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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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ADDRESS (Editorial, Subscriptions, and Manuscripts):
Melanesian Journal of Theology
Christian Leaders' Training College
PO Box 382, Mt Hagen, WHP
Papua New Guinea

Email: mjt@cltc.ac.pg
Phone: (675) 542-2797

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology in Melanesia. 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 contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians are welcome.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith within Melanesian cultures. The Editorial Team will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, Editorial Team, or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to meet the requirements of the journal.

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

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EDITORIAL

In the first article, Ossie Fountain critiques three approaches, used by the Christian Brethren church Bible schools in Papua New Guinea, to communicate theology. For each of the three approaches (topical, commentary, inductive), he provides insightful breakdowns of their strengths and weaknesses in relationship to contextualisation and globalisation. Ossie has spent many years teaching in Papua New Guinea, and his article shows a depth of discernment that should challenge every educator. His article is part three of a four-part series.

Next, Daniel Johnson grapples with contextualisation within a Muslim society. He asks, "Is it possible to be a child of God and fall under the broad national and cultural category of being a Muslim?" Daniel argues that contextualisation must not be neglected, because it is both biblical and strategic. He suggests four contextualisation principles, to be used within a Muslim context: adopt Muslim forms, maintain ***ummah*** (world community of Islam), coach new believers, and allow gradual transformations. He agrees there is a risk of syncretism in contextualising, however, that is outweighed by the failure to contextualise. The article is well researched and thought-provoking for anyone interested in ministry to Muslims.

Jon Paschke, based on his experience of teaching for many years in Vanuatu, gives specific recommendations for teaching cross-culturally in a Melanesian context. These include issues related to group, time, gender, kinship, and language, to name a few. He presents biblical arguments for teaching Christians in small groups, and gives ample evidence for its validity, in a Melanesian context. Jon presents a solidly-researched article that incorporates contemporary theories of adult education with traditional learning patterns of Melanesians. For a practical approach to teaching cross-culturally, read Jon's article.

Victor Schlatter, in an intriguing article, shows how the Bible came alive for the Waola people of Papua New Guinea, once they related with the Hebrew culture of the Bible. He attributes this to the fact that third-

world countries, unlike Western countries, are uninfluenced by Hellenism. Victor incorporates an interesting blend of visits to Jerusalem with living among tribal people, far removed from Jerusalem. He shows that understanding Israel, its biblical history, and prophetic future, proved to be an important piece of the puzzle for the growth of the Waola church in Papua New Guinea.

Dan Seeland shows how the concept of reciprocity, within Melanesian culture, stands in stark contrast to the concept of grace in salvation. In Melanesian culture, "nothing is given for nothing": obligations are integral to relationships within the clan. Combining his substantial understanding of Melanesian culture with sound anthropological and biblical research, Dan shows that salvation, as seen from the standpoint of obligation, does immense damage to the exaltation of Christ, and the glory of God. His prayer is that Melanesians, despite being bound by their animistic culture, can truly understand grace.

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

Doug Hanson.

CONTEXTUALISATION AND GLOBALISATION IN THE BIBLE TRAINING MINISTRY OF THE CHRISTIAN BRETHREN CHURCHES OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PART 3 OF 4)

Ossie Fountain

Ossie (MA, MTh, Dip.Tchg) and his wife Jenny are from New Zealand, and have been mission partners with the Christian Brethren churches in Papua New Guinea since 2000, working as Bible School advisors and trainers. They were missionaries in PNG from 1967 to 1984, spending most of their time in church leadership training roles. This series of articles is adapted from Ossie's Master of Theology thesis that he completed in 2000.

PART 3: COMMUNICATING THEOLOGY

In this series of articles, I look at the two major forces that impact Bible school ministry – contextualisation and globalisation. We ask how far should we go in adapting to the local context, and to what extent should theological education embrace global norms and expectations? In Part 1 (see volume 19-1), we explored these two fundamental concepts. In Part 2 (see volume 19-2), we looked at how global and contextual issues impact the curricula of the Bible schools of the Christian Brethren churches of PNG (CBC). Now, in Part 3, we first look briefly at the theological orientation of these schools, and then examine, in some depth, three approaches to communicating theology. Next, we see how globalisation and contextualisation impact theology within the schools, and offer some comments on developing a biblically-based approach to theological education.

A. THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION – UNDERGIRDING COMMITMENTS

Theological orientation can be explored from at least two different perspectives: that of the undergirding theology that motivates and drives the training institutions, and that of how a working theology is developed within the schools, and communicated to the student. We will briefly comment on the first of these, but our chief interest is with the second.

The Christian Brethren churches worldwide, as a grouping of independent congregations, do not have an agreed creedal statement, nevertheless they are thoroughly evangelical, and almost all their membership would accept the basic commitments of an evangelical statement of faith.[1] Rather, a cluster of emphases, instead of any one doctrine, tend to distinguish them from other traditions. The combination of five elements – the view of scripture, the conviction that the New Testament provides a model or guidelines for church life and practice for all times, the autonomy of the local church, the practice of believer's baptism by immersion, and the Lord's Supper, observed weekly within a largely unstructured service of worship – would generally be agreed to comprise their set of distinctives.

The Brethren have, throughout their history, contained a tension over how the Bible, and especially New Testament material, is to be used as an interpretive guide to church life now. Two different hermeneutical methods lead to rather different outcomes, in terms of church life. On the one hand, the belief that the New Testament provides a universal "pattern" for the structuring of church life is often supported by a "proof-text" approach, substantiated by a number of biblical references. Other Brethren, sensitive to the dynamic movement of church planting in

[1] This basic core of beliefs includes: acceptance of the divine inspiration and authority of scripture; the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead; the full divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ; His death and resurrection, as fully sufficient for human salvation; the fallenness of human beings; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the final resurrection; the unity of the church, composed of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; spiritual gifts, given for building up the body of Christ; and the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

New Testament times, and the range of contexts into which the gospel was preached by the apostles, have sought to discover "principles" from the New Testament that are applicable, with local variations, to a range of modern contexts.

In relation to global and contextual elements, this brief outline highlights several contrasts. The "pattern + proof-text" approach makes the perceived "New Testament church" a global and normative structure for all times and places. Thus, Brethren churches would be recognised by the same set of distinctive practices anywhere. It very largely ignores local contexts, either in New Testament times, or in the modern context. A "principles" approach also takes the New Testament as its normative framework, but is much more sensitive to, and accepting of, local variations in the range of biblical and modern settings.[2]

COMMUNICATING THEOLOGY IN CBC BIBLE SCHOOLS

Now, we look more closely at how theology is transmitted by three dominant hermeneutical approaches to biblical studies in the CBC Bible schools.[3] In particular, we look at three methods adopted in the Bible schools, and the contrasts between them. Using the globalisation and contextualisation themes, it will become evident how the three methods of studying the Bible encourage different attitudes to the biblical text, and to developing a theology. We conclude the paper by pointing to a biblical approach to leadership training that emerges from a Brethren-style of theology.

[2] This argument is considerably expanded in chapter 5 of my thesis: Oswald C. Fountain, "Some aspects of globalisation and contextualisation in the Christian Brethren Bible schools in Papua New Guinea", M.Th. thesis, Auckland NZ: BCNZ, 2000.

[3] All the Bible schools teach some doctrine as courses (see Part 2 of this series). Here, our interest is in the theological implications of differing approaches to deriving theology from scripture.

B. BRETHREN THEOLOGY AS TRANSMITTED IN CBC BIBLE SCHOOLS OF PNG

How is theology communicated in CBC Bible schools? More specifically, for churches that base their theology firmly in an inspired scripture, how are theological positions derived from that scripture? Much of this theology is communicated in ways that are difficult to evaluate, because it is shared orally in the classroom. Theology is also modelled by teachers in the Bible schools, and by other Christians, including CBC leaders. The attitude and actions of teachers powerfully reinforce an underlying theology.[4] It is not possible to quantify the impact of these influences, for the purposes of this study.

We, therefore, restrict our investigation to written materials, produced for Bible school use.[5] Written materials, however, suffer from a range of communication limitations. Beside the simple matter of typographical and grammatical errors, teachers may not express concepts clearly in writing, and thus be open to being misunderstood. Many teachers prepare their written material, not as final or polished theological statements, but as working papers to stimulate student thinking, which, outside the classroom, may be thus open to misinterpretation.

On the other hand, the Bible school teacher is usually aware that what is said on paper makes a lasting impression, and is likely to be taken as "truth". The teacher hopes it will be read repeatedly, once the student has completed the course of study. Therefore, it has an impact beyond the immediate context, and reinforces the oral context of the classroom.[6]

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[4] Or, if there are perceived inconsistencies between teaching and practice, the theology modelled may well undermine the theology taught.

[5] In this article, I make detailed reference to published works of current missionary colleagues. No personal criticism of them, or their ministries, is implied in doing this. I respect and honour each of them.

[6] It is worth noting that the written word is, therefore, a more-globalising communication media than the spoken one. Furthermore, the published word is communicationally more globalising than duplicated classroom notes. As a consequence of globalisation, the impact of the personal communication style, and the modelling effect of the oral situation, is thereby lessened as we proceed from oral to classroom notes to published book.

The teacher who is aware of this will often take more care over written material that will be preserved and reused. This is even truer for published than duplicated Bible school material.

What are the three approaches to communicating theology in the CBC Bible schools? The first is a systematic approach to teaching doctrine. A common method is to attach biblical references to statements of doctrine in the text to substantiate the position being stated by the teacher. We will call this the "topical" approach to teaching theology.[7]

The second is the "commentary" approach, involving exposition of biblical passages to assist understanding of the inspired text so that the student forms a personal theology as a derived product from the exegetical process. One underlying assumption in this process is that it is necessary to have access to, and understanding of, the whole text for an adequate theology. Several types of commentary exist, some of which require the student to interact more with the text than others.[8]

The third is an inductive approach that does not produce notes to be learned, but focuses on the process of carefully attending to the text, in order to develop understanding, interpretation, and both theology and praxis. The teacher seeks to develop in the student the set of skills required to gain an adequate understanding of the text on which to base theology. It does not aim at passing on a theology already developed by others, but at engaging the student in studying the text. Theological insight is, therefore, a resulting product.

[7] The topical approach may be further subdivided into at least three sub-types: (a) an explanatory method that requires the student merely to read and understand; (b) a study outline approach that involves the teacher making a summary statement, and the student using scripture to check the validity of the points made; and (c) a group-study approach, where the main teacher inputs are questions, with references for the student to read and make his or her own deduction or evaluation.

[8] The best-known CBC Bible school example of this approach is Les Marsh's *Baibel Tisa* commentaries on the whole of the New Testament (see below).

1. THE "STUDY OUTLINE" TOPICAL APPROACH TO THEOLOGY

An example of the topical approach is *Baibel Doktrin*,[9] a book of study outlines. Teaching points are accompanied by Bible references, and the reader is encouraged to refer to these, and discover that the point being made is derived directly from scripture.[10] As a teaching tool, *Baibel Doktrin* encourages a principle the Christian Brethren have always desired to follow, to hold scripture as the source of guidance for faith and practice, including church practice.

The book is a published example of unpublished Bible school lecture notes, common in the CBC Bible schools, treating a range of doctrinal topics. By publishing, the authors appear to intend it to be used beyond the classroom situation, globalising this method of learning doctrine. The introduction states that the book "was prepared to help any person wanting to teach the truths of the Bible with depth and clarity."[11] However, the authors are aware of some risk that the book will be misunderstood or wrongly applied. They say, "We are not responsible for any misunderstanding or false teaching that any individual may present while using this book."[12]

Baibel Doktrin is a guide to developing a systematic theology. It attempts to be comprehensive, covering common major headings used in systematic theology.[13] Some topics are dealt with more extensively than others. The proportions, however, reveal some interesting emphases. One is the concern of Brethren, in their distinctive views about the church. The largest section of the book is devoted to that. The

[9] David Wainwright and Dave Baker, *Baibel Doktrin: Ol Stadi Autlain*, Wewak PNG: Christian Brethren churches, 1999.

[10] "In no way is it to replace the Bible, or the diligent study of the Word. We desire that each person would prayerfully receive these outlines with eagerness and examine the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so" *Baibel Doktrin*, p. ii (a quotation from Acts 17:11).

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Headings are: the Bible, God, the Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, humankind, sin, God's plan (seven dispensations, eight covenants, and eschatology), salvation, the church, marriage, heaven and hell, the angels.

ecclesiology it develops treats the New Testament as a "pattern" of church order that, with minor variations, is viewed as transplantable to Melanesian cultures and elsewhere.[14]

In the section on God's plan, dispensationalism and the premillennial, pretribulation rapture (with charts) are taught as standard Brethren teaching on eschatology. This version of eschatological thinking, while common among the Brethren, has never been the only accepted interpretation of the future, or of apocalyptic passages of the Bible, and is now widely rejected.[15]

Baibel Doktrin does not distinguish matters that are essential, common core for most Brethren, and those who are peripheral. It seems to use scripture to establish a set of distinctive doctrines and practices, rather than to encourage open enquiry about important points of doctrine. Although the book, at points, does state "some denominations believe that . . .", or "some Christians approve of/agree to . . .",[16] the book makes little or no concession to the fact that some of its teachings are not held by other orthodox Christians, or even all Christian Brethren,[17] or that there may be other ways of interpreting the passages cited. It, therefore, becomes difficult to distinguish the common core of Christian truth from more-distinctive doctrines of the Brethren, or even personal emphases.

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[14] Under the heading *sios* (church) the topics include baptism, communion, giving, the priesthood of all believers, prayer, the will of God, the eternal security of the believer, witnessing, church leaders, elders, deacons, false elders, teachers and prophets, and how the church can correct elders. In all these cases, Bible references are used to support practices in the Bible to develop an authoritative pattern.

[15] The author of this article made a survey of the doctrinal positions of elders in a sample of NZ Brethren churches. As many as 38 percent of these elders questioned the correctness of this approach to eschatology.

[16] "*Sampela lotu i bilip olsem*", "[*s*]*ampela Kristen i orait long*", Wainwright and Baker, *Baibel Doktrin*, pp. 89, 109 [translations mine].

[17] Wainwright states his purpose in writing thus: *Mi bin redim dispela stadi buk bilong helpim sios bilong God i ken save moa long Jisas Krais na bikpela plen bilong em bilong kisim bek ol manmeri bilong em.* (I have prepared this study book to help the church of God to know more about Jesus Christ and His big plan to save His people [translation mine]), *Baibel Doktrin*, p. 2.

A major feature of this approach is the way it handles scripture, using a "proof text" approach to make a teaching point, followed by one or more Bible references for the reader to examine, and to validate the point at issue. This is different from a more-typical evangelical method of biblical interpretation, whereby the student would expect to read whole sections of scripture (usually as literary units of meaning) with the aim of establishing both the literary and historical contexts to understand the selected passage in its original setting. Exegesis, on these lines, is needed before applying the passage to the present situation, or comparing this passage with other texts, with a view to developing a coherent doctrinal position.

When this process is short-circuited, and verses are extracted from their contexts, to prove separately-established points of teaching, the way is open for the scriptures to be misunderstood in their original intent, and to be misapplied. Fortunately, for missionaries like Wainwright and Baker, this approach does not normally lead people too far astray. Their knowledge of the thrust of the whole of scripture acts as something of a safeguard in much of what they say. However, the approach has other weaknesses.

Points are sometimes made that are not being directly established in the text, but appear an oblique reference to the point at issue. For example, *Baibel Doktrin* has a section called "*Sampela pasin bilong helpim yu i stap gut wantaim God*" (Things to help you stay in fellowship with God).[18] Abraham is held up as an example of someone who followed God. But the point is established by Gen 19:27, a verse which carries forward the narrative rather than making the point of the heading.

Proof-texts function satisfactorily only if their literary and historical backgrounds are well known.[19] Most CBC Bible school graduates have

[18] Wainwright and Baker, *Baibel Doktrin*, p. 102.

[19] Arthur G. Clarke's *New Testament Church Principles*, 3rd edn, Kilmarnock UK: John Ritchie, 1962, is a parallel example of the proof-text method of establishing doctrine, in that case, Brethren ecclesiology. It relies on a well-taught readership, as was often found in the Brethren of Clarke's era, to evaluate the truth it sought to establish.

been taught a useful Bible survey that would cover, broadly, the social, political, and religious background to the books of the Bible. It is more doubtful that they appreciate the importance of the literary contexts, and the way literary genre affect interpretation. However, the Bible teaching ministry among the Brethren is not restricted to those who are Bible school graduates, nor is *Baibel Doktrin* intended only for such. In fact, the typical Brethren understanding of the priesthood of all believers allows at least men to teach the Bible, regardless of theological qualifications. For such people, a proof-text method provides little assurance that the text will be understood in its context, unless that context is pointed out.

The process involved in furnishing the reader with "proof-texts" is especially risky with new and semi-literates, who are frequently struggling to get meaning from the text. They focus on making sense of words and phrases rather than larger units of meaning. They do not naturally read an isolated verse in its wider context. The Bible school teacher needs to take more than usual time to guide his or her reader to the wider context. If not, the student is encouraged to read the text, and attempt to derive meaning non-contextually.[20]

a. Viewing This Method Through the Perspective of the Globalisation and Contextualisation of Theology

What perspective do the concepts of globalisation and contextualisation provide on the "study outline" method? We draw these and wider aspects together.

[20] Proof-text approaches are risky, because "false" teachings, as well as orthodox ones, are established from scripture by this method. It is on the basis of a non-contextual reading of 1 Cor 15:29, for example, that Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) find a basis for being baptised for the dead. Rather than protecting the flock from false teachers, this approach to scripture sometimes opens the door to its misuse.

i. Globalisation and the "study outline" method

The "study outline", combined with a "proof-text" approach, is based very largely on a set of assumptions that can be regarded as a globalised version of Christian teaching. We note four levels of globalisation.

> *Universal gospel message.* The Brethren, along with other evangelicals, regard the gospel of Jesus Christ as universally salvific for all peoples, in all times and places. The gospel must be preached to all for all to hear and believe (Rom 10:13-15). Those who do not actively believe are lost, and subject to judgment in hell.[21] Its faithful presentation is to be urged upon all believers in Jesus.
>
> *A globally-applicable scripture.* The whole of scripture, both Old and New Testaments, is regarded as inspired and authoritative. Lessons for the Christian life can be learned from any part of scripture. This is a view that many evangelicals would share.[22]
>
> *A global pattern of church practices. Baibel Doktrin* endorses the view that a pattern of Christianity, as observable in the New Testament, is desirable globally, and is to be reproduced as closely as possible in every cultural context. Consequently, Brethren-type fellowships worldwide can be recognised by a set of common practices. Certainly, cultural adjustments need to be made, but there are limits to this type of deviation from "New Testament Christianity". A core of these practices would include the weekly celebration of the "breaking of bread", baptism of believers by immersion, the silence of women in mixed public worship,[23] especially in any teaching role, and the autonomy of the local church, under the rule of a male, plural eldership.

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[21] Wainwright and Baker, *Baibel Doktrin*, pp. 141-142.

[22] Similarly, the various statements of historic creeds, like the Apostles' Creed, would find endorsement in *Baibel Doktrin*.

[23] Increasingly, in "progressive" Brethren fellowships in Western countries, women are allowed to participate audibly in worship, and, somewhat less commonly, in teaching. Several Brethren churches in New Zealand now allow women to be elders.

> *The proof-text method of Bible study.* Using this method, teaching points can be made in the briefest of forms, often only a line or two. The reader is then asked to look up one or more references from the Bible and see how these endorse and validate the point being made. A globalised interpretation of the text is thereby offered to the reader.

