, as it lazily set toward the western horizon.

The bell was rung at 4:30 pm. We were pushed into a cell, and locked in for the night. I was handed a blanket, stained with vomit, so the odour was terrible, but, as there was no other option, I had to make use of it for the night.

For the first time, in the pitch darkness, I heard a deep, queer, humble voice, which I have never forgotten, and which, ever since, I will always cherish in my heart. “Brothers, it’s true, we are trouble makers, but God loves us, He sent His one and only Son, who died that we might have life. If we confess our sins, God will forgive and cleanse us.” The sermon was short, brief, and ended with a short benediction.

Would God really hear the prayers of a bunch of criminals? Who is this Jesus Christ? Did God really love us? Did He really love me? Can He really forgive me? But that is impossible, God is holy, He cannot tolerate sin. That’s why we all end up here in this God-forsaken institution. It is all nothing but a nightmare. But, night after night, Brother Teine¹ would encourage us, and pray with us. Somehow, his message shook, and compelled me, so greatly that I decided to search for this God, who could forgive, cleanse, and, more than that, love me.

Searching for God

I was summoned to the visitor’s porch one weekend to meet my family. It was a joy to have our brief reunion. I requested my office Bible on my wife’s next visit. Now that I had access to the Bible, I read it daily, and, to my amazement, I found great encouragement and truth in the scriptures. My eagerness and enthusiasm made me lose my appetite for lunch on many occasions.

Since I was attached to the nursery section, there was sufficient time for prayer and meditation. I would recite each Hail Mary 60 times, and Our Father daily, by the Catholic prayer book I borrowed from an inmate. My determination and eagerness was to have a face-to-face encounter with the God, who loves, and who sacrificed His son on my behalf. Daily, I searched through the scriptures, prayed earnestly, and I

¹ Teine Siwi comes from Sim village east of Kerowagi in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea. He comes from an SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) background, and was on remand, though I am unaware of his crime (he was later released).

attended Mass every Sunday. I would ask many questions about faith, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. With the answers from the priest, I would search the scriptures, to see if they would match. Those were the most challenging, exciting, and fascinating times, but for how long would my search continue, I did not know.

An Unforgettable Trip from One Prison to Another

Prisoners engaged in specialist duties circulated news of transfers. The focus was on the long-termers, and it was uncertain as to which prison the transfers would take place. I was disturbed, in case my searching for the God who loves would be in vain. My acquaintance with the prisoners, in sharing and praying, would be handicapped. Would there be opportunities available at the new prison for enrichment and enhancement to my relationship with God? Somehow, I believed Mary would intercede with Jesus that I should remain.

Unfortunately, on a bright July morning of 1982, we were summoned to board a waiting Toyota 6000 truck, I packed the few items I possessed, notably my precious Bible, two shirts, and a pair of shorts into a pillow case, not being aware of our destination. As I boarded the truck, and got my self settled, the same queer, deep, humble voice seemed to speak to me repeatedly: "God loves you. . . . God is with you, and will not forsake you." As I turned to that odious cell, where I heard this voice the first night, tears started to roll down my cheeks. "God, but why, why do you have to do this? Why transfer me?" Haven't you heard my prayers, haven't you heard Mary and Jesus? Why did you have to remove me from an environment, with which I have gotten well acquainted?

Slowly, the truck descended the hill, as my temporary home vanished behind the hills, but I could still recapture some of those sweet memories of my meditation in the nursery, and that fateful night. The guards interrupted my thoughts, and told us that we were bound for Baisu Corrective Institution at Mt Hagen in Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, some 30 miles west of Kerowagi in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea.

Life at Baisu, and My First Contacts

After a few weeks, Baisu proved to be a fertile ground for me. There was light all night, I could read my Bible for as long as I wanted to, cell fellowship was consistent, Bibles, tracts, and guitars were in abundance, many of which I later learned were donated by Prison Fellowship, and other para-church organisations. I got involved with Prison Fellowship from the start.

I got well acquainted with Paul McArthur,² who was a very gentle, humble, and sensitive person, who was always ready, and more than willing, to answer all that I would ask of him. At the same time, there was progression, and improvement, in my personal prayer life. I could counsel, and share, from the word, and commend to the Lord, those inmates, who were due to be released the next day.

I was so engrossed in the Bible that I read from Genesis to Revelation several times. Apart from that, there were tracts and good teaching by various truly born-again Christians from the Prison Fellowship ministry. The jail keepers and fellow inmates complimented me for my changed life, enthusiasm, and eagerness for the scriptures. In actuality, I should say I was still searching, and every moment of the day I rose to new heights.

The Day I Met Christ

About four o'clock one Sunday morning, as I was praying and meditating on the book of Psalms, something unusual and amazing happened. As I sat with my eyes closed, something like a sticky tape on my forehead gave way slowly and gently, as though someone removed it deliberately. I was feeling rather strange, and sensed an inner joy and peace that was beyond my comprehension and explanation.

² Paul McArthur was Corporate Director of ATA (Alliance Training Association), based in Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, and Coordinator for Prison Fellowship Ministry to Baisu Prison. He was also the son of the founding Principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea, near Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

Paul McArthur came with his friends that morning, and, in the course of our fellowship, I was challenged by one of the brothers who shared (whom I later came to know personally as Geoff Williames).³ So, there I was, at the crossroads, wondering whether to accept or to reject. I was unsteady, and sweated all over, but, at the end, I decided I would give my life to Jesus Christ. I accepted Christ as my Saviour and friend that morning. At long last, I met the God who loves, for whom I had been searching with all my heart. I was saved, truly saved.

How It All Began

God knows how He has to lead His people. He also knew what was good for me. That was why He guided me during the days of my imprisonment. He led me in a completely different direction. I realise, today, how good it was that God did not allow my plans to come to fruition, but His plans, just as the apostle Paul thinks of the good start the believers have made in their Christian life. He is confident that God will finish the good work he has begun (Phil 1:6). Man may give up a work he undertakes, but not God.

The work, which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete,
His promise is yea and amen,
And never was forfeited yet.

Augustus M. Toplady⁴

Into Freedom

As the day of my release was nearing, I seemed to struggle between two worlds. What would the free world offer me? How would my former colleagues classify me? How would my immediate family's reception be, particularly when I did not attend my father's funeral? It seemed best to remain in prison, rather than to expose myself to the free world.

³ Geoff Williames was a businessman from Victoria, Australia, who was a friend of Paul McArthur. Both became instrumental in helping me in my early Christian life.

⁴ W. McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996, p. 776.

Paul McArthur made prior arrangements for me to be picked up after my release. Not knowing what lay ahead, I bid farewell to my fellow inmates for the last time, hurried towards the open gate, boarded the waiting car at the porch, and sped away into freedom.

Paul McArthur was all smiles as I entered his office. We greeted each other, and discussed issues of mutual interest for the next 15 minutes. I also had the opportunity to talk to Geoff Williames from Victoria, Australia, who also rejoiced, and encouraged me to really rehabilitate back into society. After a cordial reception, encouragement, and prayers, I was geared to face the challenges ahead.

My first experience of having dinner with white Christians was with the McArthurs. What intrigued me most was when Paul's little boy was asked to pray over our dinner. I was wondering whether God would accept a child's prayer. I thought it worthwhile if I could teach my son to do the same. I am indebted to their love and hospitality, over the years, when I really needed them. I learned so much from them.

Sad Family Reunion

Our family reunion was a season of sorrow and heartbreak. It was all gloom and doom. My heart bled, and tears rolled down my cheeks, as I hugged my widowed mother for the first time in five years. I felt as though the future promised us a state of oblivion. Life was not worth living for me. We walked over to my father's grave. I sat there, paused, and focused, as those sweet memories flooded my mind. I thanked the Lord for giving us an industrious, generous, wise, and a resourceful father.

Now that God had called him home, to whom should we go? Who would be our fortress, our refuge? This was the darkest hour of my life. How on earth would I manage a large family? All eyes were upon me. They were more than willing to obey what I had to say. That widow and those orphans were at my mercy.⁵ Our destination was uncertain.

⁵ The widow and the orphans refer to the writer's mother, brothers, and sisters.

Veronica,⁶ and my mother, were both great women of perception, who were industrious and constructive during those perilous times. They would always ensure that we wouldn't go begging. Life began to promise better times for our future. My older brothers sought employment elsewhere. I kept the promise I made to my mother, until the day I left for Bible college.

Personal Witnessing

Over the first few weeks of bereavement, my spiritual temperature declined. So many earthly issues also deprived me of my quiet time with God. Likewise, readjusting to a new environmental setting, particularly in a village, wasn't that good for me.

Somehow, I revived my quiet time with the Lord, by constant prayer, after toiling in the garden to reinforce my spiritual strength. My daily life also seemed to attract other's attention. Many enquired why I didn't take alcoholic beverages anymore, or smoke, or gamble. I would cordially share about how I found Christ, and what He did for me.

I would try my best to be generous to everyone. We would invite folks to our house for meals and prayer. Frequently, the men's house⁷ was an option for me to share Christ with men of all ages. I would sit with young people in market places, or other places of gathering, and share about Christ, and His saving power. Those, who were curious and enthusiastic, would come, in private, later, and, on many occasions, I led them to Christ.

The first place for me to share the gospel was at home. I would encourage my mother, wife, and children to pray together, though they didn't take it for granted at first. The family spread the word, and others came to our house fellowship, and, gradually, the fellowship grew. Songs, sung from the hymnals every night, ignited, and

⁶ Veronica Wago is my wife. She comes from Kogai village, west of Kundiawa town, in the Simbu Province of New Guinea. She hails from a decent and well-respected family. They were supportive in our times of peril.

⁷ Men's house is a building for all males. As in our custom, the man must not sleep in the family house. The men's house was a place where initiations took place (which is not so common now). This was one place we found to be fertile ground for witnessing.

prompted, others to come to our fellowship, who then made first-time commitments to follow Christ.

Our First Church

One Sunday morning, after a service, some of the brothers approached me, and enquired about building a church, because my house would no longer accommodate the large group of believers. I had to dismiss their proposal, because building materials were costly, and manpower was inadequate. It would also look bad in the eyes of the Catholic fellowship, and they would accuse us of sheep stealing. But, deep down in my heart, I was afraid. I feared that being a pastor, preaching from the pulpit, and before crowds, was not my calling. I was not born to be that. Exposing myself to the public would be a disgrace, because I was not an eloquent speaker, so I did my best to brush aside this proposal.

However, the brothers insisted, and persuaded me to agree. Unless I agreed with their proposal, they would disassociate from the fellowship, so I was somehow being forced to give in.

The brothers kept their promise. Land was acquired, and, in the space of one month, our new church building was completed. That fear of incapability struck me again. How was I going to organise my pastoral duties? I didn't want to preach from the pulpit, as it was the first in the history of my life. I was in total confusion as to where, when, how, and what I would actually do. Did I have to affiliate with other churches? I was also afraid about remarks from those who opposed me. "What is that creep doing? What is that convict up to?" It was all a nightmare for me.

Glory is due to God. He gave me the boldness, clarity of mind, and wisdom I needed. I preached from the pulpit, and Christians were all smiles, and proud of the new church. Sunday after Sunday, people poured into the church, and many gave their lives to the Lord. In three months, we extended the building again, to accommodate 150 people.

Why the Churches are Growing

In our contemporary world, people seek brilliance, and special qualifications, for church planters. However, at times, God passes by the person, who, from the human perspective, would be the most qualified to do the work, and, instead, He uses unlikely instruments. God was brewing up something unique, preparing us for pioneer church planting.

The Place of Prayer

Prayer is right at the heart of the Christian life. Our Lord spent much time in prayer. In John 17, we see Christ's priestly prayer. He made intercession for His people. His petitions related to spiritual things. Likewise, in almost all of Paul's epistles, he mentions prayer, which was vital in his life and ministry. He encouraged Timothy, and the church, to pray for all people (1 Tim 2:4). As Christians, it's our responsibility to pray to God on behalf of our unsaved friends and relatives.

Prayer has been found to be an essential element in every situation in pioneering church planting. In the early 1960s, missionaries, working in the Green River area of Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea found that prayer was a vital part of the ministry, right from the beginning.⁸ Through much prayer, Christian Brethren churches penetrated through the West Sepik and the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Other church planters, like Dick Grady and Glen Kendall say that, "The more time spent in prayer, the more effective is the church planter, regardless of field difficulties."⁹

The prayers of other people also affect church growth. There were Christians in Australia praying for a few believers of the ECFC that the church would grow, and it did. A letter, written to the believers in 1984, read in part, "God has a plan for you all. As you maintain a deep

⁸ Dennis Thorp, and Barbara Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea: 1951-1995*, Auckland NZ: Dennis & Barbara Thorp, 1996, p. 27.

⁹ Dick Grandy, and Glen Kendall, "Seven Keys to Effective Church Planting", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28 (October, 1992), p. 366.

experience by quiet time, Bible study, and prayer time, you will grow stronger.”¹⁰

And, several years later, among many other letters, the same author encouraged the believers that they were being prayed for daily. “I want you, and your elders, and deacons, and believers to know that you are all often in our prayers and thoughts.”¹¹

Here we see that these people have experienced the power of prayer, and likewise encouraged the believers to take the same initiative. They expressed the necessity of private and corporate prayer. Years later, Anton Bre was asked, “Why is it that ECFC is growing so much?” His simple answer was, “It’s because of the global prayer warrior.”¹² This believer was aware of the effectiveness of prayer in a broader perspective.

Now, all this is an indication that prayer is a priority. Likewise, in the ECFC context, the pioneer believers initiated prayer meetings, praying earnestly for their relatives, and friends, and the whole community, to know Christ. God’s Spirit convicted many. There were people coming to the fellowship and Sunday services. Church growth accelerated, and numerical strength increased. Prayer meetings in believers’ homes had a dramatic impact. Relatives and friends came to Christ. God also answered believers’ prayers, by healing the sick.

With much prayer and fasting, believers took the word to market places, and preached with boldness, and saw their faith rewarded, as they saw people raising their hands to receive Christ as their Saviour. Other believers, who had prayed for their relatives for years, found that their prayers were answered. There was a brother, who came to the Lord, after 13 years of consistent prayer. Without prayer, nothing would have been accomplished, no church would have been planted.

¹⁰ Geoff Williames, elder, Warragul church, Australia, letter dated 01/02/84.

¹¹ Geoff Williames, elder, Warragul church, Australia, letter dated 06/04/92.

¹² Questionnaire, 23/07/2000, Anton Bre, elder, age 35, ECFC, Gumine, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

The Place of Scripture

All human beings have to learn the way of salvation, through the scriptures. The assurance of faith comes through the Word of God, and makes men and women wise. That is why Paul draws out its importance in 2 Tim 3:16-17.¹³ So it is a key seed, from which our understanding of church planting should grow. Church planters use different methods of biblical teaching and evangelism in pioneer church planting. Wayne Gute tells of how the chronological method of Bible teaching was taught, and the impact it had with Guatemala's Mam Indians. The director taught Genesis at one of the Mam retreats, as he related it to their context. Those courses answered their questions as to origins about the world, the human race, the entrance of sin into the world, the confusion of languages, and the beginning of the Hebrew nation, then the coming of Christ, His ministry, death, and resurrection, and then Pentecost.¹⁴

Or, it can be "regular systematic teaching of the Bible",¹⁵ as related by Dennis and Barbara Thorp, which proved to be a fertile ground, preparing the advance of the gospel in Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea, which, today, has about 200 Christian Brethren churches. This was how the knowledge of God was provided, and the faith of the indigenous people was developed and multiplied.

There are many avenues of using the scripture, to bring people to the knowledge of Christ. Not all avenues will prove to be useful in all places and cultures. In the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea, the people already had a fair knowledge of God and creation, but their knowledge of Christ, and having a personal relationship with Him, was shallow. They still held on to ancestral worship, magic, polygamy, and adultery.

¹³ "All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

¹⁴ Wagne Gute, "How the Churches Grew in Guatemala Mam Indians", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 32 (April, 1996), p. 194.

¹⁵ Thorp and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea*, p. 27.

The believers were encouraged to buy Bibles in Pidgin, and read on their own. When they found out the truth, they encouraged their families and relatives. The message they had in their own Bibles was the very message being preached to them. Though they read in Pidgin, they shared in their own language, which enabled the believers to teach and preach, in their own vernacular, to their own people.

God called dedicated men and women, and anointed them for ministry among their own people, providing fellowship and encouragement, to maintain the unity of purpose, with freedom to develop their own lives. It was through this effect that Towa William came to know the Lord. When asked, “What do you think are the strong points within ECFC?”, he replied, “It was the word of God, preached, that stirred and provoked me to become a Christian, and go to ECFC.”¹⁶ Over the years, the believers of ECFC have been praying that the scriptures would be translated into their own vernacular.

The Place of Tribulation

In Acts 8, we read that the Jerusalem church began to suffer cruel persecution, instigated by Saul, and the believers scattered, and went everywhere (Acts 8:4). From the human perspective, it indeed was a dark day for the believers, because a member of their fellowship had been killed, while others were being chased like pigs.

When we look carefully from God’s perspective, this event was like a peanut planted in the ground, which would reap much fruit, as a result. The persecution was like scattering the seeds of the gospel to distant places. If it had not been for the persecutions, the church in Jerusalem would not have branched out.

Likewise, Wayne Gute tells that persecutions amongst Guatemala’s Mam Indians “meant being put in prison for a time for preaching the gospel in market places and public squares, or it meant economic

¹⁶ Questionnaire, 21/07/2000, Towa William, age 35, elder, Kimeb church, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

threats”,¹⁷ but the result was that it became the means of the rapid growth of the churches of Guatemala.

John Nevius relates that, in China, when native Christians persisted in asserting their purpose to follow their own convictions, resulting in brutal assaults, house burning, and driving Christians from their homes,¹⁸ the result was that they sustained their Christian identity, by overcoming evil with good. Here, we realise that persecution brings multiplication.

During the inception of ECFC, severe threats from major religions were experienced. Tribal fights were the worst. When Christians refused to fight, they were threatened with the loss of communal land, or were made a laughing stock, and were cast out, or their lives were threatened. If one died in the fight, it would be the believer’s life that would be taken.

However, in the midst of this, the believers stood firm in their faith, like lights across a wide expanse of a heavy-populated area. The real fruit was that many souls were won to Christ. One particular believer escaped to another district, witnessed to his relatives and friends, and planted another daughter church. Those, who studied the situation, began asking several questions, “Do we follow our leaders, and fight, and die? Do we stay with the mass? Should we pay attention to the Evangelicals?” There was openness to a new message, which did not exist before. This prompted discussion, rather than confrontation, and furthered the gospel in the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea.

The Place of Self-Governing

In this section, we will discuss the three basic elements of indigenous church growth. Paul, in his missionary enterprise, established many indigenous churches. The methods Paul used are relevant to us today in any culture. In fact, indigenous methods are New Testament methods. William McDonald, in his commentary on Acts, states:

¹⁷ Gute, “How the Church grew in Guatemala”, pp. 193-194.

¹⁸ John Nevius, *Planting and Developing of Mission Churches*, Nutley NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958, pp. 45-46.

Local churches were established, wherever people responded to the gospel. These assemblies gave permanence and stability to the work. They were self-governing, self-financing, and self-propagating. The apostles revisited the congregations, to strengthen and encourage the believers, and appoint leaders (Acts 14:21, 22; 15:41). In their missionary travels, the apostles, and their associates, were sometimes self-supporting (Acts 18:3; 20:34).¹⁹

He went on to say, “Every local assembly, in the early days of Christianity, was autonomous – that is self-governing. There was no federation of churches, with a centralised authority over them.”²⁰ There were no denominations, and denominational headquarters, like we have. Each local church was directly responsible to the Lord. When Paul left the infant believers in Thessalonica, they were instructed in the doctrines of the faith, and left on their own (Acts 17:1-10).