Of the weaknesses in this method of Bible study, one is that experienced cross-cultural exegetes are aware that biblical passages are frequently read quite differently in varying cultural contexts.[24] A less-directive discussional approach would alert the teacher to other possible understandings of the text. Another weakness is the tendency towards a single, dogmatic interpretation of the text, where there may be optional readings. Bible verses are used to substantiate a particular viewpoint. Finally, the method is less open than other approaches to a study of the worldview, and cultural background, of the text. A rather wooden understanding of how scripture applies in other contexts is, therefore, encouraged.

ii. Contextualisation and the "study outline" method

Some aspects of *Baibel Doktrin* demonstrate a healthy contextualisation. The book is written in Melanesian Pidgin, the *lingua franca* of the majority of CBC members. The attempt to communicate to literate Pidgin-speakers is commendable.[25]

The method used has, however, two significant contextual weaknesses – its failure to place biblical texts in their historical and literary context, and the failure to grapple, at any deep level, with the immediate context of Melanesian communities.

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[24] For example, see Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third-World Eyes*, Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1984.

[25] However, communicating some doctrinal concepts in Pidgin seemed a difficult exercise, and, on occasion, English words and Anglicisms were used that would not be understood by the majority of adult, Pidgin-speaking Melanesians.

Verses must be read in the light of their *biblical contexts*. It cannot be satisfactorily understood without acknowledging that the divine Creator has revealed Himself to particular people, within their mental and socio-cultural frames of reference, in ways that are immediately significant. One important aspect of biblical faith is that God has entered into human history in specific times and places. Many scripture passages are difficult to interpret without this.

Three cautions seem warranted. Firstly, juxtaposing a variety of verses from very different historical contexts, without further explanation, is confusing to the marginally-literate reader. Secondly, the brevity of explanation makes it difficult to understand what is meant, or why particular references are included. Thirdly, without an explanation of the wider biblical context, suspect deductions could be made from the process. A much greater knowledge of biblical history, and socio-economic conditions of the nation of Israel, and the Middle East as a whole, is assumed, than is warranted for the likely reader of the book.

Another weakness is that *the Melanesian context* seems to have been given insufficient attention. The book follows a pattern found among the Brethren Bible teachers in Western countries.[26] However, we question how a book of Bible doctrines should be modified to engage PNG readers, and lead them into a good understanding of how to apply scripture in their own context. What issues are the burning ones in Melanesian minds? How do Melanesian worldviews impinge on the process? Can teachers assume that a study guide will be used effectively to answer the serious theological and ethical issues facing the country's churches? At least the following factors need further consideration.

The Melanesian concepts of the spirit world need to be understood and dealt with. The book contains few references to such Pidgin concepts of the spirit world as "*marila*", "*posin*", "*sanguma*", "*masalai*", "*spirit nogut*", "*gutpela spirit*", "*tambaran*", "*glasman*", and so forth. At what points do the scriptures coincide with, revise, amplify, and confront traditional Melanesian perspectives? That is left a largely open question.

[26] *Baibel Doktrin* follows the pattern of Clarke's *New Testament Church Principles.*

The book seems to vary little from the answers given in Western contexts. The section on angels, for example, discusses good and bad angels, but it is not until the last two pages that we find reference to the work of evil spirits, and some useful points made about the way they interact with human beings.[27]

A deeper engagement is required to treat issues of community and social ethics – the extended family, justice, the environment, government and society. What role should Christians play in government, and the modern economy? Does the Bible speak into these situations? Or does it speak only about the church and its order, personal piety, and marriage and family.

A study outline approach might be more useful if it had been built around the questions and issues that Papua New Guineans are asking, rather than presenting mainly Western answers, and from a framework derived in Western church contexts.

In summary, then, the "proof-text" approach to communicating theology is heavily weighted in favour of the global end of the global-contextual polarity. Its approach to scripture is determined by the authors' orientation, with minimal attention to the literary or cultural context of the verses cited. The contemporary perspectives of the authors, and the limited literacy levels of many readers, tend also to inhibit its relevance to the readers' context.

2. THE "COMMENTARY" APPROACH TO BRETHREN THEOLOGY

Another approach used in the CBC Bible schools is to teach theology as an integral part of the study of the Bible, book by book. The method wins approval among the Brethren for it brings together concepts developed from the Bible in theological statements, explanation of the meaning of the biblical text, and the study of the text from which theology is derived. It is close in concept to the function of the sermon in explaining and applying lessons drawn from the text of scripture. Furthermore, in the running commentary form that teaching notes take

[27] Wainwright and Baker, *Baibel Doktrin*, pp. 150-151.

when dealing with passages from the Bible, the teaching is reinforced, on a number of occasions, and derived as they emerge from the text.

While lecturing students at BTTS at Amanab, Les Marsh conceived the idea of producing a series of commentaries on all the books of the New Testament in Melanesian Pidgin. The *Baibel Tisa* commentaries are the published product, derived from Marsh's classroom teaching.[28]

Like Wainwright and Baker, Marsh is aware of the wider impact of publication, and he, too, is careful to provide directions about how the commentaries should be used. Each volume contains a description of the purposes of the commentary, and a set of directions as to how they are best used.

By undertaking this huge project, Marsh has provided the Pidgin-speaking Christian public of PNG with an extensive and usable explanation of the whole of the New Testament, a valuable contribution. The full set is comprehensive, covering every book of the New Testament. It is a detailed verse-by-verse commentary. Sometimes two, and occasionally three, verses are treated together, but the vast majority of verses are treated individually. Thirdly, it is devotional and practical. Marsh aims to apply the word of God to individual and corporate Christian life and work.

In using the commentary, Marsh offers the reader seven steps.

1. Keep your Bible open every time you use the commentary. Read the Bible, chapter-by-chapter, first.
2. Read again the part of the Bible you want to study.

[28] L. A. Marsh, *Rom: Baibel Tisa: Buk 6*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1980, p. vii. Marsh includes a statement, similar to the following, in the introduction ("*Toksave bilong man i raitim dispela buk*") to all his commentaries: "*Mi redim dispela buk taim mi autim tok na lainim ol sumatin long Baibel Tisa Trening Skul long Amanab*." Marsh later makes the point, however, that the commentary is the product of many years of personal Bible study.

3. Read from this book, verse-by-verse, along with reading the Bible, verse-by-verse again, to get the meaning of each verse.
4. Think again about what you have read, so that it bears fruit in your life, and you understand what God is showing you.
5. Write something [that is, what you have learned] in an exercise book to help you remember.
6. Answer the questions, when you have finished reading. This will test your knowledge.
7. Pray that God will help you understand well all that is said, and obey whatever talk has spoken to your heart.[29]

Marsh integrates his personal devotion to Jesus Christ with his many years of Bible study, and thus encourages the reader to study the biblical text in the same manner. In fact, the biblical text is included in the commentary, passage-by-passage, helpfully dividing the text into manageable units. In writing the commentary, Marsh has modelled a style of Brethren and evangelical study of the text for the purpose of deriving spiritual and practical lessons for Christian living.

The commentaries follow a conservative, evangelical approach to the text. In each book, the traditional authorship remains unquestioned,[30] and is reinforced by "godly imagination",[31] and brief introductions about the book and commentary.

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[29] My translation from Tok Pisin.

[30] Matthew is Levi of Matt 9:9, one of the 12 apostles; Mark is John Mark, whose mother is referred to in Acts 12:12, a resident of Jerusalem, and convert of Peter; Luke is the doctor who accompanied Paul on his journeys; and so on.

[31] In the introduction to *Matyu*, Marsh pictures Matthew sitting in his tax office writing up his tax records, when the shadow of Jesus falls on his page. He looks up and looks into the eyes of Jesus, and hears His authoritative voice say, "Follow me", and then He turns and walks away. Matthew remains seated, but he keeps on thinking about Jesus. He is different. He has authority. His eyes are bright. So Matthew closes his books and follows Jesus. This is a dramatic expansion of Matt 9:9, L. A. Marsh, *Matyu*, 1991, p. 1.

In the earlier volumes, Marsh listed the commentaries he had found helpful in preparation. Usually these included the relevant volume of William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible,* a daily devotional style of popular scholarship; the relevant volume in the *Tyndale Commentary* series, a basic exegetical commentary; and, generally, a conservative commentary, providing a supporting doctrinal perspective.[32]

a. Baibel Tisa *Commentaries and Brethren Theology*

The *Baibel Tisa* commentaries have several strengths. They offer explanatory comment for the whole New Testament, and refer, by cross-reference, to passages of the Old Testament as well. Their detail sets an example of Brethren "lay" Christian theology that may inspire Papua New Guineans to attain the same level of devotion to God's word. In the absence of other Bible school study materials, these have become basic tools for many CBC Bible schools.[33]

Several aspects of how they transmit theology are noteworthy. Firstly, a developed theology lies behind the volumes, and emerges explicitly in some passages, but it is implicit throughout. For example, an explicit theology is stated with reference to the different kinds of spiritual gifts listed in 1 Cor 12:8-11, where Marsh discusses whether all the listed gifts are for today. He claims that some gifts were given to strengthen the preached word, but others were for starting the church, just as the apostles were given to commence the church.[34] Use is made of 1 Cor 13:8-10 and Eph 2:20-21 to support this division of spiritual gifts into permanent and temporary.[35] Having taken this position, Marsh then

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[32] Examples are: For *Jon: Baibel Tisa: Buk 4* – William MacDonald, *The Gospel of John*, Emmaus Bible School; For *Rom: Baibel Tisa: Buk 6* – William McDonald [sic], Emmaus Bible School; For *Revelesin: Baibel Tisa: Buk 16* – John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

[33] In some cases, their purchase has been subsidised for the students, making them even more attractive.

[34] ["*God i givim sampela presen bilong statim wok bilong God tasol na ol i stap long sotpela taim.*"]

[35] L. A. Marsh, *1 na 2 Korin: Baibel Tisa: Buk 7,* Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1987), pp. 157-158.

proceeds to assure his readers not to worry if their local church has not been given all the gifts.

Fundamentally, this theology promotes an orthodox evangelicalism, but with Brethren emphases emerging, including ecclesiology, a non-Pentecostal pneumatology, as discussed above, and a version of Brethren eschatology of the dispensational variety.

Secondly, issues of textual criticism, and variant interpretations, are not raised. For example, the student is not made aware, except by the unexplained square brackets in the quoted Tok Pisin text, of the textual problems surrounding the alternative endings of Mark's gospel.[36]

Thirdly, the approach to theological understanding is deductive. It aims to transmit to the student a given body of understandings and interpretations of the text. These have been worked out by the "hard work" of the author over many years, and are the product of his distilled wisdom.[37] Students are expected to read and agree with the commentary. The questions at the end of each chapter test reader comprehension of the text of scripture, rather than invite a deeper study of the Bible. In the classroom, undoubtedly, students are attracted to the Bible by the personal charisma and devotion of the teacher. But this enthusiasm is more difficult to convey in book form.

Fourthly, a danger of the commentary is that, since the teacher has done the exegesis prior to writing the commentary, it may easily come between the student and the biblical text as "the way to think" theologically.

Finally, in the interaction between biblical understanding, faith, and praxis, the emphasis is undoubtedly on the first of these. Cognitive understanding of the text is assumed to be the essential foundation. It is also assumed that faith and action will follow.

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[36] L. A. Marsh, *Mak: Baibel Tisa: Buk 2*, pp. 255-257.

[37] "*Long dispela rot mi bin hatwok long redim dispela buk . . .*" [In this way, I have worked hard to prepare this book . . .], L. A. Marsh, *Baibel Tisa: Buk 2*, p. vii, and parallels.

b. Global and Contextual Implications of the "Commentary" Approach

As with *Baibel Doktrin*, the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture, and its authority and adequacy as a guide to personal and corporate life, are global theological commitments, along with other evangelical commitments. Beyond this, Brethren positions on some controversial issues, common in the 1950s and 1960s are similarly advocated as global. In fact, the commentary approach globalises the personal viewpoints of the author, especially where it does not discuss optional interpretations of the text. In a language and cultural context, where only one commentary is available, there is a danger of theological narrowness developing. The assumption is easily made that the commentary gives the final word on the meaning of the text, and no other applications are likely or necessary.

The commentary approach is considerably more context sensitive than a proof-text one. The former makes several important accommodations to the historical and literary context of the original text. The break-up of the commentary into sections, by including the biblical text, assists the reader to become sensitive to contextual issues. The verse-by-verse approach, however, while ensuring depth of coverage, actually limits contextual sensitivity, making it more difficult to determine important matters from those of lesser significance.

The commentary approach also has considerable value with reference to the contemporary context. It presents the finished product of exegesis in the Melanesian Pidgin language,[38] and models a way to apply the biblical text. It is the product of active classroom teaching in PNG, so the applications are more relevant than translations from other languages and Western contexts tend to be.

However, there are at least two major problems of contextuality with the commentary approach. One is that the applications, the author makes, may inhibit fresh light from scripture by the commentary reader.

[38] Much of the author's study of the text was done in English.

Interaction with the biblical text is largely an internal mental process, completed prior to writing, rather than involving the reader.[39] The other is that such a commentary attaches a particular interpretation and application to the text, making it a static approach within a changing context. As the context changes, whether through time, or by transfer into another different context, it becomes less relevant.

In this approach to communicating theology, then, the balance is considerably tipped in favour of the global rather than the contextual.

3. THE "INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY" APPROACH TO THEOLOGY

Another approach is developed by Graham Erb[40] and by Reggie Howard,[41] who are training Papua New Guinea Christians to study the Bible for themselves, using an inductive method. The rationale behind this is to equip Christians with the skills of Bible study, so that they will understand the Bible better, and apply it to their personal Christian lives. We will outline the method, and then see how it develops a workable theology.

The method uses a three-step process, and the training is essentially practical, explaining the process, and developing the skills, on particular passages of scripture. Based on Howard's notes, the three-step process is:

a. *Observation:*[42] Using specified biblical passages,[43] the student is asked to observe and list all the people, individuals, or groups in the story. Then, taking each

[39] Alternative approaches would be, for example, to raise questions about application, or to emphasise that the author is making one application, and the reader may make others.

[40] Graeme Erb, personal communication.

[41] In Pidgin training courses he conducts. Reggie Howard, "*Baibel Stadi Kos*", (unpublished MS, Wewak PNG: National CBC office, nd), and "*Tisa Nots bilong Baibel Stadi Kos*", (unpublished MS, Wewak PNG: National CBC office, nd).

[42] Pidgin: *Lukluk gut long olgeta tok i stap.*

[43] Howard has used John 16:4-15; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:1-10; Col 2:6-10; Mal 1:11-14; Acts 19:11-20.

person or group, the student is asked to write down what the passage says about them. In epistolatory and prophetic passages, the people or characters change. In Col 2:6-19, the significant persons are "you" (plural) and "the Lord Jesus Christ". In Mal 1:11-14, they are "God" and "Israel".

b. *Interpretation:* The second step is built around the question, "What is God wanting to teach us from this passage?"[44] For this, the student is expected to write out a range of teaching points that emerge from the passage.

c. *Application:* The final step is practical application, and is built around the question, "What should I do to obey this talk?"[45]

Howard has developed this study method a stage further to train participants on how to develop a sermon. Beginning with the three steps listed above, he encourages prayer, and a focus on the needs of the congregation, during preparation. The sermon outline has three parts to it – introduction, sermon, and conclusion (Pidgin: *Kirapim tok*; *Autim tok*; *Pinisim tok*). The main body of the sermon is divided into several main points (Pidgin: *Bikpela poin*), and supporting details (Pidgin: *Sapot*). This seems a rather Western approach to sermon style.

For Christian theologising, one of the most impressive aspects of inductive methods of Bible study is that they do not commence with a given fully-fledged theology. This is built up over time, by consistent and diligent application of the method. That is not to say that a theology does not lie behind the method, especially in relation to scripture. It does. Space does not allow us to flesh out these theological assumptions. Suffice to say that evangelical Christianity, particularly Western and Brethren versions of it, ride comfortably with the essential ingredients of this implicit theology. Core ingredients of it include a respect for the

[44] Pidgin: *Skelim gut, God i laik skulim yumi long wanem ol samting long*.
[45] Pidgin: *Tingting gut, mi mas mekim wanem bilong bihainim dispela tok?*

detailed text of scripture, an expectation that God's Holy Spirit will speak personally, and specifically, through the text, and that God intends us to understand His Word, and to apply it to ourselves, personally.

The method has several strengths. One is that it insists on the priority of understanding the written text, as a first basic essential. It focuses on the actual events, words, and literal meaning of that text. Another strength is the focus on passages of scripture, as literary units. The participant is asked to take a whole passage, as broken up by textual headings (inserted as reading aids during the translation process).

The method attempts to be comprehensive about the teachings drawn from the immediate text under study. It is also designed to avoid mere head knowledge, by emphasising the need for practical change, in light of the study done.

However, there are dangers and weaknesses in the method, too. It is possible that more will be drawn from the text than was intended by the original writer. By focusing on a very small text, and expecting action in the light of it, there is a danger of unbalanced and exaggerated emphases. Theology and praxis must relate to the whole of scripture, and not only scripture in fragmentary form.[46]

Secondly, the considerable attention to the immediate literary context of scripture must be balanced by the wider context of the Christian community. If used as a method of personal Bible study, little allowance is made in the method for input by the wider Christian community. Such insight may be gleaned through exegetical commentaries,[47] and through the living Christian community, whether that is the Bible school classroom, a Bible study discussion group, or the local congregation.

[46] In CBC Bible schools, the text of scripture has been translated into the common language. A risk is present that the meaning of the text may have been skewed in the translation process. But all biblical studies of translated texts, where access to the original is not available, suffer from this, not only this method.

[47] For the Pidgin speaker, the ***Baibel Tisa*** commentaries, being more devotional than exegetical, are only part of the answer.

Personal use of the inductive method needs to be checked against that of the wider interpretive community, if a balanced theology is to result.

The method also appears to take insufficient account of the original context of scripture. It would seem that the second step, asking the question of what the text *teaches*, disposes too quickly of what the text *taught* (and how it functioned) in the original context of the writer, and the probable first recipients.

A final weakness to mention is that the method is developed for use in an essentially Western and literary context. It develops skills of personal Bible study. It encourages personal and individual action in response to the word. It provides the literate Christian leader, working in an oral and non-literate, or only partially literate, community with the resources for continuing personal growth. The literary skills are essential tools for a Bible-based Christianity. But they are inadequate, on their own, for a strong Christian community.

In Melanesia, the method should be developed to include the dynamic of group interaction with the text of scripture. As a class-based method, with teacher-student and student-student interaction, and corporate wisdom emerging from this process, the method has considerable strength. When accompanied by studies in historical theology, biblical surveys, and Melanesian cultural perspectives, there is great potential. But the wider church community is ignored, at very great risk. Theologising is much more than a personal task; it is a corporate one.

a. Global and Contextual Aspects of the Inductive Bible Study Method

The inductive Bible study method has been developed in the West,[48] as a method of developing an approach to Bible study that is based on adequate understanding of the text, and is applicable to personal spiritual formation, and practical Christian action. It is regarded as a global

[48] Howard G. Hendricks, and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1991, among others, have developed this approach to an inductive Bible study method.

methodology, applicable in all literate cultures. The philosophical assumption is that every Christian should adopt a similar methodology, to become strong in their faith, and consistent in their Christian practice. The belief that this method, on its own, is sufficient to grow a strong Christian community, is highly suspect, being a product of the individualistic Western society. This globalisation is transmitted rather easily, along with other Western perspectives, through the interaction of Melanesia with the West. Accommodation to the need for the private study of scripture to be integrated into Melanesian Christian community is a necessary contextualising process. Part of the reason for this is that the integrated Melanesian perspective may alert the Bible student to applications to the wider society that the student on his/her own may overlook.

Further contextualisation of the inductive method is needed, in two respects. The first is to counter the danger of non-contextual readings of scripture that may occur through focus on detailed study of units of the text, without sensitivity to its wider historical and literary settings. The second is the process of ensuring that the Bible is applied within the modern context of the Melanesian Christian community. To do this, personal study of the inductive method will need to be supplemented by the insights of both the history of interpretation and the wider living Christian community. In Melanesia, a dialogical and group approach to the method needs to be adopted.