Melvin Hodges further explains that the Thessalonian church “functioned without Paul. More than that, there is no evidence that Paul had appealed for funds to erect church buildings, or support workers, who were to pastor the new churches, or even pleaded for one from Antioch or elsewhere.”²¹ They functioned on their own. The head of the church, the Lord Jesus, directly governed each one.

Self-government means indigenous leadership, evangelism, and pioneering church planting, so that each particular local church is able to sustain itself, without foreign support. William Smalley defines the nature of an indigenous church like this:

It is a group of believers, who live out their life, including their socialised Christian activity, in the pattern of the local society, and for whom any transformation of that society comes out of

¹⁹ McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 443.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

²¹ Melvin L. Hodges, *On the Mission Field: The Indigenous Church*, Springfield MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953, pp. 9-10.

their felt needs, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the scriptures.²²

In the light of the above statement, one of Alan Tippett's core principles, in the production of leaders in a local church, is:

The strength of the Island churches lay in the fact that they produced their own leaders at every level. Only when converts are effectively incorporated into the church fellowship, and provided with opportunities for participation and development, can this be made.²³

Incorporating converts into the church, and providing them with opportunities, is vital for multiplication and growth in any church. We recapture what Paul did with the infant believers in Thessalonica. Scripture indicates (Acts 17:1-10) that he was there for only three weeks, but we may presume that, as the converts were incorporated into the church, he may have provided opportunities for participation. If he hadn't, then that congregation of believers wouldn't have been sustained through crisis. Every believer, born into God's family, is unique, regardless of educational qualifications, seniority, status, and whether young or old, is not a problem with God. God equipped each convert with some kind of gift, to participate, and contribute, to the whole body. This was what happened with the ECFC.

ECFC was planted in early 1984, in a rural setting. It was the result of the witness of a foreign brother, but it was not he who brought about the pioneering of the church. Through his convert, the Lord brought in other believers, and incorporated them into the church. There was no foreign influence in its inception or partnership, no clear guidelines or directives were incorporated. None of the believers, in its inception, had any theological training, or any formal education. They were

²² William Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 496.

²³ Alan R. Tippett, *The Deep Sea Canoe*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1995, p. 138.

ordinary men and women of the village. But Christ was in their midst, and in control.

The early believers stood firm in their faith, and witnessed boldly for Christ. Church growth accelerated, and numerical strength increased. The indigenous believers proved they had the capacity to govern themselves. They wondered what should be done. The Holy Spirit led them back to the Bible, and they realised that the sole responsibility was in their hands. The management, welfare, teaching, and the furtherance of the gospel, were within their capacity.

Prayerfully, believers, with potential and special gifts, were chosen, and were prayed over, just like Paul did, when he revisited the local churches (Acts 14:2). The ministries were drawn from the scriptures in the light of 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1:5-9. The Holy Spirit burdened their hearts. They were more than eager to govern the church, without reserve, and unsalaried. This was the inception of the first governing body of the ECFC.

Their own way of worship was structured, prayer meetings were initiated, and Bible study groups were formed, lives were being transformed, and many people were involved in the ministry. This confirms what Melvin Hodges said about the capability of indigenous believers managing their own affairs

To assume that any native church perpetually requires constant supervision by a missionary is an unintended insult to their capacity to manage their own affairs. The most primitive tribes have some form of local and tribal government, adjusted to existing conditions. Necessity and common sense, even among the most backward and primitive, have so required. How much more, then, may those same natives, now washed by the blood of Christ, enlightened by the word of God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, give wise administration to the church and community.²⁴

It was a thrill to see uneducated villagers taking on onerous responsibility for the King. This enabled Christians to arrive at a clear

²⁴ Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 18.

understanding of Christian faith and conduct, though they had no written set of rules or doctrines. These unwritten doctrines and rules were acceptable to all the believers. They had a common understanding and agreement as to the points they considered vital for all believers to adhere to. The foundation of self-government was laid with the first church. Over the years, all the other daughter churches have been able to manage their own affairs, with their own indigenous pastors and elders taking full responsibility. The same principle of self-governing also applies to them. The standard of doctrine and conduct is always the converts' expression of the concept of their Christian life, as they find it in the scripture, and not a belief of any foreign missionary. This has a powerful effect on evangelism and growth.

However, there is a central body, known as the executive board, that is comprised of a pastor, and his assistant, and two elders from each local church, to oversee the welfare and functioning of the churches. This board also has no foreign influence whatever. This executive board deals with problems and needs, spiritual or physical, and its decisions are final.

The Place of Self-Propagating

William McDonald, in commenting on Acts 14:21 while elaborating on the truth of the church, and its importance in God's program, says, "A proper missionary programme has, as its aim, the establishing on the field of self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating churches. This was ever the purpose and practice of Paul."²⁵

Here we see that the New Testament church was self-governing, as we saw in our preceding section, and we see that the New Testament churches were self-propagating. Paul only revisited the churches to build up the believers in their faith in Christ, by teaching and preaching.

²⁵ McDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 442.

Melvin Hodges also went on to say that, “Self-propagation is the vital element of the missionary program. It is the true object of missionary endeavour. A church that does not propagate itself will soon die out. New Testament churches were self propagating.”²⁶

This has been so true with many of the local churches. Melvin further emphasises that, “Indigenous church principles recognise that the local church unit is the best medium for evangelism. When we have established a local church, with all its rightful and inherent vigour, we have followed God’s own method for propagating the gospel.”²⁷ Yes, propagating is, indeed, the vital element, and is a mark of a truly indigenous church.

Only when the young local church has seen itself as being directed by the word, and is enthused to look beyond its boundary, then it is a divinely-ordained unit in that particular area, in which God may choose to work. That was what has been happening with ECFC. However, in a broader view, we focus on the Pacific Island missionaries, who propagated the gospel in Papua New Guinea. Those island churches were truly indigenous, and were true churches. Alan Tippett explains further:

Does the young church see itself as being directly addressed by the words of the great commission? This was a matter in which the young churches of the South Pacific excelled. From Tahiti, and Tonga, from Samoa, Rotuma, and Fiji, national missionaries moved out into the West. It was this that the gospel spread as far as Papua New Guinea.²⁸

It is interesting to see that the Pacific Islands’ churches were God’s unit in the Pacific for propagating the faith, and the island national missionaries were content to work within that context. It is somewhat parallel to the apostles in the book of Acts.

²⁶ Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Alan R. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1987, p. 381.

ECFC saw that new converts had the potential of witnessing for Christ. They were enthusiastic, and eager to share their new-found faith with their relatives and friends. They were seeds for a potential harvest, in the light of Matt 3:38.²⁹ It was those new converts, whose witness during the week brought friends on Sundays. Seeing this trend, the church encourages new converts to spend time with God, read their Bibles, witness, and bring others to Christ.

The believers are encouraged, with opportunities and participation in all activities in the church: flower girls, sweeping and cleaning around the church, visitation, sharing, and leading in home groups, and realising that activity and responsibility makes the church grow, as it develops in the process. Precautions are taken not to dampen the enthusiasm of believers, as it was discovered that work done by a believer could wither and die out. Pastor John was a good example. A week after his conversion, he was encouraged to share, and lead in a home group, and has now become dynamic in his pastorate. He was asked, "What is it that makes you go to ECFC church?" "I go to Evangelical Christian Fellowship, because God had chosen me, and put me there to serve Him."³⁰

John was given an opportunity to participate, and, in his service, he has proven his capability. Believers were prompted by the Holy Spirit to go in pairs to share their faith in the surrounding villages. The 2 Tim 2:2 principle³¹ proved to be very effective. One of the daughter churches was established through this method in another village, and the main church has to sponsor a lay worker to take up the responsibilities there.

The believers in that daughter church went all-out for God, still applying the 2 Tim 2:2 principle, and were heavily involved in open-air preaching, and personal witnessing. The result was that two other

²⁹ Matt 13:38, "The field is the world and the good seed is the people who belong to the King" (GNB).

³⁰ Questionnaire, 21/07/00, John Angai, age 33, area pastor, Tembogai Evangelical Christian Fellowship church, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

³¹ 2 Tim 2:2, "Take up the teaching that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witness and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others."

churches were established. A lay worker from the first daughter church was sent there to become a full-time pastor. One other means of the 2 Tim 2:2 principle is the man-and-wife team. A Christian couple took the initiative to visit, and witness to another couple, who gave their lives to Christ, and converted their house into a church. That is how another church, in another province, was established. The husband is an elder in that church, and his wife is dynamic in coordinating and tutoring TEE³² in their area.

The home also is a very important force in the Christian life (Col 3:18-4:1). A believer, who lived a considerable distance from her church witnessed to her family and friends, and opened her home for house meetings. The main church assigned a lay worker, making him responsible for the home group, and to report the progress constantly.

Months later, there were many converts ready to be organised into a church, and they requested permission from the main church. Permission was granted, and the lay worker, who was instrumental, became their pastor. Church land, and land for subsistence farming for the pastor, were allocated by the believers. Food and tithes for the pastor were also negotiated and confirmed.

This was a full-time ministry for the pastor. Two things happened. We not only have the new church, but a new worker as well. The pastor, in turn, appointed elders and deacons, and began sending out the converts into the neighbouring villages. The process began all over again, with the gospel reaching an ever-widening area. Much of the success is the product of the labour of the indigenous converts. The pastor and elders see the necessity of teaching their own converts, so that they will all have a clear vision of the work of the church. Converts are encouraged, and pushed into active service, so that they, themselves, would know how to establish a group of converts, and form them into a local church, without the aid of a missionary, or any other official.

³² Theological Education by Extension (TEE). It is done by tutorials, in groups, or can be done as isolated students. It is useful for both believers and seekers.