In summary, then, the inductive method lies much more towards the contextual pole than the global, but still retains some weaknesses from its development within an alien Western culture. It requires further adaptation to be appropriate for Melanesia in terms of, at least, corporate application, and it needs to be supplemented by other approaches to be fully integrated into the Melanesian context.

C. Global and Contextual Aspects of Communicating Brethren Theology

Three approaches to the study of scripture have been described and evaluated from the perspectives of globalisation and contextualisation.

In all three, global and contextual influences were involved, but resulted in contrasting balances between them. Of the three, the "study outline" and the "commentary" approach began with a prior exegesis of the text, with a theology largely developed in a Western context. In both, while modifications were made to take account of the Melanesian context, the assumption was that Melanesian readings of the text would arrive at the same understandings as those of the authors. Therefore, they globalised the results of the interpretive process. The Bible school student is expected to agree with the theological understandings of the authors. In their passion to communicate doctrinal "truth" (the study outline method), or a particular understanding of the meaning of the Bible (the commentary approach), both appear to fail to adequately address contextual questions emerging from within the Melanesian environment. Where they are addressed, responses are already worked out, explicitly or implied.

The commentary approach to hermeneutics attempts to lead the student to adopt theological positions by encouraging a reading of the scriptural text, thereby emphasising the importance of the original literary context, and supplying something of the historical context in its exegesis. In that sense it is more sensitive to a contextual approach than the proof-texting method of the "study outline". The latter not only assumes a globalised theology, but also a globalised hermeneutical system.

The "inductive" approach is in marked contrast to the other two. It assumes a globally high view of the significance of scripture, for both theology and practice. It seeks to maintain the integrity of the text, and to develop a method of understanding, interpreting, and applying it. The Bible is treated as a global message. The inductive approach is, therefore, sensitive to both the original and the present reader's contexts. Its major potential weakness is that it tends to play down the important role of the corporate life of the believing community in understanding the text. Its original purpose was as a personal Bible study method. However, the Bible school context, in which the approach is taught, mitigates this individualistic orientation to some extent. Even so, the method does not ensure that major issues of the local or wider context

will be engaged by scripture. The "inductive" method, therefore, must be complemented by a sensitive dialogue with the local Christian community in its context, and between it and scripture.

D. Developing A Biblically-Based Approach to Theological Education

Our survey of the CBC Bible schools has demonstrated how a distinctively-Brethren theology, with its strong emphasis on an authoritative, inspired scripture, has developed into a strong commitment to a biblically-based curriculum. Each school has attempted to cover all the available scriptures in as much depth as possible. The conviction that the whole of the Christian life, including church life, should be based on the Bible, has influenced curriculum formation towards some parts of scripture, which are seen to be more significant than others. Other theological underpinnings, common among the Brethren, could also be shown to have impacted the process.

In examining how theology is transmitted in the CBC Bible schools, three approaches have been outlined. All approaches have a common loyalty to scripture, but develop that in different ways. The study outline example makes assumptions about a global theology, and, in particular, a universal pattern of New Testament church life. It employed a non-contextual proof-text method to achieve this. The commentary assumes a global interpretation of the text of scripture. The inductive method advocates a globally-applicable method of studying the Bible. This article has critiqued each of these, pointing to ways in which CBC Bible schools need to strengthen their training, making it more sensitive to the Melanesian context.

We now raise the broader question of whether Brethren theological commitments provide a contribution to theological education. If, for example, the Bible is the reference point for the whole of the Christian life, does it also provide guidelines for theological education. In 1976,

John Hitchen contributed a paper to a MATS symposium.[49] He outlined a series of biblical models for ministerial training, drawing lessons from Old Testament examples, Jesus, and Paul, which he applied, in five key ways, to Melanesia.[50] Although the specific applications from 1976 need updating, Hitchen's strongly-biblical approach presents a significant model, from which Brethren Bible schools can learn. Most recently, and on a broader canvas, Robert Banks has developed a similar methodology.[51] From a study of comparable biblical material to that used by Hitchen, Banks developed a "missional" model of training, offering guidelines as to how current practices of leadership training should be redirected, in the light of his biblical study.

A significant opportunity exists now for Bible school administrators and teachers to use the Bible in ways demonstrated by Banks and Hitchen, to rethink the direction of their leadership training methods. Part 4 of this series will address some aspects of this.

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[49] John Hitchen, "Models of Serving: Some Biblical Patterns of Ministerial Training and Their Relevance for Melanesia Today", *Point* 1 (1976), pp. 85-121.

[50] (1) Selection and recruitment for training; (2) Training for ministry as a continuing process, not once in a life-time; (3) The principles of apprenticeship, example, and counselling; (4) Developing the right ideas about the nature of ministry; and (5) Ministry must increasingly become fellowship with Christ.

[51] Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

TOWARDS A CONTEXTUALISED MINISTRY AMONG MUSLIMS

Daniel Johnson*

Revd Daniel Johnson studied Asian Studies at Australian National University, and later lived in Indonesia, studying language and culture. He has post-graduate qualifications in linguistics, education, and cross-cultural ministry. Now based in Australia, he is serving as a Baptist pastor, while teaching and pursuing further studies in missiology.

**Not the author's real name.*

INTRODUCTION

Imagine, if you will, that it is Friday, and, today, the whole community prays at one of the hundreds of mosques in your area (Goble and Munayer, 1989, pp. 169-173). You are going to an ordinary house in a secluded place at the edge of town. Your older brother visited here last week, and has invited you along. He says they have found blessing through the prophet Isa, yet are unlike the Christians. You walk through the front door. On your right is the washroom for you to wash after taking off your shoes. The first room is decorated as a place of preaching and prayer. Following your brother down the hallway, you come to the dining room, where guests are gathering. There are no Western furnishings nor images of any kind on the walls, so it is not like church. Instead, there are various hangings of Arabic calligraphy that quote messianic passages from the Qur'an. And there is the prominent clock to signal prayer times. You wonder where your brother has brought you, but feel comfortable with the setting.

After a time of informal social fellowship, the call to prayer is made. All of you assemble in a prayer circle, and the group chants a confession before filing into the prayer room for a time of teaching and prayer. You notice the Arabic scriptures opened on a low book stand raised off the floor. Sitting together on the floor (on bamboo mats), the imam teaches

about Isa, as the Word of God. The fellowship meal is then served. Guests seated on the floor seem quite at home, and do not hurry to move on from eating and talking together. They ask you whether you would like to come again to their fellowship meetings. Although comfortable with their approach, you have doubts about the meaning of the imam's teaching, and so, ask some questions, and talk around the table. You determine that you will not betray your Islamic upbringing, and yet your brother and the others – many of whom you know – seem similarly determined to stay with their heritage, while following this new teaching. You wonder what effect this group will have on your community.

The Christian church has to critically consider the whole subject of Muslim evangelism (Parshall, 1980, p.16). Muslims have almost always been expected to leave their culture behind in "converting" to Christianity. What will be argued here, instead, is that Muslims can change their allegiance, to follow Jesus, whilst remaining in their culture. Is it possible to be a child of God, and fall under the broad national and cultural category of being a Muslim? (Anderson, 1977; Parshall, 1980, 1985, 2000; Travis, 1998a, 1998b). What will "church" then be like in a context that is culturally Muslim? How far should it be contextualised? These are the sort of broad questions that need to be answered for each context, particularly where Islam is a majority religion, and where people are Muslim by background. Reaching Muslims in Indonesia, for example, where people may come from families that have been Muslim for generations, is different than sharing the gospel with Papua New Guineans, who have recently converted to Islam. Where seekers of Christ have been Muslim by cultural background, it is a big challenge to help them find and express faith in Jesus Christ (*Isa Almasih*), in a culturally-appropriate way. This article seeks to help the process, by arguing the necessity for, and proposing principles for, working toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

THE NECESSITY AND RISK OF CONTEXTUALISATION

Two major challenges face anyone working towards a contextualised ministry among Muslims (Anderson, 1977, p. 9). The first stems from a

failure to separate the universal purpose of "church" from the cultural container in which it operates. New believers should not have to become Westerners, or first-century Greeks, to feel at home in a Christian fellowship. Communities of God's people must display their universal appeal by functioning, relevantly, in their context. A second challenge arises from so accommodating "church" to Muslim worship forms, values, and theology that a syncretistic mixture results, lacking the power of a true kingdom community. The truth should not have to be compromised, for converts to feel at home. The risk of syncretism needs to be avoided, but so does the risk of failing to contextualise. Without contextualisation, how will the people see the relevance of Jesus? How will they meet together with understanding as His people? This first major section of the article argues contextualisation must not be neglected by God's messengers, because it is necessary, biblically and strategically.

1. THE BIBLICAL NECESSITY

The Bible abounds with precedents for contextualisation (cf. Ariarajah, 1994; Davies, 1997). In the Old Testament, God communicated with people, using forms they understood, according to their context. Moses gave the Ten Commandments at Sinai, but recontextualised them at Shechem, one generation later.[1] God's people were entering the land from the desert – facing a new situation that demanded some new and some modified forms. Worship forms had to be further adapted, with the building of the temple, and, again, years later, with its destruction. During the exile, Israel had to recontextualise their worship forms, to be relevant in that context, and yet maintain their distinctive beliefs (e.g., monotheism).

In the New Testament, contextualisation is similarly seen in preaching. Jesus preached, using different forms with different people. He talked about the new birth with Nicodemus, and the water of life with the

[1] E.g., The rationale given for observing the Sabbath was God's deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus, rather than because of God resting from Creation, Deut 5:15; cf. Exod 20:11 (M. Weinfield, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic Tradition*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Samaritan woman (John 3:1-7; 4:7-15). A time was coming, He told the same woman, when worship would not be restricted to geographical locations, but would be in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). Jesus Himself was the incarnational communication of God's love and commitment to His people (Heb 2:10-18). Peter and Paul adapted preaching material to their audiences, with profound insight.[2] Paul, for example, readily communicated with forms from the context of his audience – such as the "unknown god" of the Athenians (Acts 17:23). Without betraying its given fundamentals, New Testament communicators demonstrated a remarkable variation in their presentation of the gospel (cf. Hesselgrave, 1981, 1988; Parshall, 1980).

Worship forms in the New Testament were also freely contextualised. Church was a worshipping community, with forms of worship free to develop indigenously (Acts 2:1-42, 6:1-7). Witness and service were common elements, but evangelistic methods and social involvement varied (Acts 2:4-7, 8:4-8). Fellowships were designed to have leaders, but their style and organisation were not restricted to one model (Acts 6:1-7, 20:28; LCWE, 1978). Kraft claims that Acts shows no single leadership pattern, but, rather, a series of experiments, as the church develops (1979c). God did not preordain a particular set of sacred forms, for His people to express their relationship with Him and each other. A Christian fellowship was made up of believers in Jesus Christ, who gathered together, and worshipped God, to serve and grow together. Once this concept was established, God's people were free to meet together and express the meaning of their beliefs, using forms appropriate to their culture.

Gentile believers did not have to adopt Jewish forms of worship (Acts 8:26-39; 10:28-11:18). When Gentiles started coming to Christ, certain

[2] Peter, at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), and in the house of Cornelius (10:34-43), and Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:16-41), and in Athens (17:22-31), contextualised their messages for their target audience, whether Jewish, God-fearing, or polytheistic, and heathen (D. Hesselgrave, "Worldview and Contextualisation", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, R. D. Winter, and S. C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, pp. 401, 404).

Jewish Christians demanded Gentiles adopt Jewish customs, including circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5). This demand was understandably unpopular, both with the Gentiles, and those seeking to lead them to Jesus, notably Paul and Barnabas (15:2). The Council of Jerusalem assembled and decided Gentiles would not have to become Jews to be Christians. Gentiles were free to adopt their own worship forms, as long as that freedom did not impinge on the culture of other Christians.[3] God was bringing Gentiles to faith, and the church leaders did not wish to erect cultural barriers against this movement. James made this conclusion at the Council, "it is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles, who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19).

Biblical communication and mission is culturally flexible. Sometimes the gospel will challenge certain forms of behaviour in a culture, but, where cultural forms do not disagree with the Bible, they are free to remain (cf. 1 Cor 8:10). If Christianity had the same cultural aims as Islam, Christians today would be living as Jews. However, Christian ways are never to be culturally bound, but are free to be contextualised. It is arguable, in fact, that contextualisation is necessary for both the biblical message, and its model for communication.

2. THE STRATEGIC NECESSITY

Contextualisation is not only biblical, but also strategic. In seeking to relevantly communicate the gospel – taking seriously the context of the people – it encourages them to respond to Jesus with understanding (cf. Accad, 1997; Parshall, 1980; Taber, 1979). Wagner argues its case with the following definition:

> to the degree possible, without violating supracultural biblical principles, aspects of Christian life and ministry – such as life-style, theological formulations, worship patterns, music, ethics,

[3] The Council added a restriction to abstain from certain things that would only offend their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 15;20; cf. 21:25; 1 Cor 5:6-8; 8:1-10; 9:19-23).

> leadership structure, and others – should be free to take on the forms of the new culture which Christianity enters (1983, p. 147).

It is assumed that, while the gospel is, in essence, supracultural, it must, to have maximum impact, be contextualised (Douglas, 1994). This is as true for forming fellowships as it is for the communication of the message. A contextualised ministry among Muslims seeks to offer them worship forms they can understand. The forms will not appear foreign, but will feel at home in the local culture.

Islamic Christian fellowships, formed in this way, could also be a valid witness to the Muslim community, of which they would hopefully remain a part. The worship and service of a congregation, expressing the reality of new life socially, can be a potent evangelistic force. Too often, recent "converts" from Islam have either recanted, or been extracted from their cultural context, because of the ostracism they received from their community. The gospel is rejected because "Christianity" is perceived as a cultural threat (Anderson, 1977; Packer, 1991; Stott, 1981). There may be offence at the essence of the message, but the cultural offence of the messengers ought to be minimised. The aim is not to compromise the gospel, but to demonstrate it properly, so Muslims can understand its relevance.

3. THE RISK OF SYNCRETISM

Syncretism occurs when the essence of the gospel is compromised by mixing with the old forms of a culture. This is a very real risk of contextualisation. Mission history gives numerous examples of contextualisation leading to syncretism. Hesselgrave concedes a number of heresies, identified by early church councils, probably represented attempts at contextualisation (1988, p. 151). Both Protestant and Catholic missions have started churches that allowed temples, idols, and animistic practices to coexist with Christian teaching (Forman, 1985, p. 13). There are practices and beliefs of Islam that challenge the biblical gospel, and which cannot be adopted without syncretism. The Qur'an, for example, denies the divinity of Jesus:

> O people of the book, exceed not the limits of your religion, nor speak anything about Allah, but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only a messenger of Allah (4:171).

Syncretism is a possible miscommunication of undiscerning contextualisation, but it can be prevented by properly communicating the meaning of the gospel, and its fellowship implications.

Those who label contextualisation as syncretism may be slow to concede that miscommunication can also arise from failing to contextualise. Hesselgrave contends, "If Christian meaning is not to be lost in the communication process, contextualisation is required" (1981, p. 409). Contextualisation has been criticised by Christians, who have propagated their very own cultural forms as Christianity. They have instructed new believers to discard their own culture, and to adopt Western forms. Consequently, they tended to be foreign, irrelevant, and easily misunderstood (Taber, 1979). Contextualisation can go too far and become syncretism, but an equally as great risk is miscommunicating, by failing to contextualise.

As fellowships are started in different contexts, and even as those contexts change with time, the forms used for meeting together will need constant recontextualisation (Connor, 1991, pp. 21-22). But what will ensure contextualisation communicates the essence of biblical Christianity, without becoming syncretistic?[4] How can the appropriate extent of contextualisation be determined? The next major section

[4] For discussion on possibilities and risks of syncretism, cf. W. C. Chastain, "Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12-3 (1995) , pp. 161-164; J. Culver, "The Ishmael Promise and Contextualisation among Muslims", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 61-70; R. Jameson, and N. Scalevich, "First-Century Jews and Twentieth-Century Muslims", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 33-39; J, Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 5-14; P. Parshall, "Danger!: New Directions in Contextualisation", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34-4 (1998), pp. 404-406, 409-410; S. Schlorff, "The Translational Model for Mission in Resistant Muslim Society: A Critique and an Alternative", in *Missiology: An International Review* XXVIII-3 (July, 2000), pp. 305-328.

discusses four proposed principles to help answer these questions, so that a fellowship can move toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

PRINCIPLES OF CONTEXTUALISATION

1. ADAPT MUSLIM FORMS

Cultural forms are observable objects, practices, or customs. Meanings lie behind, and are expressed by, the forms. A traditional approach to communication slavishly imitated linguistic forms to produce a literal translation (formal correspondence), for example, of the Bible. Unfortunately, imitating forms can cause meaning to be misunderstood, because the same forms are not likely to convey equivalent meaning cross-culturally. An alternative approach is to be flexible with forms, so as to communicate a similar meaning, and stimulate an equivalent response (dynamic equivalence). Fortunately this approach has been increasingly adopted in Bible translations, which have thus become more meaningful to contemporary readers (Kraft, 1979c, 1979b; Nida and Taber, 1969; Parshall, 1980; LCWE, 1978). Fellowships that are "dynamically equivalent", by adapting Muslim forms, may also become widespread.

The first principle, therefore, for appropriate contextualisation, is to uphold both the gospel and the culture, by adapting Muslim forms. The meaning of the Christian gospel needs to be, at all times, maintained. By adopting Muslim forms in the new fellowship, the culture can also be upheld. It must be understood that the forms are only important for the meaning which they convey. There is nothing implicitly biblical in any particular form of church furnishings or music, timing or regularity. In a Muslim land, there is nothing unbiblical about a follower of Jesus praying five times a day. It is ethnocentric to ensure that no cultural habits of Muslims are used in Christian worship. The biblical authenticity of any form lies with the functions served, and the meanings conveyed, rather than the forms themselves (Kraft, 1979a, p. 66).

This article seeks to do without linguistic forms that carry unnecessary connotations to Muslims. Such traditional terminology, despite a new approach, could unconsciously perpetuate traditional methods.

"Conversion", for example, is a change of allegiance to Jesus. It includes a new dynamic of relationship with God, made real by the Holy Spirit. To Muslims, however, it implies a break with the community, and identification with the "Christian" social group. Language forms, such as "ex-Muslim", "convert", and "Abdul becoming a Christian", will thus be omitted. Alternative forms may include "believers", "people of God", "lovers of Jesus", "the Jesus one" (*Isayi*), "Muslims who follow Jesus", "Muslim-background believers" (MBBs), or "Islamic Christians". "Islamic Christians" appropriately describes Christians (the noun), who do things in ways that are Islamic (the adjective). This is more appropriate than "Christian Muslims", or "New Creation Muslims" (*Khalq Jadeed*), which (grammatically) describes Muslims (the noun) modified by a Christian label. Fellowships might be called "Islamic Christian fellowships", "House *Masjids*", "Mosques for Jesus" (*Masjid Isawi*), or "Jesus fellowships" (*Issawi*); or they may be referred to as part of a "Jesus movement" (*Haraka Isawiyya*) (Conn, 1979, p. 97; Cragg, 1956, p. 51; Dutch, 2000; Gilliland, 2000; Goble and Munayer, 1989, p. 134, Travis, 2000). These terms uphold both the gospel and the culture, by identifying believers with Jesus, and adapting Muslim forms.