The Place of Self-Supporting

Self-supporting is the New Testament method. In their missionary travels, the apostles, and their companions, were self-supporting. Acts 18:3 tells us that Paul supported himself by tent making, and, in Acts 20:34, Paul says that he supported himself, and also his companions, in their needs. This illustrates that, though the local churches sometimes supported them (Phil 4:10), they were not controlled by the local churches. Self-support is an apostolic method. Melvin Hodges says,

We find no hint that the churches among the Gentiles were supported by the Jewish congregation. Instead, we do find that the Apostle Paul solicits funds from the churches he founded to help relieve the distress among the famine-stricken saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:26), a striking contrast to today's procedure.³³

Here we see that the Jerusalem church did not support the Gentile churches in any way. We could also presume that, though the Gentile church had its own financial burdens, it was more than willing to assist the saints in Jerusalem. Should the indigenous church be self-supportive, or seek funds from elsewhere? Alan Tippett gives us another beautiful illustration about how an indigenous church supports itself.

I ought to mention that most of the building costs were carried out by the local church, itself. No overseas funds were used. It was the responsibility of the people to build their dormitory, and, if the roof leaked, the principal of the school would send a message to the people, who would soon come to the island with the necessary materials, and the building would be repaired. They tried to make the school self-supporting.³⁴

³³ Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, pp. 66-67.

³⁴ Tippett, *The Deep Sea Canoe*, pp. 149-150.

This is a story of an indigenous church that was self-supportive in running a Bible school. The burden was laid upon the indigenous church, itself, to meet the requirement of the school. This was also true in the Sudanese area of Java in Indonesia, as related by Warren Chastain.

The fellowship collected their own funds, and built a separate building, at some sacrifice. Unfortunately, one night it accidentally burnt down. A few years later, properties were bought, which still stand. A full-time evangelist, supported entirely by the church, leads it.³⁵

This is a church in an unreached Muslim area that is self-supporting. It is fascinating to see that their full-time evangelist is entirely supported by the fellowship. The burning of the building was not the end for them; they acquired new property. In another situation in Africa, Paul Pearlman wrote regarding the financial relationship of the Barunda people.

OCMF (Overseas Christian Missions Fellowship) aims to preserve the financial autonomy of the convert in relationship to himself, his family, and his peers. Economic structures should, at all costs, be preserved. The convert is told from the beginning that Christianity will only be credible among his Muslim friends if he stands without foreign financial assistance.³⁶

Expert missionaries believe that, without self-support, an indigenous church will die. During the inception of the ECFC, there were few believers, but their enthusiasm and eagerness, motivated by the Holy Spirit, prompted them to build a meeting place with a thatched roof. It was amazing to see believers taking responsibilities in their own hands, at the outset. One believer allocated a portion of his land for the

³⁵ Warren Chastain, "Establishing a Church in an Unreached Muslim Area", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 693.

³⁶ Paul Pearlman, "Reaching the Baranada People of Barunda", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, p. 705.

building, and others contributed material. Their cooperative effort resulted in the building being put up in less than two months.

After three years, the thatched-roofed church deteriorated and leaked during rainy seasons, and the land on which the building stood was being disputed. The believers met, prayed, and sought God's direction, and wrote for donations as well, but those circulars that were sent out were in vain, as there was not much response. Eventually, after intense prayer and fasting, they came to realise that the responsibility was in their own hands. As Christians, they had a role to play. They felt the sense of responsibility, and the privilege of giving sacrificially, to support the work of the church.

They began to pool their resources: in terms of pigs, chickens, coffee bags, vegetables, bananas, and taros, and contributions of money. All those items were sold, and, with the money, they bought land (one acre), and built a permanent church, with an iron roof, and a pastor's house. This was a tough experience for most of the believers. However, churches that sprang up later followed the same pattern.

Indeed, over the years, five daughter churches sprang up, two in another district, and one in another province. The same pattern was followed. Believers really felt the pain and suffering of bringing the churches to maturity, believers, who were employed in the public service, had to use much of their resources, voluntarily, without reserve. Some of our resources were donations from our Australian friends. Their donations were focused on literacy materials, audio tapes, and training materials. Though limited in amount, much appreciation is due to them, however, the bulk of the labour was laid upon the local believers themselves.

Believers were encouraged to tithe, and give generously toward the work of the church, and were taught to give, after they made their commitments to follow Christ. It was remarkable to see a keen believer, who had his tithe deducted from his salary, and directed to the church account, for the allowance for the pastors.

To ease the financial constraint, attempts have been made to place pastors into their own district, with the same dialect as the congregation. This brings about mutual understanding: believers living harmoniously with the pastor, with no distinctions, everyone living on the same level.

However, there are also hindrances. The pastor sees that preaching and teaching is an onerous task that requires much of his time, and less time is given to his self-support ventures, in terms of finance. The senior pastor of Barawagi church was approached recently, and asked, “What do you think is the weak point, which needs addressing in the ECFC churches?” His response was, “The church needs money to function, to expand, and extend, to penetrate to the unreached with the gospel.”³⁷

Although, over the last couple of years, the church, with contributions from individual believers, established a poultry project, and a store, to combat the pressing financial problems, this still needs to be developed, because management is poor and stagnant. There is no place for begging here. They are indigenous, they are self-supporting, but the going is still hard, particularly in their economic enterprise. Ross Clemenger explains:

Missionaries have long defined the indigenous church as one that is self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting. Envision the indigenous church as a three-legged stool with the three “selfs” forming the legs. Three-legged stools are handy implements round the home and farm. We used to sit on one to milk the cows. Sometimes one leg was broken. It would still be used with only two legs, but the milker was then put in a precarious position, somewhat at the mercy of the cow. There is a parallel between such a stool and the indigenous church in the developing world.³⁸

³⁷ Questionnaire, 21/07/00, Joseph Genebare, age 35, pastor, Barawagi ECFC, Kerowagi, Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea.

³⁸ Ross Clemenger, “Self-Support: The Missing Leg in the Development of Indigenous Churches”, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 13-1 (January 1977), p. 13.

The church needs capital from believers and friends, to boost it economically, and to encourage the believers to be economically self-reliant. Where the church wants to move forward in evangelism, there is still a deficiency in this area, but this is not the end of the world. The believers are looking forward to minimise this lack. What Hodges says seemed to be so true of ECFC: “The native church, left to its own, of course, has to suffer. It has to struggle, and sometimes its efforts seem to be so feeble.”³⁹

Perhaps there may be no option for ECFC, but the only avenue is the Lord’s way, the biblical way. The church should go back to tithing and offerings. The generosity of believers will move the church to new heights. However, praise God, ECFC has been sustained through awkward and perilous times, but has been self-supporting over the 17 years of its life.

The Place of Leadership Development

Training and development is essential in our Christian context today, because it is an ongoing need for every aspect of church life, and for producing potential leaders. ECFC recognises that it was essential to build on this, and generate enough indigenous leaders to ensure a continued acceleration of their church-planting programme. It is appropriate to repeat what Paul said to young Timothy (2 Tim 2:2). Paul here encouraged Timothy to go on faithfully for the Lord, but more than that, he was to provide for the spiritual growth of others. This was now his responsibility to transmit to others the inspired teaching he had received from Paul. Paul admitted teaching Timothy, in the presence of many witnesses, knowing that soon he would leave his earthly body, and Timothy would have the responsibility of imparting the same message of the gospel to reliable men, so that the task of evangelism would be an ongoing process.

Training and development is not easy. It requires a divine calling, and strength. In every church, God gives His gifts to men and women, with the potential and capability to lead, with the diverse gifts He has entrusted to them. God works in unique ways in any culture, but the

³⁹ Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, pp. 69-70.

product is the same, preparing men and women for leadership in His church, for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many missiologists, and expert church planters, have come up with various views and aspects of training and development of leadership. John Nevius says:

Young converts, before they are advanced to positions of prominence and responsibility, should also be trained. The processes of proving and training, though quite different and distinct, are carried on simultaneously, and largely by the same means. This training includes not only study, but work, trial, and, perhaps, suffering. It should be such as will fit a man to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

Nevius voiced a core principle of how a leader develops, particularly in the area of trial, work, and suffering. God raises strong, faithful, and dedicated leaders, through enduring the storms of life. Any Christian leader, who hasn't gone through suffering, and who is not prepared to do so, will never last. There are men and women believers in ECFC, who, for many years, have gone through severe trials and persecutions, who now comprise the leadership in the governing body.

When God calls a leader, and develops him, He looks at the heart, and not the physical appearance, or educational qualifications (1 Sam 16:1-13). Melvin Hodges made a contrast between the theologically-trained, and an illiterate, with moderate schooling at home, and found that the theologically trained does not last long in a village setting, and longs for the comfort of an urban life:

Whereas the local man, with a moderate amount of schooling, has no such trouble. Having being brought up in the district, they are part of the community. They are familiar with local customs. They speak the local dialect, and eat the local food. Moreover, their shops and homes are there. This gives stability to their work, and stability always makes for permanency.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Nevius, *Planting and Developing of Mission Churches*, p. 27.

⁴¹ Hodges, *On the Mission Field*, p. 5.

Likewise, God has raised up men and women with a moderate amount of schooling, through apprenticeships, participation, delegating of responsibilities, and mentoring for years, who have now become dynamic in ministry and leadership in their own culture, and with their own people, and in their own communities. We may object about people, with little or no training, not doing things in a proper way, yet we see Paul trusted them, and ECFC has proven this over the years. However, this does not mean that theological training should be neglected. In fact, the writer of this paper is from ECFC, and has attended the Christian Leaders' Training College at Banz, near Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

One of the best missiological minds, Alan Tippett, reflects some of the best principles of the role of an indigenous leader. He has this to say, when referring to a Fijian church:

I believe that one of the strengths of the Fijian church has been the fact that the leaders had a little more knowledge than the rank-and-file of the people. I say "a little more" because it is dangerous if the leaders are too far above the level of the people. In many lands, the mission of the church has failed, because people are living at a simple farming or fishing level, and their pastors have high university degrees, which do not relate to the occupations of the congregation. Certainly, leaders must be better trained than the people, but just enough so as to preserve their rapport, and inspire others to reach a higher level. This means that it is better to find leaders from among the people, than from outside. A leader has to identify with the people, and integrate within the social group with whom he works.⁴²

In the light of this statement, particularly the last two sentences, it is both interesting and confirmative, because ECFC has developed leaders from their own area, where the church is planted. The church realises that, in sending pastors from one district to another, some find it quite difficult to adjust, but developing and training a local person from among their own people gives positive results.