While external forms are biblically flexible, they are very important in Islam. Islam is built on legalistic observances, meant to prepare a person for heaven (Parshall, 1980, p. 57). Performing the five pillars of Islam (whether or not the meaning is understood) is very much a part of being Muslim:

1. *Shahada* – reciting the declaration of faith "there is one God and Muhammad is his Prophet".
2. *Salat* – prayer, five times per day.
3. *Saum* – fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan.
4. *Zakat* – almsgiving (2.5% tax on assets).
5. *Hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca, once a lifetime, if possible (cf. Cragg, 1956; Parshall, 1980; Robinson, 2003).

The pillars have basic similarity in form with biblical practices, though the meaning sometimes differs.

One fundamental difference is that Islamic forms are meant to gain merit for the devotee, which is incompatible with the biblical message of grace (Parrinder, 1965). Rather than changing the forms, however, the meaning of some or all of them may be able to be reinterpreted. If a Melanesian churchgoer, faithful in good works to gain favour with God, was later converted to true allegiance to Jesus, should they give up their old forms of good works? They continue in the forms (as long as they are not prohibited by scripture), but need them reinterpreted. Similarly, Muslims, who want to follow Jesus, do not necessarily need to forsake their worship forms. Rather than relinquishing daily prayers, they can be exhorted to pray with meaning through Jesus. Rather than forsaking ***wudu*** (washing) before ***salat***, they can be encouraged to use the practice to prepare their hearts (Surah 29:45, cf. Cragg, 1956, p. 98; Goble and Munayer, 1989, pp. 70-72; Uddin, 1989; Woodberry, 1989).

Like a good Bible translation, fellowships should recombine biblical meanings with cultural structures. Forms will be adapted to make the biblical impact of a kingdom community. The alternative traditional approach would be to imitate the forms of the first century, or foreign church, but this can create a less-than-desirable impact (misunderstanding, alienation, and rejection). The ideal forms are faithful to the original, but at home in the culture, not requiring followers of Jesus to learn new structures, to get the message (Kraft, 1979c). Structures of worship, prayer, leadership, education, and social service will all be geared to be culturally relevant. The people of God, for example, are to meet together regularly for mutual encouragement (Heb 10:25). There is no reason why Islamic Christians should not meet on Fridays, when their whole community prays. The aim is to produce an impact on the people, dynamically equivalent to the impact produced upon, and intended by, the New Testament church (Kraft, 1979b).

2. MAINTAIN *UMMAH*

The second principle in contextualising ministry among Muslims is the need to consider *ummah*, the world community of Islam (Parshall, 1985). *Ummah* gives Muslims a strong solidarity, from which it is very hard to break. As part of the *ummah*, Muslims all around the world identify with Islam; some claim the brotherhood is the real force behind Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini declared: "We Muslims are one family, even though we live under different governments, and in various regions" (Anonymous, 1979, p. 40). It is difficult to discern how much a Christian can remain Islamic culturally, when Islam is so thoroughly pervasive. Nevertheless, contextualisation will seek to encourage new believers to remain in their Islamic *ummah* culturally, as well as to support them with a new Christian *ummah*.

Muslims experience *ummah* religiously through the five pillars of Islam, and by the nature of local mosques. All members of the *ummah* are obligated to practice the pillars of Islam. The solidarity of *ummah* is strengthened at *salat*, as rich and poor, liberal and conservative, stand together towards Mecca in apparent equality (Parshall, 1985, pp. 39-41). Bowing together towards Mecca, they are not merely praying locally, but engaging in a form used around the world by millions of fellow devotees. Similarly *saum*, *zakat*, *hajj*, and *shahada* are undertaken all around the world, by people with common aspirations that go beyond racial and linguistic differences (Anonymous, 1979; Parshall, 1985). Locally, Muslims experience *ummah* in the informal organisation of the mosque. Mosques have a minimal hierarchy, with no priesthood, and all are welcome and equal (Ansari, pp. 133-137; Cragg, 1956, p. 298). The building sometimes functions as a shelter for travellers, and a school *kuttab* for children (Parshall, 1985, pp. 41-42). Outside of prayer times, locals will be seen relaxing on the steps, and discussing various matters. Mosques serve as an informal centre for the local *ummah*.

Contextualised fellowships will need to maintain *ummah* for believers. Religious involvement for Muslims, Parshall argues, must be in the context of a community of interacting people (1985, p. 175). Although community is perhaps devalued in many Western church patterns, the

religious side of ***ummah*** is closely aligned with the biblical ideal of community. Acts shows the potential of biblical community to form a new ***ummah***, to which Islamic Christians could aspire:

> All the believers were together, and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone, as he had need. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and ate together, with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:44-47).

The believers were committed to fellowship, and to living out their new-found faith, in the context of their traditions. They met regularly, both in the Jewish temple, and in each other's homes.

Modelling on a home fellowship, or cell system, is a viable option for an ***ummah*** of Jesus. Consistent with Mosque patterns, home churches can involve lay people, and minimise the need for raising building finance (either from the nationals themselves, or from the West) (Parshall, 1985, pp. 219-219). A home fellowship can be a community for close fellowship and pastoral care, which new believers need for some time. Meeting in a home allows for caution and privacy; it may not be expedient for the community to be aware of new believers.

Although a reason for contextualising Islamic Christian fellowships is to establish viable witnesses within their communities, new believers would be best to share their faith discreetly at first, and with close contacts (Cragg, 1956, p. 315; Goble and Munayer, 1989, p. 140; Parshall, 1985, p. 186). Establishing credibility for witness with initial contacts should not be thrown away by parading before the whole community. The ***Qur'an*** is sceptical of Christians: "O ye who have believed, do not choose Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends to each other; whoever makes friends with them is one of them" (Surah 5:51). Those developing a contextualised ministry, which will inevitably take time and patience, can pray with Archbishop Temple: "Grant us to know when, by patience, and when, by impatience, we can serve Thee best" (Cragg,

1956, p. 303). Such caution is not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to be culturally sensible, in a community committed to solidarity. In the early stages of a movement, it is important that the expectations placed on new converts not be made impossible for their social context.

Similarly, baptism ought to be carefully considered. Persecution usually intensifies following baptism, because fellow-Muslims see it as a betrayal.[5] Some authorities have suggested that baptism is open to such misunderstandings that dynamic equivalences ought to at least be explored (Anderson, 1977; Parshall, 1983; LCWE, 1980). Others maintain baptism has a clear biblical mandate, and is useful as a definitive sign of conversion. Parshall suggests waiting till the fellowship is strong and mature, and then leaving the baptisms to a mature national leader.[6] Baptism is an initiatory rite (the form was derived from Judaism), whereby one turns their allegiance over to the name into which they are baptised. Is it possible to use another form that is faithful to the Bible, and fulfils the intention of baptism, yet avoids the cultural ostracism? (LCWE, 1980, p. 18). Admittedly this is a bold question, but may deserve consideration. The big picture of reaching communities with the gospel needs to be kept in mind. This may mean experimenting with new forms, or at least coaching believers to consider delaying baptism.

A contextualised ministry will, as much as possible, use forms shared by the wider community. Islamic prayer forms may be maintained. Believers may sit on the floor on oriental carpets, shoes off, with the

[5] For an example of persecution following baptism, see I. W. Mastra, "Contextualisation of the Church in Bali: A Case Study from Indonesia", in *Gospel and Culture*, J. Stott, and R. T. Coote, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 361. P. Goble, and S. Munayer suggest Muslims, who undergo the baptism of God (*sibghat Allah*), do not cease to be Muslims (submitters to God). Rather they are more in submission ("islam") to Him (*New Creation Book for Muslims*, Pasadena CA: Mandate, 1989, pp. 138-139; cf. James 4:7).

[6] P. Parshall also suggests baptising male leaders first, and cautions definitely not to start with women and children (*Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 187-188; cf. Goble and Munayer, *New Creation*, pp. 140-141).

Arabic scriptures lying open on a low book stand. Men and (appropriately covered) women would necessarily sit separately. Beyond the actual posture, prayers could be formulated, similar to Islamic prayers, but communicating the new truths of the Bible, and salvation, through faith in Jesus (Goble and Munayer, 1989). Islamic Christians could also feel a part of the wider Christian community by participating in common rituals, such as, the Lord's Supper, and the days of Lent (as redeeming equivalents to regular worship and the Ramadan fast). Common rituals help to maintain a sense of *ummah* (Parshall, 1985). The local believers, themselves, will need to determine which rituals they use, with the missionary functioning as their coach.

3. COACH NEW BELIEVERS

The third principle in contextualised ministry among Muslims is that the missionary's role is not as a director, but a coach. As a coach, their asset will be their experience, knowledge of the scriptures, and perspective, as an outsider. They can help the local believers to search the scriptures, to relate the biblical concept of a fellowship (*ekklesia*) to their task. According to *The Willowbank Report*, the task of interpreting the scriptures belongs to the whole Christian community, historical and contemporary (LCWE, 1978; cf. Hiebert, 1987). Believers' understanding of scripture throughout history, and around the world, needs to be taken into account. The coach can help the nationals with how the wider Christian community has interpreted core meanings, and, perhaps, suggest local forms. The local believers, themselves, will then interpret fellowship forms for their context.

Nationals must be consulted in the contextualisation process. Cragg writes "All that Christ will be to Muslims, only Muslims can declare" (1956, p. 305). To ask Muslim followers of Jesus what is most appropriate is not only respectful, but pragmatic. What feels right, and how they want to meet together, in their context, are matters they are best able to decide. Missionary strategists may propose great contextualised forms, but the important litmus test is that Muslims can feel at home with the forms, and understand their meaning. A Muslim follower of Jesus, as a case in point, asked, after a recent conference, "Wouldn't it

be wise to see if (the thousands of converted Muslims) *want* to be called *Issawayun*"? (Conn, 1979, p. 112). Ultimately, contextualised forms will prosper, or not, depending on the feelings of identity of the national believer, particularly new believers, unexposed, as they are, to Westernised Christianity.[7]

Appropriate forms of prayer have been worked through with Sundanese Muslims,[8] using this approach. The external forms were discussed, and agreed upon. They were forms that they brought from their Muslim heritage, with which they felt they could relate to God. It was culturally appropriate for them to sit on the floor with legs crossed, hands uplifted, and eyes open. Interestingly, when the prayer forms were field tested, the young believers used Indonesian – which they spoke with less familiarity than Sundanese – whenever praying in the presence of non-believers. In review, the coach questioned them, and they agreed that Sundanese would be the better form to use. However, in their context, the most valid prayers had been those in Arabic, which they could not understand. Forms that were less understandable, thus felt more valid, as a testimony to non-believers. The Sundanese believers had the cultural insight that outsiders lacked, and thus implemented contextualisation from within.

4. ALLOW GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION

The final principle toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims is to allow gradual transformation from within. When the gospel becomes

[7] New believers are more likely to be in the mainstream of the culture, and not have ideas of how Christianity operates (that is, based on experience with the church on a Western model). It has been argued that the development of more-effective witness to Muslims may demand at least some of the existing Christian communities amongst Muslim communities be bypassed (C. Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society", in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, D. McCurry, ed., Monrovia CA: MARC, 1979c, pp. 114-128; P. Parshall, "How goes the battle over contextualisation in Muslim evangelism?: An interview with Phil Parshall by Jim Reapsome", in *Muslim World Pulse* 12-2 (1983), pp. 7-8).

[8] An unpublished anonymous paper, "How to Coach New Converts in Developing a Contextualised Ministry", discusses the ideas about coaching, explored in this paper, and outlines this experience of Sundanese followers of Jesus.

part of a culture, the culture cannot be expected to stay the same. The essence of the gospel is transformation. The Lausanne Covenant states "Churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God" (LCWE, 1978). Culture is not static and dead, but dynamic and responsive. As God interacts with people of a culture, it will inevitably have at least some of its customs transformed. The new developments will be a continuation of the past, but some old patterns will be renewed, and others left behind. As far as possible, a contextualised ministry among Muslims must start where Muslims are, but should never try to keep them from changing (Kraft, 1979b, p. 310; Kraft, 1996; Mastra, 1979, p. 376).

Islamic Christians should be free to change gradually, as they are directed by the Spirit, and their study of scripture, and not have change imposed externally. Certain Islamic forms of worship will be appropriate for ministry among Muslims, and a missionary, committed to contextualisation, will not forbid using one form or another (1 Cor 7:20, 24). During the coaching process, however, Muslim-background believers may, themselves, decide certain forms are not appropriate, perhaps because they were used to gain merit with God, or to venerate Muhammad. Moreover, a fellowship might start for Muslims that is composed only of Muslims (following the homogenous unit principle as a bridge), but gradually transform into a group where there is "neither Jew nor Greek . . . (but) all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28, cf. Gnanakan, 1985; Smith, 1985). The important dynamic is that the change be Spirit-directed, and not imposed by foreign influences.

Gradual change is consistent with biblical precedents. For example, through God's interaction with the Hebrews, polygamy died out in Hebrew culture – over a period of a few thousand years (Kraft, 1979b, p. 210; cf. Gatje, 1976, pp. 248-261). The early church first accepted Christ, through their traditional faith; then gradually came out from Judaism, and developed as their own entity. Peter and Paul, for example, maintained contact with the synagogue, yet accommodated Gentiles in the church, without insisting they use Jewish forms (Acts 3:1; 15:1-21; 21:20-26). They began looking like a Jewish sect – under the umbrella

of Judaism, which Jesus fulfilled – but were inevitably transformed into an independent entity. The church left some forms behind (notably sacrifice and ceremony), while others were maintained, or reinterpreted (Jewish morality and the Passover).

What ultimately is the aim in developing a contextualised ministry among Muslims? Is it not to place Christ in the culture for all to see, experience, and believe? He will be presented with local cultural forms, and, when He becomes a part of the culture, will certainly transform parts of it. Outsiders can do the communicating, and allow the process of gradual transformation to begin under the master's hand. Taber comments:

> As (new believers) together study and obey the scriptures, and as their testimony begins to penetrate the broader context, it is, indeed, the ultimate aim of contextualisation to promote the transformation of human beings and their societies, cultures, and structures, not in the image of a Western church or society, but into a locally-appropriate, locally-revolutionary representation of the Kingdom of God in embryo, as a sign of the Kingdom yet to come (1979, p. 150).

CONCLUSION

Contextualising fellowship for Islamic Christians takes seriously the example of Jesus, who sensitively offered the gospel to each person, according to their needs (Taber, 1979, p. 146). Rather than mass-producing forms, to be exported to people everywhere, contextualisation tailor-makes approaches for each context. Forms used will be more understandable, and less threatening. The gospel is then less likely to be rejected, because of being misunderstood, or seen as extracting fellow Muslims from their community. Muslims, who want to follow Jesus, should not be expected to forget who they are, and where they come from.

Muslims need to be invited to explore how to follow Jesus, and still maintain a valid witness within their hostile context. There is a constant

tension for contextualisation between how to be faithful to scriptural truth, and yet be relevant to the modern world. This paper proposed four principles to guide such efforts toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

1. Adapt Muslim forms, and maintain the essence of the gospel, so that both culture and gospel are upheld.
2. Maintain the sense of *ummah* for believers with their Islamic community, and with a supportive Islamic Christian fellowship.
3. Coach new converts to appropriately contextualise ministry for themselves.
4. Allow gradual transformation from within, rather than imposing Western, or other foreign, culture from without.

This topic is controversial, but there is sometimes a need for radical experimentation to produce strategies that work. Ray Schaeffer, pioneer worker to Muslims, warned "As Christians and as missionaries, to play safe is only to play." Following Jesus, it would seem, requires new possibilities of mission to be explored. Moreover, of more critical importance, it demands Islamic Christians on the frontiers engage the options of how they will walk with Christ.

Although it needs to be further researched how much Muslims can stay a part of their cultural Muslim *ummah*, and yet faithfully follow Jesus, the extent of such continuity may determine the success of pointing whole peoples to Jesus. Further consideration of what response or impact God desires of the church would be helpful (Kraft, 1979c). This article has not answered how much the community of those who are following Jesus should be separate from their background religion. Neither has it detailed what aspects of Islamic organisation, initiation, worship, almsgiving, dress, use of the veil, view of Mohammed, and prayer and fasting are biblically appropriate. The most critical need for further work is for the actual implementation of contextualised ministry by workers who will go to the nations, be prepared to experiment, and yet

stay true to the scriptures, and to do it all according to local contexts (Guthrie, 1993). The approach presented, though, by no means, the only possibility, may have great potential for facilitating Muslim people movements to Christ (Goble and Munayer, 1989). The framework is set, waiting for creative Spirit-led harvesters to set it into motion (O, 1991, p. 27).

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THE SMALL GROUP AS A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING MELANESIAN CHRISTIANS: ISSUES FOR THE CROSS-CULTURAL FACILITATOR

Jon Paschke

Jon Paschke is an Australian, who has lived in Vanuatu for 10 years, eight years of which were as lecturer in Christian Education and in Missions at the Talua Ministry Training Centre, the training facility run by the Presbyterian church of Vanuatu, located on the island of Santo, Vanuatu. He has a B.Min and Dip.Miss from the Bible College of Victoria. Currently Jon is working as a pastor with the Uniting church in Australia, in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia. This article has been written as part of his studies towards a M.A.(Theol).

INTRODUCTION

People, the world over, gather in small groups. The same can be said of Christians. In whatever place they are found, believers seek opportunity to gather together in small groups to worship God, to study the Bible, and to be encouraged and equipped to live the life of faith. The small group is the place where Christians grow, and lives are changed.

Teaching Christians in small groups is not a recent phenomenon of the 20th century, much less merely a passing fad of the church in the West.[1] Many cultures, worldwide, have small groups in their very cultural makeup, and meeting together in this way, for the purpose of learning the Christian life, is an extension of what comes naturally.

[1] For examples of the many cultures in which Christians gather in small groups, see J. Mallison, *Growing Christians in Small Groups*, Melbourne Vic: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1989, pp. 1-2.

Looking at the specific, yet diverse, cultural grouping of Melanesia, the broad aim of this essay is to explore the central issues impacting the learning of adult Melanesian people within the setting of the small group. The specific aim of this study is to clarify some of the key issues, to which an effective learning facilitator must be alert, in their important task, especially if they are faced with the added challenge of coming from a culture other than Melanesian.

To achieve this end, an overview of the main features of traditional Melanesian learning patterns will be presented, together with helpful insights, gained from studies in the specific links between culture and learning. This will be followed by particular relevant insights, gleaned from contemporary adult education theory, and then the biblical and theological perspective of the role of small groups in the intentional task of teaching Christians for life-change. Lastly, a summary of specific issues for the cross-cultural small group facilitator in Melanesia will be given.

TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN LEARNING PATTERNS

Melanesia, meaning "black islands", is the term used to describe those parts of the south-west Pacific, which are inhabited by people with dark skin.[2] Today, there are several million Melanesian people scattered over hundreds of islands, living in the countries of West Papua, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. Melanesia is one of the most-culturally and linguistically-diverse areas in the world,[3] yet, in terms of the Pacific, is quite distinct from the more homogeneous regions of Polynesia to the east, and the relatively homogeneous Micronesia to the north.[4]

[2] This term was coined by the French navigator, Dumont d'Urville, in 1832. See D. L. Whiteman, "Melanesia: Its People and Cultures", in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, D. L. Whiteman, ed., Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1984, p. 86.

[3] Illustrated by the fact that 1,200 of the approx. 6,000 languages of the world are spoken in Melanesia. See D. Whiteman, *Introduction*, p. 89.

[4] D. Whiteman, "Oceania", in *Towards the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission*, J. M. Phillips, and R. T. Coote, eds, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993, p. 108.

Melanesian cultures do, however, demonstrate many cultural commonalities among themselves, which allows for a generalised study of traditional Melanesian cultures, values, and learning patterns to be possible, and, indeed, authentic.[5]

Melanesian societies are characteristically group oriented.[6] The "group" may be a family, an extended family, a clan, a peer group, or even a whole village, but whatever the size of the group – life is focused around the welfare of this group as a whole.[7] Individuals certainly do make personal decisions and choices, however, individualism, so familiar in the West, is foreign to this part of the world. This group-orientation (or community-orientation) is the context in which learning has traditionally occurred, down through the ages.

Studies of learning strategies in Melanesia (and, indeed, other non-industrialised societies around the world), show that the traditional strategies employed in these societies are particularly of an *informal* nature.[8] The informal educational process is sometimes described simply as the socialisation (or enculturation) process,[9] where learning emerges as an outcome of the many social interactions which occur

[5] A. Twohig has compiled a helpful summary of common themes in Melanesian cultures, under the headings of conservatism, education, leadership, relationships, morals, land, and religion. See *Liklik Buk: A source book for Development Workers in Papua New Guinea*, Lae PNG: Liklik Buk Information Centre, 1986, pp. 332-333.

[6] For a helpful discussion on this characteristic, see "Melanesian Communities: Past and Present", by Mary MacDonald, in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, pp. 213-230, esp. p. 217.

[7] Whiteman, "Oceania", p. 110.

[8] Peter Ninnes takes note of similarities between the traditional learning patterns of the Aboriginal Australians, tropical Africans, Native Americans, Polynesians, and Melanesians. See "Culture and Learning in Western Province Solomon Islands", unpublished Masters thesis, Bedford Park SA: School of Education Flinders University of South Australia, 1991, no pages, http://fehps.une.edu.au/f/s/edu/pNinnes/ma/ch2, accessed February 28, 2002.

[9] Ted Ward, "Putting Non-formal Education to Work", in *Together* (July-September, 1987), Melbourne Vic: World Vision, p. 7.

through the course of life.[10] Wherever people live, work, play, or simply gather, becomes the locus for learning, ranging from the acquisition of necessary practical life skills, to the passing-on of important knowledge, deemed necessary for the welfare and prosperity of the group. Significant locations include the house, the garden, the place of hunting or fishing, the village meeting place, the place at the river, where the women gather to wash clothes, to the special places set aside for gatherings of selective groups, such as for the boys' initiation ceremonies,[11] or the exclusive men's meeting places under the leadership of the chief.[12]

A comparison of the anthropological research data on traditional learning strategies, from a variety of areas in Melanesia, reveals a remarkable similarity.[13] From childhood, but not limited only to childhood, the major informal learning patterns tend to have the following features: observation, imitation, listening, participation, and questioning.[14]

- *Observation* – Watching other people performing a task. The key people observed being older generations, family, kin, or someone recognised by the group as a leader or an "expert".[15]

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[10] Edgar J. Elliston, "Options for Training", in *Christian Relief and Development*, E. J. Elliston, ed., Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1989, p. 238. See also T. H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1980, p. 109.

[11] J. G. Miller, *Live I*, Sydney NSW: Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1978, p. 7.

[12] For example, the ***nakamal*** in Vanuatu, or the ***haus man*** in PNG. See Johnny Naual in "The Church is a Nakamal", in *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 2: Contemporary Local Perspectives*, Randall Prior, ed., Wattle Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2001, pp. 51-59. Also M. MacDonald, "Melanesian Communities", p. 213.

[13] Peter Ninnes has provided a very helpful synthesis in his thesis, "Culture and Learning", chapter 3, no pages.

[14] P. Ninnes, *Informal Learning Strategies in the Solomon Islands*, no pages, http://wings.buffalo.edu/academic/department/anthropology/JWA/V1N3/ninnes.art, accessed 28 Feb. 2002.

[15] An "expert" is someone regarded by the group as having some information or skill of value to their welfare and prosperity.

- *Imitation* – After observing something, the action is copied.
- *Listening* – Knowledge, information, and instruction is received through talking, stories, songs, etc. Usually linked to observation.
- *Participation* – Initially, partial participation, leading to full participation. Full participation is often experienced in the context of a group.[16] Repetition and memorisation seem to be key components.
- *Questioning* – Particularly in regard to requesting information, or seeking help and advice.

The extent to which each of these strategies is used is dependant upon the context in which the learning occurs.[17] Further, the major cultural value, which influences these strategies, is the desire to maintain good relationships between people, with a strong emphasis on maintaining respect, and avoiding conflict. Again, the centrality of the group, and community relationships, are seen as very important values.

Learning comes through a variety of group contexts. Although not ascribed the formal title of "teacher", significant people, in whose presence learning occurs, are the older generations, especially parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles.[18] Others are the community leaders, especially the "big men" or chiefs, who have responsibilities for the welfare of the group. A great proportion of learning occurs in the peer group, whether it is of children, young boys, young girls, mothers, men, local chiefs, etc. Notably, these informal groups often constitute people of the same sex.

Much of what is described, above, stands in stark contrast to the institutionalised school systems, and processes, prevalent in much of

[16] An important learning strategy for activities, such as dancing, singing, fishing, building, gardening, etc.
[17] P. Ninnes, *Informal Learning*, no pages.
[18] Ibid., no pages.

Melanesia today. Originating in the Western world, the *formal* schooling system came as a legacy of European contact, dating back over 200 years. Christian missionaries, too, were instrumental in the introduction of formal teaching patterns, as they tackled the education process, using the educational philosophy and training methods they knew so well from "back home" (i.e., Europe).[19] Melanesian people are among the first to reflect on the benefits of such a purposeful educational system, introduced into their rapidly-changing lives, yet, in this context, the formal educational system is also often criticised for the way it perpetuates the inherent cultural gap between the formal school processes and the traditional learning milieu of the Melanesian student.[20]

The wise cross-cultural educator always seeks to adapt his philosophical and methodological teaching approach to that which has greatest affinity to the context in which he is operating. Clearly, small groups are a key to learning, within Melanesian cultures. It follows, then, that, using the small group context as a strategy in teaching Christians, demonstrates a good Melanesian "cultural fit", and should be encouraged as a culturally-relevant setting, in which to facilitate Christian learning.[21]

INSIGHTS GAINED FROM STUDIES OF THE LINK BETWEEN CULTURE AND LEARNING

Substantial evidence exists, suggesting that it is unlikely that there are any significant differences in cognitive ability and processes of people

[19] See D. Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1983, pp. 122-124. Also Graham Miller, *Live I*, pp. 84-85.

[20] Critiques are well documented. For example, see M. J. Christie (1984), as cited by Ninnes, "Culture and Learning", chapter 2.

[21] An African church leader Elie Buconyori, calls this "coopting cultural modes for formation". See "Educating for Spiritual Formation" in *Perspectives on Leadership Training*, V. B. Cole, et al, eds, Nairobi Kenya: NEGST, 1993, pp. 62-65.

around the world.[22] People from all cultural groups have the ability to think logically and rationally. The differences perceived, when comparing the learning behaviours noted across different cultural groupings, have to do with the socio-cultural context to which those people belong.[23] Different cultures have differing views on reality, where differing conclusions are drawn from, differing cultural values, beliefs (assumptions), and worldview.[24] How important it is for the cross-cultural small group facilitator to have an understanding of the cultural preferences and assumptions of the people with whom they are working.[25]

Research and analysis of preferred learning styles of people, from differing cultures around the world, seems to confirm a continuum of learning-style preferences, with the two poles relating to the degree of people's sensitivity to their context. As noted by Edward T. Hall, "high context" people have a high sensitivity to the concrete context around them, whilst "low context" people tend to be more interested in ideas and issues that are broader than the immediate context.[26] People are characteristically, more or less, at one end or the other of the continuum. Another way of describing these two characteristic learning styles is with the terms "field-sensitive" and "field-independence". Earle and Dorothy Bowen have popularised these terms, through their research of learning style preferences among African students. The Bowens have noted that East and West African students typically demonstrate "field-sensitive" characteristics,

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[22] Refer Ninnes, "Culture and Learning", chapter 2, who cites a literature review made by Scribner and Cole, 1973.

[23] Refer Ninnes, "Culture and Learning", chapter 2.

[24] Refer D. L. Whiteman, "What is Culture?", in *Introduction*, pp. 21-22. Also Whiteman, "Communicating across Cultures", in *Introduction*, pp. 56-84.

[25] For helpful discussions on the practicalities of this task, see D. J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*, Grand Rapids MI: Academie Books, 1978. Also K. G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions*, Brisbane Qld: Harvest Publications, 1995.

[26] As cited by J. Plueddemann in "Culture, Learning, and Missionary Training", in *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, W. Taylor, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1991, p. 219.

remarkably similar to observations of students from other non-Western countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.[27] These broad characteristics, which identify the *field-sensitive* person, include:

- Very sensitive to the judgment of others.
- Responsive to social reinforcement.
- Good with interpersonal relations, which are very important.
- Likes being with people; groups are very important.
- Obedience to authority important.
- Culturally-determined gender roles important.
- Not analytical at problem solving.
- Extrinsic motivation very important.
- Autonomy not as important as social acceptance.[28]

For the Bowens, the goal of their research outcomes was to propose teaching strategies to fit the learning preferences of the field-sensitive person.[29] It is significant to note that most of the teaching strategies they suggest are firmly rooted in the context of the small-group learning environment. Again, the evidence strongly affirms the priority of the small group as a learning environment for the characteristically "field-sensitive" Melanesian people.

[27] E. Bowen, and D. Bowen, "What Does it Mean to Think, Learn, Teach?", in *Internationalising Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, W. Taylor, ed., Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1991, p. 206.
[28] K. P. Cross, cited by E. Bowen, and D. Bowen, "What Does it Mean to Think, Learn, Teach?", p. 207.
[29] Ibid., pp. 211-213.

INSIGHTS GAINED FROM CONTEMPORARY ADULT EDUCATION THEORY

Over the last 40 years, the emphasis of adult education study and reflection has shifted from teaching to learning. The person, and needs, of the *learner* have come more clearly into focus, with the development of what is commonly known as *learner-centred education*, as contrasted with subject, or *content-centred*, education more often associated with formal education. A pioneer in this approach was Paulo Freire, who developed a learner-based education strategy while working among the illiterate peasants of Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s.[30] Many consider the most important consequence of Freire's approach was his firm belief that language, and any educational content, must be firmly rooted in the world of the learner. The learner, living in his particular and unique context of community, is to be the one who sets the educational agenda for change. Through group discussion and dialogue, the priorities are set for action. Freire's methodology has had the roll-on effect of triggering increasing interest around the world in the value of sharing opinions and ideas in a group setting, especially in response to unique, and specific, learner contexts.[31]

The cross-cultural small group facilitator can benefit greatly in using principles from *learner-centred* reflection and discussion techniques. Cultural insights are gleaned when the facilitator intentionally allows the group members to talk, encouraging them to share thoughts together, articulating the needs, issues, problems, and challenges

[30] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York NY: Crossroads, 1970, and *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth UK: Penguin Books, 1972.

[31] For example, Lyra Srinivasan, in *Perspectives on Non-formal Adult Learning*, New York NY: World Education, 1977. Lyra gives case study examples of the "problem-centred approach" and "self-actualising education" as non-formal education techniques, used with success in Asia. For a summary, and balanced critique of Freire's contribution to the task of Christian education, see Robert Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1997, pp. 75-80.

facing them and their community.[32] Further, it is from this entry point that the Christian small group facilitator can help guide discussion, from felt needs and issues, towards finding practical help in the scriptures.

It should be noted that there is not necessarily a dichotomy between the ideals of *learning* and those of *teaching*. The focus on the learner ensures that dignity, value, and respect are always conferred on the learner, their needs, and context, while an appropriate emphasis upon teaching, not only includes a concern for learning, but further demonstrates a commitment to sharing "content" intended to enhance the life of both the learner and his community. Obviously, content considerations are foundational to a Christian small group facilitator desiring to share the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the associated challenges of practical Christian discipleship.[33]

Determining how the adult learns has become a central issue in seeking for effective adult education. Perhaps one of the most significant contributions is the simple acknowledgment that adults are not children, and that there must, therefore, be some particular distinctives, as to how they learn. Clearly, adults are different, in their developmental needs, in their accumulated life experiences, and also in their perceptions about God.[34] Malcolm Knowles' study of *andragogy*[35] offers four crucial assumptions about learners, suggesting that, as a learner matures:

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[32] In "making easy the work of the group", the facilitator's role is clearly expressed. See B. J. Fleischer, *Facilitating for Growth*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1993, p. 21.

[33] See R. Pazmino, "Adult Education with Persons from Ethnic Minority Communities", in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, J. O. Gangel, and J. C. Wilhoit, eds, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1993, p. 280.

[34] See Nancy T. Foltz, "Basic Principles of Adult Religious Education", in *Handbook of Adult Religious Education*, N. T. Foltz, ed., AL: Religious Education Press, 1986, p. 25.

[35] Knowles initially defined "andragogy" as "the art and science of helping adults learn". See *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Houston TX: Gulf Publishing, 2nd edn, 1978. More recently, he uses the term "andragogy" to simply describe

> (1) Their self-concept moves from being a dependant personality towards being a self-directed human being; (2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; (3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and (4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and, accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centredness to one of performance-centredness.[36]

Knowles' perceptions have had a profound influence on how the task of adult education is considered, in both the secular and the Christian realms around the world. Valid cross-cultural application of these principles can be made, however it must be kept in mind that his theories of andragogy were developed in the Western environment of America, and care must be taken before the principles are wholly transferred to other cultural contexts, such as Melanesia, where many traditional cultural values are typically "un-Western". As an example, the welcome and helpful emphasis of recognising the learning needs of the individual (the development of the self-concept) could easily degenerate to the destructive excesses of individualism, observed in Western societies. In Melanesia, personal advancement is not set as a higher goal than familial and communal connection and loyalty.[37] Positively though, Knowles is clear in his affirmation that "Learning is a social activity; we learn better when we interact with

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another model of assumptions about learners, with distinctives from pedagogy, yet useful in describing the way many adults learn. See *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*, Chicago IL: Follett Publishing, 1980, p. 42.

[36] Knowles, *The Modern Practice*, pp. 44-45, 390.

[37] Robert Pazmino provides some helpful cautions in "Adult Education with Persons from Ethnic Minority Communities", pp. 278-288.

other people."[38] He goes on to suggest that, "the small group format . . . offers the ideal".[39]

Research has found that adults learn best when they are not under undue stress, they are given adequate time, and can work at their own pace.[40] In Melanesia, it is extremely important for adults to be given plenty of time to fully discuss and explore the issues of the topic at hand. Frustration comes when insufficient time is given. Further, frustration, followed by disinterest, comes when the learning objective is felt to be either too basic or too difficult.[41] A wise small group facilitator will fully collaborate, and negotiate, with the members of the group, in the process of setting the group's learning objectives.[42]

In all cultures, as people move up in years, they begin to lose the physical agility of their youth. Visual and hearing acuity begin to decline in the adult years, sometimes limiting what can be easily seen and heard by members in a small group situation.[43] The small group facilitator needs to consider questions such as: *Have all members heard accurately the words spoken by me and other group members? Can all group members see the subtle hand and eye movements of other group members?*[44] *Are people sitting in the best possible configuration to see and hear all that is happening?* Research shows that, even though rate of learning may decrease with age, declining hearing and visual acuity do not necessarily mean a corresponding decline in the ability to learn, or the correctness of the

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[38] Taken from "Contributions of Malcolm Knowles", in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, p. 100.

[39] Knowles, "Contributions of Malcolm Knowles", p. 100.

[40] D. J. Brundage, and D. Mackeracher, *Adult Learning Principles and Their Application to Program Planning*, Ontario CAN: Ministry of Education, 1980, p. 108.

[41] J. R. Kidd, *How Adults Learn*, New York NY: Association Press, 1977, p. 275.

[42] Brundage and Mackeracher, *Adult Learning Principles*, p. 12. See also S. D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*, San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 1986, pp. 62-64.

[43] Kidd, *How Adults Learn*, p. 62.

[44] This is particularly pertinent in Melanesia, where non-verbal communication techniques are frequently used.

response.[45] Adult small group members need to be given every opportunity to maximise their full learning potential within the small group.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR TEACHING CHRISTIANS IN SMALL GROUPS

God created people as social beings, with needs for interaction. Since people cannot survive in isolation, they must find ways to cooperate together. The family of Adam and Eve was the first small group.[46] Even a cursory look through the Old Testament reveals how the notion and practice of small and large groups was woven into the fabric of the very existence of God's people, the Israelites.[47] In the New Testament, we see that Jesus Christ devoted Himself to His own small group of 12 disciples, to informally teach and guide His followers (Mark 3:14, 15). Following the "Great Commission" (Matt 28:18-20), these same men went out again with the task of evangelising and nurturing new Christian believers. It is interesting to note that the disciples, and other members of the early church, followed the same model, which Jesus gave them, where they regularly gathered together in small groups for fellowship, worship, prayer, and teaching (e.g., Acts 2:46-47; 5:42; 12:12; 21:7). Evangelism and nurture happened, as a spontaneous outcome of these informal, yet intentional, gatherings of Christian believers.[48] Church history has shown this to be a continuing scenario down through the ages, particularly noting that, on many occasions, it is through the agency of small groups of committed Christians gathering together that God has brought spiritual renewal to His church.[49]

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[45] Foltz, "Basic Principles of Adult Religious Education", p. 32.

[46] J. Plueddemann, and C. Plueddemann, *Pilgrims in Progress*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1990, p. 115.

[47] For a helpful summary, see N. McBride, in *How to Lead Small Groups*, Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 1990, pp. 14-15.

[48] John Mallison provides a useful summary in *Growing Christians in Small Groups*, pp. 4-5.

[49] J. Mallison, *Growing Christians in Small Groups*, pp. 5-7.

Following the teaching and example of Jesus, and His first disciples, the Bible clearly reflects the task of Christian education to be something intentionally prayed for and planned towards. "Life change" in believers is the goal. An important goal of Christian education is for believers "to become conformed to the likeness of Jesus", that is, "more Christlike", or "reflecting maturity in Christ" (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:11-13).[50] Not only are believers to be built up in their Christian knowledge and understanding, their whole lives are to be in the process of reflecting growth and change towards the maturity intended by our Creator. As stated by Lois LeBar, "Christian teaching operates at the level of life. Anything less is sub-Christian."[51]

As signalled by Jesus' words in Mark 12:29-31, effective and balanced Christian education must have a holistic outlook on life. Nancy Foltz describes Christian teaching as necessarily requiring a gentle blend of four content areas: cognitive (knowing), affective (feelings, emotions, attitudes), psychomotor (action), and lifestyle (the integration of the three).[52] Christian knowledge and understanding is intended to have a relationship with every area of life, without compartmentalisation. Fortunately for the Western Christian educator working in Melanesia, this understanding of reality fits naturally into the Melanesian way of viewing life as an integrated whole. Traditionally, there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. It may serve the cross-cultural facilitator well to recognise that the Western neo-platonic worldview is traditionally foreign to Melanesia, and that practical application and expression would be expected to accompany any cognitive spiritual truth.

If Christianity is correctly described as "faith-as-whole-of-life", then what is the most effective way of communicating this life-changing

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[50] Refer Lawrence Richards, *Christian Education*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1975, pp. 20-25. Also L. LeBar, and J. E. Plueddemann, *Education That is Christian*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1989, p. 193.

[51] LeBar, *Education That is Christian*, p. 15.

[52] See Foltz, "Basic Principles of Adult Religious Education", pp. 25-26.

faith to others? A closer look at the life of Jesus in the gospels reveals His teaching and leadership methodology. In the informal context of the small group, sharing life's rough-and-tumble experiences on a daily basis, Jesus led His disciples to discover spiritual realities, which were to profoundly impact their lives. Through His every ***word and action***, Jesus' life example was on display for every disciple to observe and reflect upon. Through the transparency and intimacy of the small group, Jesus *modelled* the humble, God-centred life of faith (John 14:9). Jesus gave His life as an example to be copied (Luke 6:40; cf. John 13:15-17).[53] In a similar way, the Apostle Paul was able to say to the new believers in Corinth, "I urge you to imitate me" (1 Cor 4:16; cf. Phil 3:17).