⁴² Tippett, *Deep Sea Canoe*, pp. 143-144.

Secondly, if the qualifications of the pastors mirror the level of their own people, and they take their pastorates as an onerous task, entrusted to them by the Lord, they will be keen to minister to their own people.

Throughout ECFC, men and women are chosen as leaders from among the converts. While participating in their role, they are assessed, as to their capacity. If proven in their capability and performance, they are entrusted with permanent ministries in the church. They are to be recognised as a person truly transformed by God. They must be people of mature judgment in the community, and ones who have understanding of their own race and culture.

Mature leaders take converts with them to camps, conventions, and other Christian gatherings, for them to get a broader view of Christianity. They have to eat, sleep, and travel together. The church has discovered that converts learn more from attitude than words. This was one of the best principles to develop leaders, and impart knowledge and vision to them. Of course, that is not only to develop pastors, but leaders for every ministry the church needs.

Pastors and elders are encouraged to solve difficult problems that may arise in the church, and are provided with adequate leadership advancement, and the responsibility of decision-making is also thrust upon their shoulders. The principle is “learn by doing”. The church discovered that it should put them to work, even though they may not be experienced, to allow them to make mistakes, so that they are able to learn how to deal with the administrative and other problems in the church.

The church runs quarterly leadership refresher courses, to add more skills to their lives and ministries. The leaders come with the understanding that, when they go back to their churches, they are to communicate what they have learnt to their congregations, and to build better public relationships in their communities.

Distance Theological Education by Extension (DTE) has become one of the fundamental correspondence courses for the last decade and a half. The headquarters are at Banz, Western Highlands Province,

Papua New Guinea. ECFC leaders have done many of the courses, and have proved the worth, by becoming dynamic Bible teachers in their respective churches. These courses ideally suit all environments, both urban and rural. For ECFC, this is the only means of theological training for Christians and leaders, except for the writer, who has completed a Bachelor of Theology at CLTC.

The Future

Discipleship, training, and an ECFC commercial enterprise are keys to the future of ECFC. Prioritising these essential aspects, and the implementation of them, is its agenda for rising to new heights in the area of evangelisation and church planting.

The Area of Discipleship

Jesus told His church to go and make disciples. ECFC belief is that we have lost sight of this command (Matt 28:19-20) as a priority. It is not just that we are good at it. We no longer recognise that it our calling. Disciple-making, is, of course, a process that requires an extended time in an individual's life. However, the process cannot begin if we are not bringing new people into the church. ECFC believes this is a top priority. The only proven method of bringing new people into the church is for us to recognise the importance of doing church planting.

Experience has proven that God calls men to discipleship, according to His own divine will, regardless of our educational qualifications. ECFC has seen that God chooses men and women, and places them in different locations, environments, and geographical areas, where those disciples would perform to the best of their abilities, through on-the-job training. In most cases, sufferings, trials, and hardships have produced genuine, reliable, fearless, and dynamic leaders.

An ECFC view of the process of discipleship for the future needs to be formed. That means moving away from concentrating on our personal and private development, and investing ourselves towards a life of usefulness to God, serving Him, and seeking first His will and kingdom. Individual members of ECFC need to appreciate their call, and realise that there is no limit to what God can do with a life lived for Him.

The Area of Training

Training of leadership is also a key strategy for ECFC's future. Over the last decade and a half, the church has concentrated on training indigenous church leaders, by way of apprenticeships, mentoring, and on-the-job training.

However, the Distance Theological Education by Extension courses offered by CLTC are the minimal theological education provided by the church. This has been the only means by which our leaders have been educated. It has proven to be fertile ground, because of its practicality and incentives. In addition, the course brings enrichment and enthusiasm to both tutor and students. ECFC has its own tutor, who tenderly encourages new students in their endeavours. The ECFC has produced many dynamic leaders more quickly where churches were planted, as it keeps up with the growth through DTE.

In the future, ECFC is aiming to set up a rural training course programme. A team of two or three can be responsible for the teaching of the courses. Someone visiting the ECFC for that purpose can also conduct it. It is further anticipated that DTE course notes will be used in these programmes. Each church will be responsible for selecting its own participants. Due to the increasing number of young people coming to churches, with a higher level of education, ECFC is looking forward to sending students to English-language Bible colleges. Likewise, those with a moderate level of education will attend pidgin-based Bible colleges.

Leadership of the ECFC rests heavily on the training of future leaders. That is a big challenge. Once the younger people have been trained, opportunity must be given for them to grow in the life of the church, and to work their way up into positions of responsibility. Therefore, the older leaders must be willing to accept the new approaches that the younger workers may bring, and be willing to share their position and authority.

ECFC Commercial Enterprises

The church has taught indigenous officials to administer the church, and informal education is provided to educate on how to conduct business meetings, or organise a church, and coordinate the evangelistic activity.

However, to generate funds for evangelistic activities and church planting, in addition to pastors' subsidies, the church has initiated a trade store, and a poultry project, through tithes and offerings. The project has actually had a decline in progress and development over the last five years, due to inadequate skills and expertise. This gradually resulted in the closure of the trade store. The poultry project is not doing very well. No financial statements and reports have been issued.

Over the last couple of years, the church has grappled with its self-support programme. The pastors are usually given minimal support, and there is no money available to finance evangelistic efforts. Caught between the church's desire to extend evangelistic and church-planting strategies, and the woeful lack of funds, the church wonders who could, and can, share their money-making ability and know how, so that they can support the church. ECFC needs to revive its commercial enterprises.

Conclusion

That is as far as the story goes, but it is not the end. It will not be finished until the Lord comes again to take His people to be with Him in heaven. ECFC members need to remember that it is only 14 years (1986-2000) since the inauguration of the first indigenous church in 1986, with five daughter churches being planted within a short space of time. How the story continues depends on whether the members walk strongly with the Lord, and serve Him faithfully within the church family. It is envisaged that every member should have equal rights and responsibilities for the future story. Whether it will be as exciting as the first 15 years rests on the earlier work of the faithful and dedicated indigenous leadership. It is an exciting story, but what can we learn from it? Perhaps it is an appropriate time to take stock.

A significant lesson that stands out through this paper is that God is a God of great power and might. He has shown His power, in the way He uses ordinary men and women, in a totally indigenous society, by the changes that the gospel brings. The power of the spirits has been broken; people have changed their cultures, as they learn what the Word of God says. Family life has been transformed, and individual lives had been renewed. This reminds us of God. Are the members of the ECFC experiencing that power today? We learn a great truth from Mark's gospel, "The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord walked with them, and proved to them that their preaching was true" (Mark 16:20). That is what the faithful workers of ECFC found, too. God has powerfully walked with the indigenous people, who went all out for God.

In conclusion, the exciting thing for our visitors to ECFC has been to see the people in the word of God. People have the scriptures in their hands. With any matter that is under discussion, a clear relevant statement from the Word is accepted as the final word. This commitment to biblical authority is the greatest asset of ECFC, as it faces the challenges ahead.

It's worthy to quote the ECFC motto, "And so I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

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BIBLICAL JUSTICE AND MISSION THEOLOGY

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Introduction

A criticism of the evangelical church worldwide has been that it has largely ignored issues of justice, as they relate to the mission of the church. A corrective, brought to evangelicals by more liberal branches of the church, has been an awakening to the biblical call to justice. This paper explores what “justice” means, particularly in its application to mission theology. It will be demonstrated that an application of the biblical context of justice into our ministry context is an essential element of any ministry.

Definitions

The word “justice” occurs 134 times in the NIV Old Testament.¹ The English-language term “justice” is most commonly, though not exclusively, a translation of the Hebrew word מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*). *Mishpat* is used 420 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, and is also translated as “judgment” or “righteousness”. The word is the most-significant Hebrew word for describing all forms of government and process, both human and divine.

¹ 116 times in the American Standard Version, 28 times in the King James Version, 138 times in the New American Standard Version, and 125 times in the Revised Standard Version.

“Justice” is also translated from **תְּשׁוּבָה** (*ts^edaqah*), a word more commonly rendered in English translations as “righteousness”.² As is the case with *mishpat*, this is a legal word, often used to describe relationships, where the parties are expected to be, or are, faithful to one another. On rare occasions justice is also translated into English from the Hebrew word **דָּיָן** (*diyn*), which, essentially, has the meaning of “governing”.³

In the New Testament, “justice” is most frequently translated from **δικαιοσύνη**, although the Greek word also has a broader meaning than can be fully described by the word “justice”. The word **δικαιοσύνη** is more commonly translated as “righteousness”, applied as a characteristic of a judge, or of justice, of the lives men should live before God, as a compelling motive for the conduct of life, and, particularly, in the writings of Paul, as a characteristic of God.

In Matt 12:18; 12:20; 23:23 the word “justice” is translated from the Greek **κρίσις**, while in Luke 18:3, 5, 7, 8 it is translated from **ἐκδικέω**.

Justice Throughout the Bible

Justice in Particular Books of the Bible and the Link to Missiology Deuteronomy

Foundational to the study of justice, and its link to missiology, in the book of Deuteronomy, is God’s selection of Abraham, which serves God’s missiological purpose for the nations. Through Abraham, and so, ultimately, through Israel, God planned to bring blessings to the nations.