The Bible shows us that the life of faith is passed on to others, young and old, through meaningful relationships. More specifically, faith is "caught", through the informal socialisation process at work in the community of faith. Lawrence Richards describes modelling as *the* method of Christian education.[54] The application of this simple, yet profound, theological insight to teaching Christians in Melanesia is obvious. Firstly, it affirms the traditional *informal* learning strategies at work in Melanesia (discussed earlier), as potentially effective ways of teaching and nurturing Christian faith-as-life. Secondly, it draws attention to the strategic role of the small group facilitator as someone called upon to *model* the Christian faith, by word, action, and lifestyle, in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit.[55] The demonstration of the facilitator's commitment to group members, in Christlike humility, is of crucial importance.

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[53] Jesus' teaching methods are explored in C. Wilson, *Jesus the Teacher*, Mt Waverley Vic: Word of Truth, 1974, and J. S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh UK: Saint Andrew Press, 1957. See also C. H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 273.

[54] Richards, *Christian Education*, p. 81.

[55] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategy of observation and imitation.

SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR THE CROSS-CULTURAL SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR IN MELANESIA

In facilitating learning and discussion in any given small group in Melanesia, the leader needs to be keenly aware of the dynamics of the group. This is no easy task, but how much more so if the one facilitating discussion is from a culture other than Melanesian. Following is a summary of many of the more-pertinent issues of small group interactions, particularly in relation to the predominantly "high-context" or "field-sensitive" Melanesian cultural preferences and values. Where appropriate, comment is made, where the cultural preferences may contrast considerably with a typical Western value.[56]

Group goals: The group will be people-oriented, as contrasted to task-oriented. The purpose will be to build interpersonal relationships, and to meet the needs of members.

Time: People and relationships take priority over time spent. Event-orientation as contrasted to time-orientation. Precise starting and finishing times are not important.

Gender makeup of group: Discussion may flow more freely in mono-gender groups or in peer groups.[57] Melanesian women may not feel as free to talk in the presence of men, however this does not rule out using mixed groups.

Kinship relationships: Many small groups are made up of relatives, some with complex relationship loyalties, protocols, and taboos. Kinship terms are often used when referring to someone else in preference to personal names.[58] Some members may not talk with, or

[56] Some of these categories have been adapted from Jim Plueddemann, and Carol Plueddemann, in *Pilgrims in Progress*, pp. 120-121.

[57] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategy of participation. A fuller participation could be anticipated within peer groups.

[58] An important feature of Melanesian societies. Anthropologists refer to this as "teknonymy". See K. McElhanon, and D. Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom?", in *Introduction*, pp. 107-108.

make eye contact with, a particular member of the group. Grasping a basic understanding of how a local kinship system is organised, and functions, is important for the cross-cultural small group facilitator.

Sitting configuration: Face to face contact, with accompanying eye contact is not viewed as especially necessary (as compared to the West).[59] However, it is important that everyone can hear and see what is going on. Participants may feel more relaxed sitting on mats.

Communication style/body language: Communication will tend to be indirect, with an emphasis on non-verbal messages. Tone of voice, facial movements, and posture all have important meanings. It may be considered offensive to unduly raise the voice.

Use of language: Any given small group would tend to use the language understood most fluently by all group members, allowing for freer discussion and interaction. When people from several language groups are present, then the local lingua franca is chosen.[60] Language learning must be a priority for the cross-cultural facilitator.

Respect for authority: Respect is readily shown for prestigious group members (i.e., the "big-man", or a senior experienced person, or someone with formal credentials [an "expert"]). Ideally, the group leader is qualified in one of these ways.[61] What these people say is respected, accordingly, members will be hesitant to counter or contradict what is said.[62]

[59] Eye and facial gestures are important features in communication, however, in some relationships, it is disrespectful to maintain direct eye contact.

[60] For example, ***Tok Pisin*** or ***Motu*** in Papua New Guinea, ***Pijin*** in the Solomon Islands, and ***Bislama*** in Vanuatu.

[61] The cross-cultural facilitator may be respected as an "expert" (rightly or wrongly), by virtue of his formal qualification (study, experience, or ordination), or even merely through his presence among them.

[62] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategy of partial participation in the presence of respected individuals.

Interaction style: Group harmony is important. There may be a tendency to conform to what other members have expressed, especially if spoken by someone with rank. Personal stories and "testimonies" are important. Members will carefully avoid causing a fellow group member to "lose face" and feel shame.

Leadership style: Members would tend to expect a strong, controlling leadership to maintain group harmony and conformity; however, the Christian leader will need to temper this expectation by demonstrating a "servant-leadership" style, as taught by Jesus.[63]

Life example of leader: Group members will look to the leader for knowledge, wisdom, direction, and example. The leader's words, actions, attitudes, and lifestyle are all contributing factors in what group members learn. The leader needs to be conscious of his or her modelling role.[64]

Conflict resolution style: Indirect resolution is sought, through relatives or mutual friends, not through direct confrontation. Displeasure by group members is shown through non-verbal, subtle communication. Resolution may be avoided for as long as possible. Reconciliation is often sealed through the exchange of gifts, and through prayer.

Literacy levels: Group members may have vastly differing levels of reading skills and comprehension. Some participants may not be able to read at all. However, all members have a valuable resource of life experience and stories, and should be encouraged to contribute to discussion.

Preferred discussion topics: Issues, concerns, problems, challenges, and events, immediately impacting on the group members or

[63] See S. Hoke, and S. Voorhies, "Training Relief and Development Workers in the Two-Thirds World", in *Christian Relief and Development*, pp. 221f.

[64] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategies of observation and imitation.

community, are the topics of greatest interest for discussion, whereby help and direction can be sought from scripture.

Preferred Bible passages: Bible stories and parables are favourites, as well as history narratives, along with the Psalms, and other passages, which encourage the imagination.

Preferred Bible-study method: A holistic approach to Bible study is preferred. The distinctions between the consecutive questions of the inductive Bible study approach (observation/interpretation/application) are blurred.[65] Deductive, or topical, Bible study methods are popular.[66]

Discussion questions: The leader must allow plenty of time for discussion, as members will want to thoroughly explore the issue at hand.[67] Out of respect for other group members (or maybe due to a lack of confidence), some people may appear slow to begin. The facilitator must be careful not to overload the members with too many discussion questions, or Bible passages to be looked through.

Use of handouts: Together with the Bible, papers, with written information, outlines, instructions, or discussion questions, are appreciated.

Visual aids: Relevant objects, models, pictures, photographs, maps, diagrams, blackboards, etc., used by the leader to enhance learning, are greatly appreciated.

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[65] For insightful comment on the relationship of learning styles to Bible study method, see Peter S. C. Chang, "Steak, Potatoes, Peas, and Chop Suey: Linear and Non-Linear Thinking", in *Missions & Theological Education in World Perspective*, H. Conn, and S. Rowen, eds, Farmington IL: Associates of Urbanus, 1984, pp. 113-123.

[66] Issues of gospel, specifically related to culture (both traditional and modern), are considered important.

[67] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategies of listening and asking.

Application: Appropriate and practical application of the study to life situations would be an expected outcome.

Group prayer: Prayer is an expected and essential component of Christian small group interaction. The "*bung*" prayer, where individuals pray at the same time, has become popular throughout Melanesia.

Singing and music: Singing and music is enjoyed in much of Melanesia, especially singing which allows for harmonies to be developed. Allow plenty of opportunity for repetition in the learning of new songs and music.[68] As well as being used in worship, songs are important media of carrying information.

Opportunities for learning and teaching: The small group facilitator should be alert to the many *informal* learning opportunities which may present throughout the day, outside of the planned-for small group Bible study and discussion meeting. Opportunities to communicate Christian truth can arise at any time or place.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of how best to teach and nurture Christians has been placed squarely before the church, ever since the Lord Jesus Christ first commissioned His disciples 2,000 years ago. What is the key to accomplishing this God-given task most effectively? For the Christian educator, ministering cross-culturally, this means giving serious consideration to the cultural milieu in which he is working. The prudent educator will not automatically default to the normative teaching and learning strategies of their own home culture. If coming from a Western culture, the typically "low context", or "field-independent", learning strategies, often expressed through *formal* education techniques, and deemed appropriate for Western learners, are found wanting in other cultural settings.

[68] Compare the traditional Melanesian learning strategies of participation, together with memorisation and repetition.

A closer look at Melanesian cultural patterns reveals that learning has traditionally occurred *informally*, and within the context of a group. The dominant learning strategies being those of observation, imitation, listening, participation, and questioning. Clearly, then, the wise educator would seek to understand, and utilise, these indigenous patterns. The concept of teaching Melanesian Christians for "life change", within the context of a small group setting, shows a striking "cultural fit" with the learning strategies traditionally employed.

How can the cross-cultural small group facilitator further maximise his or her effectiveness? The cross-cultural facilitator must consciously seek to understand the dominant cultural values at work within Melanesian society, particularly in relation to the high priority given to relationships, and to the maintenance of harmony within the group. For example, time considerations are secondary to quality relationships. To the cross-cultural facilitator, this heightened "group awareness" may contrast to the individualistic thinking and time-orientation, more common in his home culture. A wise cross-cultural facilitator will seek to minimise cultural dissonance for group members by careful observation and sensitivity. Further helpful insights on effective small group leadership can be gleaned from contemporary studies and observations by adult educationalists, particularly in the area of *learner-centred* reflection and discussion techniques, and also from studies revealing how adults learn most effectively. An understanding of the adult world – particularly intellectual, social, and biological distinctives, as contrasted with those of the children's world – is of great benefit to the small group facilitator.

The biblical goal of Christian education is expressed in the holistic development of people's identity, based solidly in the person of Jesus Christ. The New Testament reveals that Jesus taught His disciples by calling them "to be with Him", as He demonstrated a godly life, for the disciples to witness, and to copy. Again, the traditional Melanesian educational role of *modelling* fits well with Jesus' chosen teaching and leadership methodology, used to bring about life-change

in His disciples. Presenting a genuine Christian "life-example" is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by any Christian, ministering cross-culturally.

In the "high context" world of varied cultural values, and distinctive learning preferences, there are, indeed, many issues requiring careful consideration by the small group facilitator, seeking to effectively minister cross-culturally in Melanesia. However, armed with the insights of fellow travellers, who have sought the most appropriate way forward, and with the grace and wisdom of Almighty God, may God grant them the courage to give it a go.

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THIRD-WORLD AWAKENING: GREEK ROADBLOCKS OR A HEBRAIC ROAD?

Victor Schlatter

Victor started out as a young atomic scientist in the early 1950s. After reading a Wycliffe Bible Translator's magazine ad, he began to pursue the science of analysing previously-unwritten languages. The final goal was scripture translation, and the transformation of tribal hearts. In 1961, he entered into the lives of the emerging stone-age Waola tribe of Papua New Guinea. Victor is currently Bible translator and Senior Advisor to the Tiliba Christian Church of Papua New Guinea, and Director of South Pacific Island Ministries, Inc, Cairns, Queensland, Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The Waola are a tribe of about 50,000 speakers of the Angal Heneng language, in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Under the ministry of the Tiliba Christian church, the Angal Heneng New Testament, a background reader of Old Testament Bible stories, plus a well-tested quality primer, were published, almost at the same time, in 1978. By 2004, the New Testament had gone into its fifth printing, while evangelism has birthed some 100 congregations. Gospel outreach also followed the young Waola work-seekers from as far away as the plantations of Mt Hagen, Kimbe, and Rabaul, in addition to the town centres of Mendi and Port Moresby. The last overseas missionaries, who had stayed on the longest to aid the Waola in technical matters, left Papua New Guinea in the mid-1990s. All the while, the rate of church growth continued and actually even increased in the later years under stable local leadership. The divine formula: The Word of God in the vernacular + an indigenous spiritual appetite = tribal transformation.

THREE REVIVALS

Revival is always a welcome occasion in any fellowship. The first Waola revival came in 1981, by the response of hundreds of young people, who had learned to read the Bible in their literacy classes. The Southern Highlands Department of Education had graciously allowed the "cultural hour" time-slot in their primary school curriculum to be used for the Angal Heneng speaking students to study their own mother tongue. This *tsunami* of young Bible readers turned into a flood of spiritual response to a Book that spoke directly to them. It was a visible and touchable source of information that replaced a previous word-of-mouth message. But, it was not only the young students that were inspired. Not to be outdone, a large number of adults – mostly men, who had, up to then, lagged behind their gospel-hungry wives – joined a flow that ended with some 800 baptisms over the next 18 months.

A few years later, a second revival, of a much different beginning, followed the pattern of the traditional Pacific Island-style revivals that tend to catch the attention of almost everyone – from curious to committed – within the wider community. This second awakening typically included significant expression of the numerous spiritual gifts listed in the scriptures. The leadership, at the time, quite wisely focused the church on the Giver, over a superficial or personal fascination with the gift, looking at the purpose behind the experience, rather than mere exuberance. But, once again, many hundreds more came to faith in a deep personal relationship with their Lord. But, both these initial group-responses paled in contrast to the third revival that gained momentum in 1990, and actually continues into the present.

FIRST THE BOOK – THEN THE LAND OF THE BOOK

In 1982, I was privileged to tour the land of the Bible, the dream of a lifetime for any Bible scholar. Sad to say, our tour guide had an ethnic background of strong anti-Israel bias, which deeply tainted his personal view on biblical truth, leaving our group a bit uncomfortable.

But, six years later, I had a second chance to return to the land of Israel, this time, not as a tourist, but as an ordinary traveller. In a routine flight

from Europe to the South Pacific, my wife and I broke our trip in Jordan,[1] and returned to Jerusalem by bus and taxi. This time, not annoyed by a prejudiced tour guide, we sensed, on our own, the prophetic significance of Jews, regathered to their ancient homeland from over 100 nations. In sharing this second experience with our Waola family, the enthusiasm of their response in the months that followed was both unexpected and unmistakable.

The Angal Heneng scriptures became alive with entirely new understanding. Why?

The Hon. Sitiveni Rambuka, former Prime Minister of Fiji, gave some interesting insights in his speech at the opening of the Fiji branch of the ICEJ[2] in 1995. When the first Christian missionaries told the Fijians about places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Hebron, they immediately thought that such wonderful holy places could be found nowhere else but in heaven! Places like Jericho and the Jordan River might be seen in a dream, but never in real life! But, when the Fijian soldiers were assigned a peacekeeping role with the UN in Lebanon, Israel, and Sinai, new knowledge began to dawn for the ordinary Fijian.

Even though the Waola acceptance of the gospel gave the Bible stories a higher place than the ancient folklore, which involved talking snakes and crocodiles, or sacred trees, no one ever thought it possible to one day see these special creatures! So, when the Bible tales came along, former thinking patterns promptly put all new biblical geography into that same never-to-be-seen world beyond reach.

Thus, when our report of walking where Jesus once walked opened the eyes of the Angal Heneng family, the church awakened to a level of understanding not known before. When they saw that Jerusalem – spoken of 800 times in the Bible – was a real city, which could be

[1] Amman, Jordan, is about 80 km from Jerusalem, and we were permitted to return in three weeks to complete our flight to the Pacific.

[2] The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, a non-political Christian organisation, with a biblical vision to support and encourage Jews worldwide to return to their ancient homelands.

visited, it lifted the entire biblical record far above the level of their old worldview.

Since that breakthrough, many hundreds of Papua New Guineans have also visited Jerusalem, and seen those ancient sites for themselves. And, more than the sites, ancient Bible prophecies are often recognised in the daily news. It is amazing! Even when the world media has little understanding of the prophetic meaning of their reports, a Bible-sensitive Melanesian does. "Israel awareness" has now spread from those beginnings among the Waola to the far reaches of Papua New Guinea, not to mention the other Pacific Island nations. A surprised visitor will even find biblically-named villages like Judea, Samaria, or Bethany. Even so, nowhere has the effect been quite as significant as in the continuing third revival among the Waola, which has now spread to some five neighbouring tribes. Certain historical factors may have helped the movement, nevertheless, revival is revival.

THROWING OUT THE KNIFE WITH THE POTATO PEELINGS

Millennialist[3]-linked cargo cult thinking has had its roots deep within Papua New Guinea, and group movements, which practised taking up sizable collections from their people (except for those offerings sanctioned by the church and for the church), have long been viewed with scepticism since the beginning of missions.

But there are also times when suspicions, caused from lack of cultural knowledge by well-meaning Western mentors, can too soon dampen the fires of valid enthusiasm. Ironically, huge meetings and community-wide celebrations are as natural to Papua New Guinea as yams and *kaukau*. So what better way is there to impart the gospel message than into a sea of popular response?

[3] Millennialism is the belief that a better age will, someday, be experienced. Melanesian cargo cult practice adds the belief that, if one attaches the proper magic to that belief, great material wealth will also be received.

So, when Melanesians have gathered to march in identity with Israel, from the streets of Port Moresby, or Highlands airfields, the Hebraic[4]-rooted mindset of massive community gatherings finds itself right at home. One has only to think back to the multitudes that came to listen by the Sea of Galilee, the massive three-times-a-year Jewish festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem, or the million-plus congregation, following the wilderness Tabernacle, to see a connection. This sort of living-faith event is far more popular in Melanesia than it might be in Melbourne or Minneapolis, and speaks out about an unmistakable cultural identity.

Added to that, many hundreds of Papua New Guineans have, by now, seen this type of huge parade gatherings with their own eyes at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Thousands more have seen it at home on videos, which these pilgrims[5] brought back from Israel. The cultural bond could not hit any closer to home.

Thus, there are no secret purposes in collecting funds to help bring the extremely poor Diaspora Jews[6] out of the collapsed Soviet Union. And there are no doubts about helping to feed the hungry underprivileged in Jerusalem. With many Jews severely undernourished, due to almost four years of war with Palestinian terrorists, these living reminders of Bible people have become *wantoks* in their Christian faith. The teaching of Rom 15:27 could not have a closer parallel in today's world. Their collections are hardly for pie-in-the-sky[7] cargo cult advantage, but a most natural Melanesian outreach to brethren in need.

I will never forget the eye-opener I got from the greeting given by a Highland elder to two Jewish visitors to his village. The ladies had just

[4] The focus of this paper is to contrast the earlier Hebrew way of thinking with the more-recent worldview of the Greek philosophers, who significantly moulded the present Western way of thought.

[5] A pilgrim differs from the ordinary tourist in his special interest in visiting sacred sites or holy places.

[6] Jews, driven from their homeland from before the time of Christ, and again by the Romans in 70 AD and 132 AD, are now scattered over the globe. Having kept their Jewish identity, they are called the Diaspora.

[7] "Pie-in-the-sky" is a word picture for something that will never happen.

offered the two guests huge gifts of food, as the leader explained, "We know you're not Christians, but you are Jews, just like in our Bible. That means we are one family, and we want to welcome you!" Can we feel the amazement this made on two secular Jewish tourists, whose history of religious persecution for almost 2,000 years had only led them as far as a deep distrust of Christianity?

God's original choice of using Israel to present the world with its Messiah cannot be forgotten. Therefore, to miss the value of using a regathered Israel in our message today, means to overlook scripture that should, likewise, never be neglected.

OVERLOOKING OTHER TOOLS OF HISTORICAL TRUTH

Unfortunately, there has been a lack of appreciation by many Western missionaries, and their sending bodies, for a vast amount of scripture focusing on natural Israel. They failed to understand – or at least teach – the significance of the final regathering and redemption of Israel, at the close of the Great Commission to the nations.

Successful evangelism has learned long ago that personal salvation through Jesus Christ – though central to the message – cannot be fully appreciated without seeing Him within the full background of biblical history. The meaning of sin in the Garden of Eden, followed by the Patriarchs of redemption – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – are the first ancient paths for the human family of God. Moses, the deliverer, teacher, and first earthly link to the God of Sinai, is, likewise, a vital part of the picture. Then Messiah Jesus came, in His Father's perfect timing, to become the very heart of the whole plan.