The ethical and moral demands God placed on Israel significantly impact this purpose. Israel is to continue in the path of justice that the Lord laid down for Abraham in Gen 18:19, so the Lord might bring about what was promised to Abraham through Israel. Such particularity, with all its moral and ethical demands, has a universal

² The word is translated in a number of ways, for example in Gen 30:33 the NIV translates it as “honesty”.

³ Esther 7:25, Job 36:17 are examples of this word, which occurs some 23 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.

application. Throughout the book, the nations are watching Israel,⁴ and will see both blessing in obedience, and punishment in disobedience.⁵ Consequently, there is a thorough link between Israel's missionary role and the social justice they exhibit, both to those inside the covenant community, as well as to those outside.

The exposition of the social justice laws begins very early in Deuteronomy. In chapter one, Moses sets forth God's commands in relation to judicial matters. Judges are to judge righteously (*ts^edaqah*), in matters between Israelites, as well as in matters involving aliens (*גֵּר*, *ger*). Equal status before the law of God underpins the Hebrew law.⁶ No man, Israelite or alien, is to be feared, for justice is of God.

Deut 4:5-8 highlights the positive missiological significance of justice, as it is found in Deuteronomy. A constant theme running through the Old Testament is Israel's role as representative of Yahweh on the world stage. Obedience to the statutes of God was not for Israel's benefit alone, but also for the nations around them. Ideally the nations will:

hear about all these decrees, that is, they will notice, and enquire, and take interest in, the phenomenon of Israel as a society, with all the social, economic, legal, political, and religious dimensions of the Torah. And that social justice system will lead them to the conclusion that Israel, as a people, qualify as a great nation, regarded as wise and understanding.⁷

In chapter five Moses reiterates the Decalogue and the fourth commandment (observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy). Again, this law did not only apply to the Israelite, but to the *ger* as well. The breaking of this law, and the accompanying economic oppression, is a theme picked up strongly by Amos.⁸

⁴ Deut 4:6-8; 28:10.

⁵ Deut 28:37, 29:22-25.

⁶ See also Ex 12:49; Lev 24:22; Deut 29:10ff; 31:12ff.

⁷ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996, p. 47.

⁸ Amos 8:5.

An ethical question raised by Deuteronomy, and linked to the question of justice, relates to the moral rightness of Israel's invasion of foreign soil. Our answer must surely be found in an understanding of the universality of God's justice and His determination to see justice done, for clearly the wickedness of the Canaanites is the harbinger of their destruction. God's impartiality in judgment is demonstrated in that what he did to the Canaanites in punishing them for their wickedness, he also threatened to do and ultimately did to the Israelites because of their consistent wickedness.

Deut 10:17-19 begins with an affirmation of Yahweh's universal ownership of the world, and then brings justice down to a very intimate level. Yahweh's justice is demonstrated through His love for the alien. This statement is followed by what Wright calls the Deuteronomic equivalent to the second greatest commandment.⁹ Israel is to respond to the love of God, which was demonstrated to them through the Exodus, by showing love to the alien.

Summary

"Walking the way of the Lord" is an accurate summary of the message of Deuteronomy. "It implies a whole orientation of personal and social life toward the values, priorities, and will of God, including commitment to justice and compassion, integrity and purity."¹⁰

The Psalms

The Psalms are a collection of 150 cultic songs of praise, which express the relationship between God and His people. Justice and righteousness are mentioned a number of times through the Psalms.¹¹ A number of the references describe justice in the terms identified above, things, such as, justice being a character quality of God, and a moral requirement for the righteous.¹²

⁹ "Fear the Lord your God and serve Him" (Deut 10:19), Wright, *Deuteronomy*, p. 150.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹ *Mishpat* and *ts'daqah* are frequently used together.

¹² A sample of references would include Ps 9:16, which speaks of God having been revealed through his justice; 11:7 and 45:6-7, which affirm God's love of justice; and 97:2, which speaks of justice as the foundation of the throne of God.

The Psalms affirm the universality of God's justice. The practical outworking of this is identified in Ps 9:8, God will judge the world in righteousness, and exercise judgment for all people with equality. Despite Israel's election, they are not advantaged, in relation to the judgment of God. Yahweh exercises His judgment and justice impartially. What is the foundation for this? The universality of God's judgment is a right of God, based on His creation, and lordship over all creation. This theme is picked up repeatedly in the Psalms. Everything in creation owes its genesis to the Lord God, who is a God of justice.¹³

It is significant that justice is mentioned so frequently in the context of worship. The prophets are blunt in their condemnation of Israel's worship, when it is undertaken in an environment where justice is lacking. A good relationship with God is impossible, where fellow human beings are being treated unjustly.¹⁴ True worship can only exist in the context of justice. Without justice being exercised, worship will always be lacking.

The Psalmist forges a strong link between justice and the poor. God's justice is exercised on behalf of the poor,¹⁵ and God's representatives, such as the king, are also expected to exercise justice on behalf of those who are oppressed.¹⁶

The 8th-century Prophets: Amos and Micah

The 8th-century prophets prophesied at a time of relative prosperity for the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah. Amos prophesied in the context of prosperity, idolatry, extravagant indulgence, luxurious living, immorality, corruption of judicial procedures, and oppression of the poor. Amos called for social justice, as an indispensable expression of true piety. Likewise, Micah prophesied during a time of economic prosperity under kings Uzziah and Jotham, but at a time which was also characterised by a strong current of materialism, disintegrating values, and reliance on the rites, rather than the meaning, of religion.

¹³ Ps 97:2.

¹⁴ See also Hos 12:5; 10:4, 11-18; Amos 2:6; 5:11; Mic 6:5-8.

¹⁵ Ps 140:12.

¹⁶ Ps 72:1-4.

Amos 5:7 and 5:12 appear to be the foundation to the charges laid by the prophet against the people, who turn justice into bitterness, and oppress the righteous, and deprive the poor. The people, to whom Amos addresses his prophecy, had divorced the ethics of their businesses, politics, and social structures from the cult. "They think worshipping God is one thing, and that business or politics is another, and that there is no connection between the two worlds."¹⁷

The message of Amos highlights an underlying principle, which has already been identified, in the discussion on the Psalms and justice. True worship of God can only take place in an environment, where the justice of God is being appropriated by people. The complaint, Amos has against the people, is their attempt to participate in the ritual of cultic worship, without an attendant outworking of justice. Amos is quite emphatic in his belief that the two necessarily compliment one another. There is a strong message for the contemporary church in the historical message of Amos.

Micah's theme of justice not also touches the religious function of the society, but also the political, judicial, and economic powers. Like his contemporaries, he prophesied at a time, when possession of land was the primary measure of wealth, and disenfranchisement from the land almost inevitably led to poverty.¹⁸ Unlike Isaiah, who presents concrete accusations, with concrete consequences,¹⁹ Micah underlines the human and moral dimension of the crimes, and sees the outworking of injustice

¹⁷ Amos 8:4-6. Norman Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, London UK: Epworth Press, 1944, p. 55.

¹⁸ It is important to note the role the jubilee legislation had in protecting the primogenital rights of land ownership. The jubilee ideally forced the reversion of ownership to the original landowner, a law designed to protect those who, for whatever reason, had become landless. Some question the practical application of this law, even suggesting that the law was only ever an idealistic principle [see Raymond Westbrook, *Property and Family Law in the Bible*, Sheffield UK: JSOT, 1991, pp. 1-20], however, the law highlights two things: (1) All land ultimately belongs to Yahweh, and His people are but landlords, given care of the land; (2) The justice of Yahweh is a superior justice.

¹⁹ Is 5:8.

in very human terms, using graphic language to describe the injustices.²⁰

Micah also gives us a very poignant summary of what the Lord actually requires of His people, “to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”.²¹

Isaiah 40-55

The entire book of Isaiah is a rich quarry of information relating to the theme of justice. Justice plays an important part in Isaiah’s formulation of his theology of God. God’s holiness, judgment, and eschatological rule, are all characterised by justice.²² The corollary of this is that God requires justice to be a characteristic of His people, and, throughout the book, Israel is severely criticised for failing to administer justice.²³ The experience of the exile is attributed to Israel’s covenantal unfaithfulness, which has included a failure to administer justice. Is 58 is perhaps the most striking of the passages in Isaiah, which makes this link, for the type of fast, the Lord chooses, is to loose the chains of injustice, untie the cords of the yoke, and set the oppressed free.

Deutero-Isaiah is of particular interest, because of the focus on the nations, and the link between justice and the nations. The interpretation of the Hebrew word *mishpat* is very significant, for the way in which the link between mission and justice is understood. As has been identified in the discussion above, there are subtle nuances in the meaning of the word, and in the context of Deutero-Isaiah, the uses of *mishpat* could be positive references, or negative references, when they are applied to the nations. Consequently, the scholarly world is divided over what the missiological emphasis actually is in these chapters. On one side of the debate, stand the particularists,²⁴ who argue there is no message of salvation for the nations in these chapters. Universalists,²⁵

²⁰ Mic 3:1-3; 7:2-3.

²¹ Mic 6:8.

²² A significant number of references could be supplied, including Is 5:7; 9:7; 11:4; 16:5; 28:6; 30:18; et al.

²³ Is 10:2; 56:1; et al.

²⁴ Represented by Norman Snaith, DeBoer, R. N. Whybray, et al.

²⁵ Represented by scholars, such as Westermann, Blenkinsopp, Davidson, et al.

however, understand terms such as *mishpat*, and phrases such as “covenant for the peoples, and light to the nations” to have universalistic applications. Missiologists, consequently, understand Is 40-55 as the climax of Old Testament missionary consciousness.

To advance the discussion, we need to be able achieve a synthesis between the views, which appears to lie in being able to maintain a tension between universalism and particularism. Throughout these chapters, there is a strong emphasis on the restoration of Israel, and part of a focus on the restoration of Israel is a focus on the judgment of Israel’s enemies, particularly Babylon. However, the pledge of restoration for Israel contains within it an even-greater restoration, for the restoration of Israel goes back to the Abrahamic covenant, with the attendant blessing for the nations.