Yet, after seeing all this, if we miss the promised redemption to the faithful remnant of Israel, we have lost the message of 16 of 17 Old Testament prophets. And it is to miss the clear teaching of Rom 9, 10, 11, at the very core of that most highly-esteemed New Testament book. It is also to overlook the "one new man out of two" model of Eph 2, 3, 4. Finally, it is to fail to see God's final act in the evangelism of the nations, which – according to the Hebrew prophets – cannot be separated from

the Father's final welcome-home to Israel, His long-lost son. Indeed, if our experience with the Waola is to be usefully interpreted, we dare not miss one of the most useful tools in getting a last-call message out to a lost world. If even the Jews are coming home, it's time for everyone to get involved!

Highlighting what we have just said, we can see that many Papua New Guinea believers have begun to understand what God is doing. Yet, this is an attraction that is not only in Melanesia. We have also seen South American, African, and Asian Christians visit Jerusalem, as well as becoming involved in Israel-related ministries over the last 20 years. Connecting world outreach to Israel's final hour is a growing awareness in the third world at large. Excitement among believers has a powerful appeal to those yet on the sidelines. Unfortunately, a similar Western awakening still lags somewhat behind.

UNDERSTANDING THE GREEK WORLDVIEW

Third-world revival movements are often misunderstood, and certainly underestimated by the "developed" Western world. Individualistic humanism[8] versus the worldview of the extended family creates a great valley that classically divides the secular West from a much more spiritually aware third world. That same giant gulf lies between the ancient Hebrew way of thinking and the general Western cultural outlook, which has developed over the centuries, from ideas taught by the ancient Greek philosophers.

Greek pagan culture began its attack upon the Hebraic worldview, a little under two centuries before Christ. In 168 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem, and shamefully defiled the Temple. In spite of the Jewish Maccabees'[9] brave victory against this military invasion, the spiritual influence of the godless Hellenistic[10] mindset was never entirely

[8] A simple definition of secular humanism is that mankind has the ability to act as its own god, i.e., a present popular form of idolatry.

[9] The family of Mattathias Maccabee, and their supporters, though greatly outnumbered, drove out the Greek military invaders.

[10] Hellenistic is another name for the ancient Greek culture.

overthrown. We can note its later effect upon the Sadducees, who, in contrast to the Pharisees, denied the spirit-world (Acts 23:8). We can also see definite differences between the Jewish apostles (including Paul the Hebrew) and the eventual non-Jewish and strongly Greek-influenced, church Fathers, who took little time to cast off their Jewish roots.

Some of the "fathers" of the faith seriously trapped themselves by the less-than-biblical pitfalls of Hellenism. Certain post-Apostolic leaders, in trying to separate the Greek-invented "spiritual" realm from an "earthly" one, were the reason that many early bishops assumed that the Creator's command to be "fruitful and multiply" was too "human" for the leaders, and they would be more "spiritual" if they kept celibate. To the Hebrew mind, you cannot separate "spiritual" life from "physical". All of life is a spiritual journey. And yet, other theologians, past and present, unthinkingly also copied the Greek-influenced Sadducees, by blindly denying a spirit-world of both good and evil. All this and more show, most clearly, the sharp divide between a Hellenistic and Hebraic worldview.

And so it was! Although Judea was the all-important cradle of faith, a less-than-watchful Europe knew little about divine shielding from heathen Greek philosophies. Pagan Rome had become the preschool of a yet-immature Gentile faith. In contrast to Abraham, who received direct revelation, the wisdom of the Greek thinkers accepted little at the supernatural level. They distrusted all inspiration from non-human sources, and debated any and all things spiritually spoken. Whatever unseen power they may have yet thought might exist; these forces were, indeed, helpless to create life, let alone a universe!

But if we think that this is all a failure of long-ago church history, a surprising amount of today's short-sightedness must again be pointed out, such as a continued neglect, by both scholars and laymen of Rom 9, 10, 11. It dare not go unnoticed that Apostle Paul placed these three chapters, on Israel's final restoration and redemption, in the exact centre of his most thorough study of New Testament doctrine! To miss Paul's

point is to miss God's indissoluble love for half His family – the Jewish half, with whom He began.[11]

Moreover, popular end-time theories, which reflect much more Greek individuality than Hebraic hope, have been invented over the last two centuries. Strangely, these focus on a dramatic deliverance of the Gentile church, while taking little note of those end-of-days' promises to the remnant of Abraham's seed. Sorry to say, but the picture presented has its wide popularity from much repetition, and not from biblical research. If the matter is honestly and biblically studied, however, the suggestion that God is about to cancel His end-of-days' promises to redeem His beloved, but errant, Jacob,[12] at this high-point of history, is seriously short of scholarship. One has only to read the prophets. It would mean the rejection of far too much text of both Old and New Testaments, an unsafe position for all who recognise the scriptures as authoritative, and God-breathed.

Alas, the "enlightened" culture, which eventually rotted in a seedbed of atheism in 18th century Europe, turned out to be those same seeds of Hellenist thinking that perverted true faith, from Greco-Roman times. The Reformation, and follow-on reformers, tried hard – and certainly with much success – to restore a watered-down witness back to the faith of Abraham. However, much like the ancient reformist kings of both Israel and Judah, even though they did accomplish much of "what was right in the eyes of the Lord", there were always a few blind spots overlooked. In the end, a few of "*the high places, however, were not removed*" (cf. 2 Kings 12:2-3; 15:34-35). If that meaning is too hidden for a half-hearted Israel, Rev 2:4 makes it even a bit clearer for a Bible-honouring church, which did its best to get most – but not all – of it right: "Nevertheless, I have this against you."

And what might He yet have against us? Thinking like Greek humanist philosophers, rather than thinking like more down-to-earth Hebraic

[11] See Jer 31:35-37; Is 49:14-16; Hos 11:8-9; Ps 89:20-37; and countless parallel assertions to Israel.

[12] Jacob refers to the name of Israel *before* his life-changing encounter with God.

believers! Ironically, a West, which obediently sent messengers with the Good News to the ends of the earth, now has the opportunity to learn some non-humanist approaches from our much more Hebraic family in the third world.

Perhaps, an ideal summation is a most-perceptive insight, passed on by author and Bible lecturer, Dr Michael Brown: "What began as a movement in Jerusalem, became a philosophy in Greece, an institution in Rome, a culture in Europe, and an enterprise in America."[13]

WHAT MUST WE NOW COMPREHEND?

So, herein is our discovery. While modern Europe and the West have borne the brunt of Greek scepticism, humanism, the profane, and the secular over the ages, a more blessed third world has largely escaped much of the curse! A growing consensus of those with clear vision, recognises that the massive future of evangelism now lies in the developing third world. Moreover, the significance of a parallel with the Hebraic roots of Israel has a depth of meaning within that last-call message. As the prophetic hope for a biblically-restored Israel is being fulfilled before our eyes, the third world catches a vision that a Hellenistic view cannot. Sceptical Western theologians have long dismissed this truth, but it has hardly gone unnoticed by the Waola people, their Highland neighbours, and, more recently, throughout other areas of Papua New Guinea.

True, the third world can use a lot of assistance. But that development lies neither with a global marketing mentality, nor multinational interference from a humanistic and greed-oriented West. The Good News, brought within the context of a Hebraic-ordered mindset, is touching the heart of Melanesian culture, and parallels a much more spiritually-ordered universe than the Greek philosophers ever knew!

Therefore, it is most appropriate for the Waola, and their friends across the Southern Highlands, and, indeed, all of Papua New Guinea, with the

[13] Michael Brown, *The End of the American Gospel Enterprise*, Shippensburg PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1993, p. 75.

rest of Melanesia, to shamelessly declare where their spiritual heritage and culture lies, and be the stronger for it. Like many in the Western church, who are also discovering an added depth to the Hebraic foundations of the gospel – the simplest road to Jesus just happens to run through Jerusalem!

OBLIGATION IN THE MELANESIAN CLAN CONTEXT AND ITS EFFECT UPON THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

Dan Seeland

Working with the Evangelical church of Papua New Guinea since 1989, Dan has been involved in a church-planting ministry among the Bogaia of Southern Highlands Province. He has also had an itinerant teaching ministry to many areas of Western Province and Southern Highlands. Since 2000, he has served as an adjunct faculty member of the Christian Leaders' Training College. Dan holds a Masters degree in Missions and Intercultural Studies from Wheaton Graduate School.

INTRODUCTION

Culture – it has been defined as "the integrated system of learned behaviour patterns, which are characteristic of the members of a society".[1] Key to this definition is the word *learned*. One's behavioural patterns are not a given, rather they are culturally conditioned, being shaped and influenced by the cultural environment in which one lives. What's more, it is not simply one's behavioural patterns, which are conditioned by culture, but also the thought patterns, which lie at the root of any given behaviour. Culture thus influences both the way a man acts, and the way he thinks. To state it concisely, culture shapes the man.

If the above-stated premise is true, then it is indispensable that those who seek to communicate the gospel, understand how culture has shaped the

[1] E. Adamson Hoebel, *Anthropology: The Study of Man*, 4th edn, New York NY: McGraw-Hill, 1972, p. 6; quoted in Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 46.

thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of those in their audience, for those who hear the gospel message will necessarily interpret that message from within their own cultural framework. As it has been pointed out, man can "understand and interpret the world, and all that is beyond this world, only in terms of his cultural or subcultural experience".[2] Because the influence of culture is all pervasive, and because the goal of communication is not simply the passing on of information, but a true comprehension, on the part of the receptor audience, an understanding of the cultural influences, which are at work in a given audience, is crucial to our communication of the gospel. To ignore these influences, is to invite miscomprehension and confusion.[3]

Bearing this in mind, what aspects of culture need to be considered, when communicating the gospel, within the Melanesian context? Taking into account the rich cultural heritage of the Melanesian peoples, this is certainly a loaded question, for, in reality, all of culture needs to be considered. At the same time, however, we can ask, are there particular aspects of Melanesian culture, which highly influence, or influence to a greater extent, how a Melanesian views and understands the message of the gospel? While countless aspects of culture could be considered here, it is the intent of this article to consider just one such aspect, namely Melanesian clan relationships, and, in particular, how the obligatory nature of these relationships affects the understanding of the gospel of grace. Toward this end, the clan relationship will first be examined. We will then consider how clan relationships shape and influence one's understanding of the gospel of grace. Finally, we will consider the implications of this influence.

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[2] Louis J. Luzbetak, "Unity in Diversity: Ethnotheological Sensitivity in Cross-Cultural Evangelism", in *Missiology: An International Review* 4-2 (April, 1976), p. 209.

[3] Many will readily admit to the value of this endeavour for intercultural communication. It should be pointed out, however, that the importance of understanding cultural influences is not limited to those who seek to communicate cross-culturally, but is equally relevant to those who communicate within their own cultural context. To ignore the influence of culture is just as fatal to a clear understanding of the gospel for the one who communicates within his own culture as it is to those who communicate across cultures.

MELANESIAN CLAN RELATIONSHIPS

At the heart of Melanesian cultural life lies the clan – that group of individuals who "claim, but cannot always substantiate, descent from a common . . . ancestor."[4] Clan members, state Hiebert and Menses, "believe they are related, but they cannot always trace the actual genealogical links between them".[5] In the end, it is not the reality of a common ancestry that is important. It is the perception that counts.

Clan members relate at many different levels, starting with the nuclear family, and then extending beyond, in a series of ever-expanding social groupings. A group of closely-related families forms the sublineage. Here, members will often reside in a single location, with land held jointly, and chores, which relate to the group, being shared among individuals. Beyond this, is the lineage or subclan, comprised of "those, who can trace their genealogical relationship to one another, through a common *known* ancestor".[6] Lineages, which recognise some sort of connection among them, then make up the clan. As stated above, it is not the actual genealogical link that counts. The simple perception of the link, often through that of a mythological ancestor, is enough to cement the relationship, and unite the lineages as a single clan.

The nuclear family, the sublineage, and the lineage, all exist as social groupings within the clan context. Yet, clan members relate outside of the clan as well. Clans are joined together as phratries, or tribes, and, beyond this, is the society as a whole. While all relationships are important, it is, nevertheless, the close kinship ties found within the clan that serve as the foundation of Melanesian society. Relationships outside the clan may fail; clan relationships are expected to last. In Melanesia, the clan tie is strong, and serves, in effect, to promote the life of the clan. One's support, provision, and security are all provided for within the

[4] Kenneth McElhanon, and Darrell Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom", in *Point* 5 (1984), p. 111.
[5] Paul G. Hiebert, and Eloise Hiebert Menses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1995, p. 93.
[6] Ibid.

clan environment.[7] It has been said that, within the Melanesian context, the traditional community "lent the support, the individual needed, in his or her life's journey".[8] This is certainly true of the clan.

THE PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY

It is commonly agreed that, central to Melanesian clan relationships, is the principle of reciprocity.[9] To be sure, some relationships will always be more one-sided than others – some will give more and receive less, within the clan. In addition, certain relationships will exhibit a greater level of reciprocity than others. The closer the tie within the clan, the greater the degree of reciprocity that will be demonstrated. Regardless of the extent, however, the principle of reciprocity remains a basic worldview assumption within the Melanesian context. For the Melanesian, real relationships are reciprocal, and must be expressed in mutual giving and receiving. This is the norm and expectation within the clan.

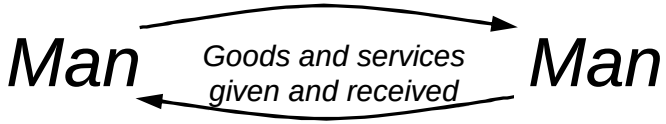

Figure 1. The Reciprocal Clan Relationship

The reciprocity referred to here can be clearly seen in the mutual dependence clan members have on one another. Clan members are

[7] What is said of the clan here would also be true of that which exists as part of the clan, namely, the lineage or sub-lineage. The Bogaia of the Southern Highlands have a population of only 300. Living among them over the past 14 years, I have seen clan members relate to one another on an almost daily basis. For the Bogaia, it is the clan which serves as the chief means of support and security to the individual. For larger cultural groups, however, it may be the lineage or sub-lineage that fulfils this role. Regardless, while Melanesian cultures are admittedly diverse and populations vary greatly, it can still be argued that it is the clan relationship, in some shape or form, that serves as the foundation of all Melanesian societies.

[8] Mary MacDonald, "Melanesian Communities: Past and Present", in *Point* 5 (1984), p. 224.

[9] See Darrell Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions: An Overview", in *Point* 6 (1984), pp. 109-110.

expected to help each other with gardening, house-building, and fighting, in paying out bride price and compensation claims, and in paying school fees, and other expenses. Each member of the clan participates, as one who gives to fellow clan members, and, in turn, as one who receives.

That reciprocity exists within the clan, is clearly evident. But, we may ask the question, "Why does it exist?" Why is exchange seen as crucial, within the Melanesian context, or why is reciprocity the chosen means of expressing relationship? Some have argued that, just as compensation payments serve to redistribute wealth within the society, so, too, does reciprocity maintain a state of equality: through reciprocity, "a relationship, tending towards equivalence, is sustained between members, by giving and receiving, by helping, and being helped".[10] Others have argued that the true value of reciprocity lies in its ability to create, maintain, and strengthen the relationships, upon which "the only way to 'life' is built".[11] In this sense, reciprocity is inseparably linked to the Melanesian concept of salvation – that "fullness-of-life" ideal, where man experiences the blessings of health, success, and prosperity, and the absence of such ills as death, defeat, sickness, and poverty.

For the Melanesian, "fullness of life" can only be found within the community. It is never found in isolation from one another, but only in relationship, or partnership, with others. Reciprocity binds clan members together, and, in this relationship of interdependency, one's welfare is provided for, ensuring that life, in its fullest sense, is realised.

The interdependency, which is made manifest in the reciprocal clan relationship, is largely due to necessity, and stems from the fact that, in the Melanesian context, the traditional day-to-day burdens of life were too great for man to bear alone. Many of the common tasks, faced by the Melanesian, are extremely labour intensive. Building a house, clearing a garden area, the construction of a canoe – these all require immense amounts of physical labour. By the same token, while gathering a bride price, or paying out a compensation claim, may not

[10] MacDonald, "Melanesian Communities", p. 216.
[11] Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Values and Ethics", in *Point* 5 (1984), p. 204.

require large amounts of physical labour, they are, at the same time, capital-intensive endeavours. Either way, physically or materially, a man would be hard pressed to meet these needs on his own.

What was insurmountable to the individual, however, was quite possible for the clan. Within the clan environment, clan members help and assist each other, giving to one another, and receiving from one another, with the end result being that all are provided for. The reciprocal clan relationship is, thus, vital to the support and provision of the individual. This has historically been the case, and remains no less so today.[12] In fact, so crucial are these relationships, within the Melanesian context, that it has been said, without them, survival and existence are impossible.[13]

THE OBLIGATORY NATURE OF THE CLAN RELATIONSHIP

While the reciprocity of Melanesian clan relationships is everywhere agreed upon, more important to our purpose here, is the obligatory nature of these relationships. "Melanesian life", it has been noted, "is centred around obligations". [14] To exist within the clan, means to exist, as one under obligation. In fact, the kinship terms, by which fellow clan members refer to one another, imply that certain obligations exist, and must be met.[15] Beyond doubt, within the clan context, one is under obligation to help, support, and provide for fellow clan members. But,

[12] It should be pointed out that, while Melanesians have seen huge technological advances in recent decades, resulting in some of the more-common day-to-day tasks becoming less labour intensive, at the same time, Western materialism has led to inflationary bride prices and compensation claims that are now more capital intensive than ever. As a result of this development, the Melanesian remains just as dependent on fellow clan members as ever. It can be further noted that today, with increased exposure and increased opportunities, Melanesians will often look outside the clan for many types of help. Governments, non-government organisations, companies, churches, and missions are all eagerly sought out. Yet, in the end, if these attempts fail, the clan still exists to meet the needs of the individual. Come what may, the clan remains the backbone of Melanesian society.

[13] See Gernot Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues for a Theology in Melanesia", in *Point* 7 (1985), p. 88.

[14] Bernard Narokobi, "Family Law in Melanesia," *Catalyst* 18-1 (1988), p. 34.

[15] See McElhanon and Whiteman, "Kinship", p. 112.

because relationships are reciprocal, to exist within the clan, means not only to exist, as one who is under obligation, but also to exist, as one who places others under obligation.

This fact became evident to me shortly after my arrival in the Bogaia area of the Southern Highlands. A major oil company had moved into the area to do some preliminary survey work. While most of the local men secured employment for a short period, cutting survey lines through the bush, one young man managed to stay on with the company for a number of months. When he finally returned home, he was, by local standards, a wealthy man. Upon his return, however, his wages were quickly doled out to fellow clan members. He, himself, was left with little to show for his efforts. When asked how he could part so quickly with the fruit of his labours, his response was, "If I do not look after my clan now, later, when I am in need, they will not look after me." Here the principle of reciprocity was indeed being upheld. But, more significantly, the obligatory nature of the clan relationship was seen to come into play. By giving today, the one clan member had placed others under obligation to him, and had, in effect, made provision for his future well-being and security.

Countless other examples could be related here: a pig is given to help pay a bride price, placing the groom under obligation to return the favour at a future point in time; one clan member helps another to pay a child's school fees, thus placing the recipient under obligation to provide future aid to the donor, in his time of need; or a garden fails, causing one clan member to provide food for his fellow clansman, and, once again, the beneficiary of the assistance is placed under obligation to his benefactor. While gifts are not necessarily paid back in kind, what these examples clearly show is that reciprocity breeds obligation, for, when one gives, the expectation is that the one who receives will one day return the favour in some shape or form.