Mishpat is, therefore, both a positive and a negative concept in Deutero-Isaiah. Mowinckel and Gelston²⁶ understand *mishpat* in a way similar to its use in 2 Kings 17:26 or Jer 5:4 and 8:7, where it refers to an ordinance, or right religion. Thus, they argue, the justice, which the servant delivers, is the establishment of the practice of true religion among the nations, ultimately serving the goal that the prophet sets out to achieve, “so that, from the rising of the sun, to the place of its setting, there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is no other.”²⁷ Justice, according to this interpretation, is intimately linked to the missionary nature of Deutero-Isaiah. Furthermore, the notion of God’s justice, as a light to the nations, is a fairly explicit reference to the missionary nature of justice.²⁸

The New Testament

While the missiologists continue to identify the missiological nature of the Old Testament, few attempt to deny the vibrant mission-mindedness of the New Testament. Where does justice fit into centrifugal mission?

²⁶ A. Gelston, “The Missionary Message of Second Isaiah”, in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965), pp. 308-318.

²⁷ Is 45:6.

²⁸ Whybray argues this is an obscure term, which has no salvation overtones, however, a word study, which looks into the way the phrase is used in other parts of the bible (cf. Ps 119:105) demonstrates it is frequently used as a positive reference to salvation.

The theme of justice, as a characteristic of God, continues very strongly. God will judge the world in righteousness, the kingdom of God is about righteousness, and God's righteousness abounds forever.²⁹ In Jesus Christ, however, the righteousness of God has been revealed in a new and significant way. This is a major theme in Romans, where Paul argues the gospel he preaches is entirely consistent with, indeed, actually reveals, the righteousness of God. This righteousness is available to people, quite apart from the law, through faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, individuals are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to righteousness – righteousness available to anyone who believes.³⁰

One danger, we need to avoid, is theologising the concept of justice. Justice was to be a characteristic, which set apart the nation of Israel in Old Testament times. The survey, above, indicates God's continual desire for His people to be a people of justice. This does not change in the New Testament period. The newly-born Christian community was to be characterised by righteousness, which had (and continues to have) strong ethical implications. The gospel authors highlight justice as a key theme in the mission of Jesus. Luke works with the theme of the coming of Jesus as Jubilee. Luke 4:16-21 is frequently cited by those, who emphasise Christian social responsibility. The Beatitudes have a strong theme of political and social justice underlying them. The New Testament concept of justice is in no way discontinuous with that of the Old Testament, justice continues to be a characteristic, which defines the people of God in the new community.

Who are the Poor?

There are a number of cognates used to describe the poor in the English Bible. Words such as "poor", "needy", "downtrodden", "afflicted", or "humble" are often used to describe those in particular need. As the theme of justice frequently intersects with the concept of the poor, it is useful to understand what this term means in the context of the Bible.

The Hebrew word אֲנִי (*ani*, "poor") is used 77 times in the Old Testament, and, literally, denotes a person, who is bowed down, or who

²⁹ Acts 17:1; Rom 14:17; 2 Cor 9:9.

³⁰ Rom 3:21, 22; 6:18, 19, 20; 10:3.

occupies a lowly position. It is a word, which denotes relationship, though, strikingly, it is never contrasted to “rich”, but with the man of violence, or the oppressor, who puts the *ani* in his lowly position, and keeps him there.³¹ The concept of the poor does not emerge in the patriarchal period. Moses makes reference to the justice, which is to be extended to the *ger*, but no mention is made of poor, precisely because the nomadic and tribal nature of Israel’s existence precluded the possibility of poor existing among them. Tribal society was such that everyone shared in the riches of the tribe, even those who were welcomed in as outsiders. The poor, as a social class, really only developed in Israelite culture, as the people became more settled, and land ownership became more common.

Boerma concludes that, in the Bible, poverty is directly connected with the structures, within which men live. He says, “Poverty does not develop of its own accord. People do not become poor, because they are idle, they become idle, because they are poor.”³² Boerma further observes that, in all the early Israelite literature, the poor man is never seen as the cause of poverty, only in the later texts, such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which emerged from the royal courts, is the poor man blamed for his situation.

There is a strong link between righteousness and the poor. The survey of the biblical concept of justice reveals defending the rights of the poor is an essential part of the biblical way of justice for individuals and governments.³³ The Messiah, who embodies the righteousness of God, will be found on the side of the poor. Jeremiah equates the care for the needy with knowing God.³⁴

In the New Testament, the concept of the poor is pervasive, as well as quite broad. The Greek terms denote the working poor, who have no property, and who survive on a day-to-day basis, and the beggar, who is totally reliant on the generosity of the passer-by. Theologically, the

³¹ Conrad Boerma, *Rich Man, Poor Man, and the Bible*, London UK: SCM Press, 1979, p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ Prov 29:7, as an example.

³⁴ Jer 22:16.

word is much more descriptive, and defies attempts to spiritualise the word, so that it only means “sinner”, or to allow the word to merely identify the abject poor.³⁵ Both of these meanings are valid, but are only part of a more substantial understanding of who the poor are in the gospels. The New Testament continues to identify the poor as those who are economically and socially disadvantaged, however, “the poor” is also descriptive of believers,³⁶ and is often used as a synonym for the people of God.³⁷ The New Testament does not see a direct correlation between the poor and social class.

What Should the Biblical Concept of Justice Mean to a Church? The Need to Differentiate Between Justice and Charity

There is an important question, which must be resolved, before a complete redefinition of our theology of justice and mission can take place. Is our concern, and subsequent response, a response of justice, or a response of charity? Doing justice, in a particular context, presupposes that what is being worked against is some form of injustice. Stanley Hauerwas contends that the current emphasis on justice and rights, as the primary norms guiding the social witness of Christians is a mistake.³⁸ All too easily, the church latches onto justice, as a means by which it might speak into the popular culture.³⁹

The crux of the problem is that, as the church, we are easily influenced by the dominant culture, of which we are a part, when we formulate our concept of justice.⁴⁰ “Out of an understandable desire to be politically

³⁵ The Christian church can be accused of spiritualising the term in passages such as Luke 4:18; 6:20; and 7:22, while certain liberation theologies have identified poor in these passages as the abject poor, who have been dispossessed, because of political or economic oppression.

³⁶ Jam 2:5-7.

³⁷ The poor widow of Luke 21:1-4 is an example of one who was materially poor, but who was also described as poor, because she demonstrated a piety, which was wholly dependent on God.

³⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Politics of Justice”, in *After Christendom: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are a Bad Idea*, Homebush West NSW: Anzea, 1991, p. 46.

³⁹ Hauerwas, “The Politics of Justice”, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Douglas Hall argues, since the Constantinian era, the church has been captured by the dominant culture, and, to have a prophetic voice in the future, needs to undertake a deliberate disengagement from the culture, rework theology, so there might be an

and socially relevant, we lose the critical ability to stand against the limit of our social orders.”⁴¹ Our societal view of justice is that justice is undertaken as a response to perceived wrongs, that is, the *prima facie* motive for justice is the need to grant equality of rights. I would argue this is a misinterpretation of the biblical concept of justice, as it is applied to the contemporary mission situation. Such an interpretation emerges from the creation of a dichotomy between the love of God and the justice of God, an interpretation which emerges whenever Christian ethics speak of justice, as a demand, which must be fulfilled, before we can speak of love.⁴²

In the Christian context, justice is not only something we do, but it is something we are. Justice certainly involves seeking to ameliorate unjust social circumstances related to economics and social issues, however, Christian justice is predicated by love. Love and justice are not dichotomous, they are complimentary. Our calling in mission to all people, but especially to the poor, is first to love them, which means unconditionally accepting them. Wogaman says “Christian love . . . recognises, and acts on the basis of kinship – even when it does not feel like it.”⁴³

Consequently, what might be done on behalf of a brother or sister, in the name of justice, may, in actual fact, be considered charity, an act of gracious love, demonstrated in a situation, where there is no obvious corollary of injustice.⁴⁴

appropriate reengagement. Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press, 1997, p. 43f. The thesis of this paper is very similar.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴² J. Philip Wogaman, “Toward a Christian Definition of Justice”, in *Transformation* 7-2 (1990), p. 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ One might be accused of splitting hairs in defining justice and charity in such a way. However, the fact remains our motivation for being people of justice is not primarily drawn from our societal understanding of justice, as giving people rights, which are due to them. It may be true that, in every case where justice is needed, there is an underlying injustice, however, Christian justice is born from love, not responsibility. The integrity of our Christian witness will only be maintained in the face of this type of application of justice.

3.2 Justice Means Restoration to Community

Restoration to community was a key theme behind the Israelite Jubilee legislation. The community was to take those who were in danger of falling out of community, because of their economic distress. Justice is restoration to community, a restoration, which needs to be worked toward, and which must take place at two levels:

- (a) Community participation includes physical life itself, political protection, and decision making, social interchange, and standing, economic production, education, culture, and religion. Community membership means the ability to share fully, within one's capacity and potential, in each essential aspect of community.⁴⁵
- (b) Incorporation into the community of God. At this point, we must deviate from the liberationist's concept of salvation, which sees salvation as liberation from economic and political oppression. Christian justice in mission, which degenerates into social action alone, is not a holistic conception of justice.⁴⁶ Justice entails restoration of the broken relationship with God, and inclusion, as a participant in the community of God.

Justice Requires a Redefinition of the Church's Ambience

Many churches work hard at creating a family atmosphere, a task made easier, in many cases, by the fact that membership of many churches is defined according to clan, or family lines. Redefining the believer, as a member of the wider family of God, as a priority over membership of familial lines, clans, or cultural people groups, is an essential task of

⁴⁵ Stephen Charles Mott, "The Partiality of Biblical Justice", in *Transformation* 10 (1993), p. 25. Also Wogaman, "Toward a Christian Definition of Justice", p.20, who argues that, as justice is defined by human faith, it means doing what is required to make it possible for everybody to belong in the community.

⁴⁶ An enormous amount of literature has been written on discussing the relationship between Christian outreach and Christian social action, authors, emphasising the priority of one over the other, frequently in response to the kind of kingdom-of-God model they are working with. For example, the priority of social action was given an enormous boost, as a response to the post-millennialist understanding of the kingdom, which looked toward an age of prosperity and well-being.

theology in Melanesian churches. In a culture, where family values are declining, a community, which is an oasis of traditional values, has an important ministry, however, there comes a point, where affirming this type of culture can become very exclusive and consequently unjust. While we are very quick to criticise the Pharisees for their exclusivism, unfortunately, honest self examination will reveal that many of us are not too far removed from the same self righteousness, when it comes to creating the type of ambience we are comfortable with in the life of the church. Exclusivism does not necessarily take place according to family lines, it can be affected, according to economic or social factors as well. Unfortunately, church members are often only open and friendly toward people they like, or to people who are like them, anyone who is too different may receive a subtle message that they are not welcome. The homogeneous unit principle can be subconsciously applied by a fellowship in its body life, so that people, who do not fit the mould, are, even unwittingly, excluded.

The Application of Biblical Justice Will Require a Radical Redefinition of Mission and Evangelism

There is a Need for the Church to Revisit its Purpose for Existence

If the church is to be genuine in its attempts to reach the lost, there needs to be a radical change in methodology,⁴⁷ as well as ambience. Where does justice fit into this? Is 61:1f indicates that justice is a foundational element in evangelism. Jesus quoted the same passage at the commencement of His own ministry.⁴⁸ Zorilla says, “One cannot really grasp the biblical message of evangelism without a mature understanding of justice. Evangelistic proclamation is the expression, and the result, of the grace of God. This is deeply rooted in His justice.”⁴⁹ A Christian community, which understands the meaning of justice, will be more interested in mission than maintenance.

⁴⁷ Less emphasis on event related outreach and much more on relationally based evangelism.

⁴⁸ Luke 4:18-19.

⁴⁹ Hugo Zorilla, *The Good News of Justice: Share the Gospel: Live Justly*, Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1988, p. 35.

There Needs to be a Deliberate Blurring of the Division Between Proclamation of the Gospel and Social Action

Ronald J. Sider argues salvation is personal, communal, individual, and corporate.

We dare not reduce salvation to interpersonal transformation of relationships with the neighbour, because, right at the centre of salvation, is renewed relationship with God. We dare not reduce salvation to a personal relationship with God, in justification and sanctification, because, right at the heart of salvation, is the new redeemed community.⁵⁰

Few can deny the link there is, throughout the New Testament, between mission and social justice. Jesus' summary of His own mission in Luke 4:18-19 makes this clear. Throughout His ministry, Jesus had special regard for the poor, affirming the practice of alms-giving in Matt 6:1-4, teaching about the need for concern for the neighbour, irrespective of ethnic background, in Luke 10:25-37, and teaching about humanitarianism in Matt 25:31-46. The theme of justice runs strongly through the Beatitudes. In Romans, Paul indicates one cannot be saved, nor have real peace with God, if one does not do justice, and practice love, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The implications of justice, at a social level, must not be ignored, in the context of mission and evangelism, nor should concerns for social justice be the only factor, which motivates mission and evangelism.

Being People of Justice Impacts Worship in the Community

A proper relationship with God is impossible where His people tolerate injustice.⁵¹ The Psalms highlight that true worship can only exist when justice is being exercised. Worship, without justice, is perfunctory worship.

The Development of a Fuller Doctrine of God and Humanity

The development of a fuller doctrine of God means understanding God, as one who invades both the sacred and the secular. God is not a God

⁵⁰ Ronald J. Sider, *One-Sided Christianity: Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1993.

⁵¹ Hos 12:5; 10:4; 11-18; Amos 2:6; 5:11; Is 5:23; Mic 6:5-8.

of the “gaps”. Understanding biblical justice requires us to recapture the truth of God as God of the nations, that is, of all people: the poor and the needy included. God’s concern for justice extends to all people.⁵²

What Kind of Theological Reflection Needs to Take Place so that the Current Inadequacies in the Church are Addressed?

Six specific needs were addressed above, but we need to consider the type of theological reflection necessary, so they might be realised. The reflection undertaken needs to recapture the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God, and the role the church has to play in the kingdom of God.

Historically, there has been some confusion as to what constitutes the kingdom of God, and what is the relationship between the church and the kingdom. Various scholars have argued the kingdom is non-eschatological,⁵³ thoroughly-eschatological,⁵⁴ fully-realised,⁵⁵ and eschatologically-inaugurated.⁵⁶ The Bible describes the kingdom as future, imminent, and present,⁵⁷ and so the best way of describing the present state of the kingdom seems to be that proposed by Ladd: inaugurated eschatology. The kingdom of God was inaugurated with the coming of Jesus, continues in the present age, and, at the return of Christ, will be consummated.

Unlike the situation that has developed in the past, the church must never identify itself as the kingdom of God. The church is a community of the kingdom, but never the kingdom itself.⁵⁸ Ladd

⁵² Amos 1:2; Nah 1:1-15.

⁵³ A. Harnack, and other 19th-century liberals.

⁵⁴ J. Weiss, A. Schweitzer, et al

⁵⁵ C. H. Dodd.

⁵⁶ J. Jeremias, G. E. Ladd.

⁵⁷ Future: Matt 6:10; 8:11-12; 13:24-30; 47-50; Mark 14:25. Imminent: Mark 1:14-15; 9:1; Luke 10:9; Matt 10:7. Present: Matt 11:28; 12:28; Luke 16:16; 17:20-21.

⁵⁸ George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, Waco TX: Word Books, 1964, p. 258.

quotes H. D. Wendland: “The church is but the result of the coming of God’s kingdom into the world.”⁵⁹

Howard Snyder argues a workable theology of the kingdom of God does a number of things, including the provision of a convincing account of the spiritual and physical dimensions of existence, a theology of the environment, an overall framework for affirming and understanding economics, politics, and social interaction, and a theology of Christian experience, which meets deep personal human needs, and yet is engaged with society and a global perspective.⁶⁰

Subscribing to this kingdom framework has enormous implications for the missiological application of justice. The administration of justice is not to take place in some other time, rather, as the church participates in the reality of the kingdom, in this age, so justice is a present requirement.

Justice is found at the heart of the theology of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament expectation of the coming of the kingdom was an inbreaking of the righteousness of God establishing a new order (cf. Is 61:1ff). Jesus’ application of this text to His own work and ministry clearly indicates His understanding of the place of justice in the coming of the kingdom.

An unmistakable evidence of the coming of the kingdom is the proclamation of the gospel to the poor, not only in evangelistic effort (Matt 11:5b), but also as tangible physical evidences: the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the lepers cured, and the dead raised. In the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the church is called on to be advocates of justice first, because, following the personal example of Jesus, necessitates this response, but also because Jesus clearly stated administration of justice was a necessary requirement for the true

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 261, quoting H. D. Wendland, *The Kingdom of God and History*, H. G. Wood, ed., London UK: G. Allen & Unwin, 1938, p. 188.

⁶⁰ Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1991, pp. 133-134. Snyder includes a number of other factors, which have been edited for brevity.

church. The parable of the sheep and the goats highlights the place social justice issues have as primary kingdom values.

The Beatitudes are, perhaps, the most comprehensive statements on the place of justice in the kingdom community. Although they are stated in the indicative, they contain implicit imperatives. As Jesus shared them, He did not do so simply wanting to reassure His followers of God's approval, but also to provoke certain ethical commitments from them. They speak very strongly about the position the Christian community should have on poverty, hunger, misery, and injustice, in the name of God's kingdom. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" may be a reference to a righteous standing before God, if understood according to the Pauline description of righteousness, but, in the context of Matthew, it refers to ethical conduct, which is coterminous with the will of God.⁶¹

The Beatitudes make a necessary link between justice and the present reality of the kingdom. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is a present desire, a longing to see God's will done in human life, as He intended it. Furthermore, Jesus makes it clear that God's blessing falls upon those who have a passionate longing for justice in the present age, not only those who think it is a good idea.

A reflection on the presence of the kingdom of God in the present age means the church is to be the strongest advocate for justice, both within the church, and within the community. The proclamation of the kingdom, as a present reality, means the church must be prepared to practise the requirements of being part of the kingdom, to seek justice, in the social, political, and economic spheres of community. Proclamation of the kingdom of God, without an attendant focus on justice, will necessarily mean the proclamation of an incomplete gospel, or worse, a damagingly-syncretistic gospel, which only addresses a select facet of society.⁶²

⁶¹ Matt 5:10, 20; 6:1, 33 make clear the ethical and practical nature of the righteousness Matthew is referring to.

⁶² This is perhaps the crux of the present problem. Material prosperity is by no means an accurate measure of the blessings.

Conclusion

Throughout the latter parts of this paper, I have deliberately avoided giving a prescriptive list of things that need to be done to address the lack of focus on justice, which is evident in many evangelical churches. This has not been done to frustrate those of practical persuasion, but because the practical steps can only come as a result of theological reflection. Faithful proclamation of the present reality, and anticipated consummation of the kingdom, will necessarily mean justice is foundational to ministry. Anything less, is not a true understanding of the nature of the kingdom. A biblical theology of the kingdom of God can be applied to any church or ministry situation, not only the one addressed by this paper. The praxis of ministry must grow out of the theology, and foundational to the theology of the kingdom of God, is justice.

As has been demonstrated, the concept of justice is a broad and pervasive one. The affluent evangelical church needs to recapture the mandate to do justice, as a requirement of participation in the kingdom of God. The need to address this issue is an urgent one, for one of the inescapable questions at the final judgment will be, “How have we reacted to those in need of justice?”

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