Barry Irwin, working among the Salt-Yui of the Chimbu in the 1960s, hit upon this same fact. Irwin discovered that, among the Salt-Yui, "nothing was given for nothing". When a gift was given, or some assistance rendered, the recipient had a liability, until the obligation to return the

favour had been fulfilled. Once repayment was made, the individual concerned was released from his obligation. If the repayment was of greater value than the original liability, then the cycle continued, with the new recipient being under obligation to the one who had formerly been his debtor. Irwin called this phenomenon, "the liability complex".[16]

Irwin observed that, among the Salt-Yui, there were no free gifts. Others have noted this same principle operating in other Melanesian cultures. It has been stated, elsewhere, that, in the reciprocal relationship that exists among brothers, "the ideal is to act generously, leaving the responsibility for returning such generosity to the brother".[17] The responsibility to return the favour is not left to chance, however. The one who gives is fully aware of the obligation that now exists, and "keeps an eye on the returns".[18] What all this clearly shows is that, within the clan context, when one gives, either materially, or through some other assistance, there is always the expectation of future benefit. Obligation always exists. Reciprocity is, indeed, central to the Melanesian clan relationship, but it is obligation which keeps the relationship operating in a reciprocal manner.

RELATIONS TO BOTH THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Within the Melanesian context, relationships not only exist between living clan members, but also between the living and the dead.[19] The traditional Melanesian view holds that the spirits of the dead continue to dwell among the living. As such, "the ancestors are as much a part of the community as the living members"[20] and "are naturally concerned to

[16] See Barry Irwin, "The Liability Complex among the Chimbu Peoples of New Guinea", in *Practical Anthropology* 19-6 (1972), pp. 280-285.
[17] MacDonald, "Melanesian Communities", p. 217.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Within the kinship system of relationships, Hiebert and Menses refer to the ancestors as the "living dead". This highlights the fact that, within the clan context, the deceased are still viewed as part of the community. They are alive, and continue to participate in the life of the clan. See Hiebert and Menses, *Incarnational Ministry*, p. 92.
[20] Mantovani, "Traditional Values", p. 202.

safeguard the strength, prosperity, and continuity of the group".[21] Of course, it is in their best interest to do so. A concern for their own well-being necessitates a concern for the clan as a whole.

Reciprocity in the Living/Ancestral Relationship

Traditionally, ancestral spirits were believed to have certain powers at their disposal, by which they could aid their living counterparts.[22] As for the living, they not only understood this to be true, but also expected it to transpire. Just as living clan members expected help and assistance from one another so, too, did the living expect help and assistance from their deceased relations. But, while the expectation of ancestral goodwill always existed, the living also understood that the ancestors were retributive. The living might experience reward and good fortune, but there was no guarantee; the ancestors were just as likely to mete out punishment if some taboo had been broken, which caused disharmony within the clan. In order to attain prosperity, then, the living had to ensure that the laws of their society were constantly adhered to, and that good relationships were always maintained, not only among themselves, but also with the dead.

While the living stood to benefit greatly from the assistance and goodwill of the ancestors, it needs to be emphasised that the relationship was not

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[21] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", p. 91.

[22] Recent decades have seen drastic changes in Melanesian culture. With that in mind, I have purposefully chosen to speak of the relationship between man and his ancestors, and between man and other spirits, according to the traditional point of view. Throughout the sections: "Reciprocity in the Living/Clan Relationship", "Obligation Among the Living and the Dead", and "Relationship to Other Spirits", I have largely used past-tense verbs. The use of the past tense does not imply, however, that the things spoken of here were only true then and not now. Externals have certainly changed. Ritual and sacrifice, as referred to in these sections, may no longer be in evidence (although this is truer in some areas than others). But the internal beliefs, assumptions, and convictions, which stood at the root of these practices, are still a very real part of the Melanesian way of thinking. Worldviews do not change quickly. It is, therefore, crucial to understand that, even in the absence of external evidence, the traditional Melanesian view of the relationship between man and the spirits continues to influence Melanesian thought and behaviour. Further sections of this article will be built on this assumption.

one-sided. The benefits received did not simply flow in one direction. Darrell Whiteman has stated that the relationship between man and his ancestors was "a relationship of mutual help and interdependence, a relationship of reciprocity, a giving and taking between human beings and the spirit world".[23] Man may have been dependent on the ancestors for prosperity, but, as the ancestors remained inseparably linked to the clan, their welfare was tied up with that of their human counterparts. When the clan prospered, all prospered, both the living and the dead. When the clan suffered, all suffered as well.

Given the above, it can be clearly seen that the living/ancestral relationship was markedly similar to the relationship that exists between living clan members. The assistance and help may have taken on different outward forms, but, ultimately, the relationship was governed by the same principle – that of reciprocity. As before, the relationship can be simply illustrated. Figure 2 shows two parties involved – a living clan member and an ancestral spirit. As before, the arrows point in both directions. As before, there is a continuous flow of giving and receiving that is taking place. And, as before, reciprocity is clearly indicated.

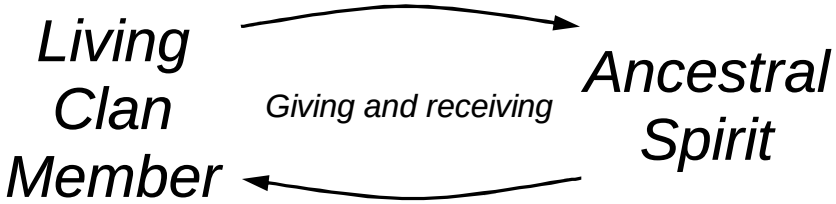

Figure 2. The Reciprocal Relationship with Ancestors

Obligation Among the Living and the Dead

It is plain that reciprocity has always existed between man and his ancestors, but, what about obligation? Was obligation the key that kept the living/ancestral relationship operating in a reciprocal manner? That Melanesians viewed the ancestors as retributive would indicate that it was. The ancestors were the guardians of society. They were the ones, who established the acceptable behavioural patterns for the clan. They

[23] Whiteman, "Melanesian Religions", p. 110.

were the ones, who were endowed with special powers. And they were the ones, who would use those powers to either bring blessing or calamity to the clan. In order for man to experience the "fullness-of-life" ideal, then, it was essential that he live in accordance with the prescribed guidelines, as set forth by the ancestors. He was under obligation to do so. To live according to the prescribed guidelines ensured harmony – a harmony, from which both living and ancestral clan members would benefit. Failure to do so, brought disharmony, and would invite the wrath and indignation of the ancestors.

Clan members were under obligation to live in a harmonious manner. They were also under obligation to make things right, if that harmony had, in some way, been upset. When the ancestors were offended, certain rituals had to be performed, or sacrifices made, in order to placate them. This was the prescribed means of making amends, and restoring balance to the clan environment. Until the ritual act had been performed, or the sacrifice made, the disharmony, and the ruinous effects associated with it, would continue.

Clan members were, thus, under a two-fold obligation to the ancestors. Firstly, to walk according to the prescribed patterns of the society, and secondly, if the guidelines had been broken, to make amends. The ancestors, for their part, were also under obligation. If the laws of the society were faithfully adhered to, the ancestors were under obligation to use the powers at their disposal to bring prosperity to the clan. Likewise, if a breakdown occurred in the clan, which caused disharmony, when the proper ritual was executed, or the proper sacrifice made, the ancestors were under obligation to restore the prosperity, which had been forfeited. Faithfulness to the laws of the society, ritual, and sacrifice were, thus, all effective means of placing the ancestors under obligation to their living clan relations. When the prescribed patterns were followed, the ancestors had to reciprocate, by bringing blessing and prosperity. This was man's understanding of the relationship.

Relationship to Other Spirits

Within the clan, there was a continuing relationship between the living and the spirits of the dead. Man's relationship to the spirit world, however, extended far beyond his relationship to the ancestors. Relationships were also maintained with a multitude of other spirits – spirits, who were believed to inhabit, or be associated with, particular places or objects (e.g., trees, mountains, rivers, or lakes). While not considered part of the clan, *per se*, these relationships still occurred within the clan environment. In a sense, these spirits belonged to the clan. As such, it is essential to understand how the relationship to these other spirits was perceived.

To begin with, as with the ancestors, man saw these spirits as possessing power – a power far greater than man himself possessed. Within the clan belief system or worldview, these spirits were seen to have a great deal of control over man and his circumstances. In addition, these spirits were seen as retributive. If one could live in such a way as to not cause offence, then prosperity could be expected. However, to offend one of these spirits was to ensure calamity. Finally, these spirits could be manipulated, through the observance of certain rules, and through the use of ritual and sacrifice.

By and large, man related to these spirits in the same way that he related to the spirits of his ancestors. In all cases, the spirits were seen as powerful. But man's ability to manipulate the spirits cannot be overstated. It has been said that "animism is based on manipulation", and, further, that the animist "seeks to manipulate spiritual beings to do his will".[24] In relation to the spirits, referred to here, this was undoubtedly true. Rule keeping, ritual, and sacrifice were the appointed means of manipulating the spirits. Yet, it must be understood, as well, that the appointed means were useless, unless obligation was seen to exist. There is power in rule-keeping; there is power in ritual, and there

[24] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1991, p. 22.

is power in sacrifice, only because of the obligatory nature of the human/spirit relationship.

Viewed in the above light, each relationship that exists within the clan environment can be seen to operate on the same basic principle. Man's support, provision, protection – in fact, all that the "fullness-of-life" concept entails – is only possible, within the framework of relationships, where obligation is seen to exist. Whether the relationship is among men, or between man and spirit, does not matter. Without obligation, the system disintegrates.

THE EFFECT OF OBLIGATION ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

The biblical concept of grace can be equated with, in general, God's unmerited favour toward man, and, more specifically, in terms of the gospel, man's salvation being based on no merit of his own, but solely on the basis of God's good pleasure, bestowed on man in Christ.[25] It is my contention that the Melanesian concept of obligation, which operates in the clan environment, is diametrically opposed to this biblical concept. Obligation, and the reciprocal relationships that it perpetuates, have a diverse effect, both on how a man understands his relationship to God, and how he understands his salvation.

MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

Given the original premise of this article – that one's culture influences both the way a man acts, and the way a man thinks – it should come as no surprise that, within the Melanesian context, many will view their relationship to God as one based on reciprocity and obligation. The clan environment has conditioned the Melanesian to view true and meaningful relationships in this way.[26] As Figure 3 illustrates, man is perceived to

[25] See Allen C. Meyers, ed., "Grace", in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, pp. 437-438.

[26] As kinship terms imply certain rights and obligations in the Melanesian context, which the God of Christianity is referred to as Father is highly significant. It implies that obligation exists in the relationship between God and man. Also, the fact that Christ is called the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29 NIV) cannot go

relate to God, in the same way he relates to fellow clan members, or to the ancestors, and other spirits. The perception is that there is mutual obligation to give and receive between God and man.

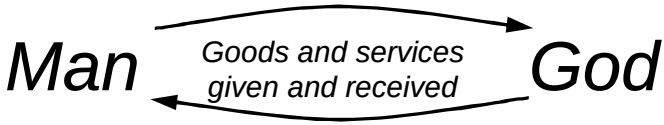

Figure 3. The Perceived Relationship between God and Man

Based on the above understanding, man is led to enter into relationship with God, through gift-giving, or the rendering of various types of service. Once performed, the expectation then exists that God is under obligation to repay the favour. Or, conversely, if the understanding is that God, Himself, has initiated the relationship, then man is now under obligation to reciprocate. Irwin observed that, among the Chimbu, new converts would work diligently to pay back Christ by attending church services, and providing assistance to the church or mission with which they were affiliated. Once the clan considered repayment to be of sufficient value to fulfil their obligation, however, church attendance would drop off, and clan members would go back to their "own lives". If the repayment was considered of greater worth than the grace of God, which had been extended to them, then God was viewed as in debt to the clan.[27]

What Irwin noticed among the Chimbu can only be understood in light of the traditional relationship between man and spirit, within the clan context. We have noted that, while the ancestors and other spirit beings were viewed as retributive, at the same time, it was possible to manipulate them, through ritual and sacrifice. Gernot Fugmann has

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unnoticed. Perhaps the most important relationship within the clan is that between brothers. Here, more than anywhere else, reciprocity and obligation rule. Within the Christian gospel, then, references to God as Father, and Christ as brother, only lend further credence to the Melanesian assumption that man must relate to God on the basis of reciprocity and obligation. Culture influencing, as it does, can it be understood in any other way?

[27] See Irwin, "The Liability Complex", pp. 282-283.

argued that, within the Melanesian context, God is viewed in this same way. He is "principally retributive, reacting according to a fairly-predesigned pattern of reward and punishment", and "is, furthermore, open to ritual influence, and prompting".[28] Viewed according to the cultural model of obligation, then, God can be manipulated, to provide for the welfare of men. If man acts according to God's prescribed pattern, or if he gives to God, or renders some type of service, then, God is bound by obligation to return the favour. In this system, God is simply a means to an end. He becomes just one more relation, albeit a very powerful one, to provide for the support and well-being of the individual. Relationship to God is not sought out for who He is but, rather, for what He can do. The influence of obligation, in the clan context, thus causes man to look at God from a very humanistic perspective. His interest in relating to God will be self-serving, and concerned with the earthly needs of the here and now – those same earthly needs that have always been the concern of the "fullness-of-life" ideal.

MAN'S UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION

If man views his relationship to God as one of reciprocity, bound by mutual obligation, then salvation must be viewed as a right, not as the free gift that scripture indicates (cf. Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9). It cannot be by grace, but must be according to man's own merit. When man acts, God must return the favour. When man acts in a way deemed worthy of salvation, then God must respond by providing that salvation.

If we consider the "fullness-of-life" ideal to be that concept, which most closely relates to salvation, in the Melanesian context, then, truly, within the clan, man has always worked toward his own salvation. By entering into a system of reciprocal relationships, either with living relations, ancestors, or other spirit beings, man could place others under obligation to himself, thus providing for his own welfare and security. Salvation has always been there for the taking. If man simply fulfils his obligations, then others must fulfil theirs.

[28] Fugmann, "Fundamental Issues", p. 92.

Within the clan, the fulfilment of obligations has, at all times, been the key. Man does not expect to freely receive. He fully understands that, in the receiving, he is placed under obligation. At the same time, he does not expect to freely give, either. In the giving, he places others under obligation. He fully expects the favour to be returned. "Nothing is given for nothing", within the clan. This mentality is so strongly engrained that it cannot help but carry over into man's understanding of salvation.

The "no-free-gift" mentality is in complete contradiction, however, to the grace of God in salvation. Grace says nothing of obligation. God is not obligated to save man. If God were to repay man, based on the merit of his own actions, then man could only expect the wrath of God. No act of man can ever be considered good enough to merit God's favour. No act can ever be considered as measuring up to God's standard of righteousness (cf. Is 64:6; Rom 3:10-12). Yet, due to the influence of culture, many will go on believing that their relationship to God is one of reciprocity and obligation, and that, because of this, humans are given "a method and a means to claim a right to salvation".[29] Many will go through life trying to build up enough merit to place God under obligation. Or, having become conscious of the grace of God in their salvation, many will seek to pay back that grace. Either way, whether man seeks to earn the grace of God, or whether he diligently strives to repay it, the end result is that grace is no longer grace. The grace of God has become highly insignificant, if man thinks he can earn it, or, in some way, pay it back. As a result, God's entire work of salvation becomes completely undervalued.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING SALVATION FROM AN OBLIGATORY POINT OF VIEW

It can be argued that there are three things at stake in the gospel: the salvation of man; the exaltation of Christ; and the glory of God. For many, the gospel is viewed as primarily concerned with man's salvation. Yet, while the salvation of man is certainly at stake, more important to the purpose of the gospel are the exaltation of Christ, and the glory of

[29] Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation in Melanesian Religions", in *Point* 6 (1984), p. 291.

God. Here, one concern builds upon another: in man's salvation, Christ is exalted, and, in both the salvation of man, and the exaltation of Christ, God is glorified. When placed in order of significance, then, the hierarchy of issues at stake in the gospel appears as in Figure 4. Ultimately, it is seen, it is the glory of God which is of primary concern.

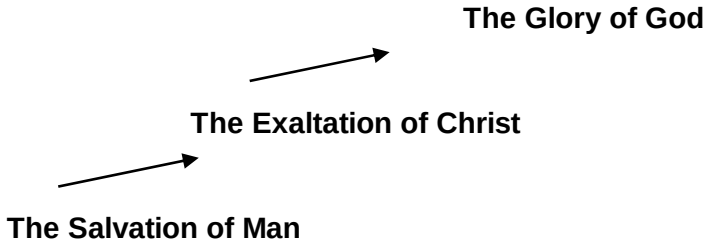

Figure 4. Hierarchy of Issues at Stake in the Gospel

When salvation is looked at from an obligatory point of view, there are major implications for all three of the above-listed concerns. There are implications for the salvation of man; there are implications for the exaltation of Christ; and there are implications for the glory of God. Each of these will now be considered.

THE SALVATION OF MAN

The scriptures make it clear that man's salvation is on the basis of faith alone (cf. Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9). Faith is the means by which the benefits of the saving work of Christ are appropriated to us. Key to saving faith is the element of trust. In order to determine the true object of faith, then, we can ask the question "In the end, what is man actually trusting in to gain salvation?"

If man is led to believe that he relates to God in a reciprocal manner, where both parties are bound by obligation, and, if he believes that salvation is somehow gained by performing certain acts that place God under obligation to save, then it can be clearly seen that what man is trusting in is not the graciousness of God, bestowed on man in Christ, but, rather, in his own work and effort. By performing the proper ritual or act (e.g., the giving of a tithe, or offering, prayer, a work of service to

the church, or more generally, living according to God's moral standard), God can be manipulated into a position of obligation.

As stated already, it was traditionally held that the spirits of the ancestors possessed power, by which they could aid their living counterparts. Other spirit beings were also viewed in this way. Certainly, within the clan context, men trusted in the power of these spirits, and believed that they could, in fact, assist them. But, it can be argued that, in the final analysis, true power did not reside in the spirits. Instead, true power rested in man, through the rituals at his command. Man's trust, finally, was not in the spirits, who were seen as the source of provision, but, rather, in the efficacy of the ritual, by which the spirits could be manipulated. In the end, man was left trusting in his own ability to control his circumstances, and, ultimately, his own fate.

This understanding, when carried over to man's view of salvation, presents a hopeless situation. In the end, the implication of trusting in one's own efforts to gain salvation is that salvation is forfeited. The power of salvation is not found in man, or in any ritual or act at man's command, but is found, instead, in the atoning work of Christ (cf. Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; Col 1:20). Only the work of Christ is acceptable in the eyes of God. Only the work of Christ could achieve the salvation of men.[30] For man to trust in anything else, ensures that the very thing which is sought, is actually lost. Man may strive diligently to find salvation, but, if he seeks it in his own effort, rather than in the effort of Christ, on man's behalf, he will never find it. Salvation is only found in Christ.

[30] The best acts of men always remain tainted by sin. As such, any offering, given by man to God, is always lacking in perfect righteousness, and is by no means sufficient to affect man's salvation. The offering of Christ alone, as a lamb unblemished (1 Peter 1:19), was sufficient to atone for the sins of men, and accomplish our salvation.

THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

It is no mistake that salvation is found in Christ alone. This has always been the Father's intent.[31] As the agent of salvation, Christ is exalted as the Saviour of the world. In addition, as a result of Christ's humbling of Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death – the very death by which He accomplishes our salvation – God has exalted Him and given Him a name above every name (cf. Phil 2:9). The Father's intent is, therefore, not simply that Christ is exalted as Saviour, but also that He is exalted as Lord.

But, if salvation is viewed as the outcome of a reciprocal relationship with God that is bound by obligation, then Christ must, necessarily, be robbed of His exalted position. When salvation is viewed as an obligatory response by God to the actions of men, then the work of Christ is devalued, implying that Christ died needlessly (cf. Gal 2:21). Why is there a need for a Saviour, or why is there a need for the saving work of Christ, if man, in effect, can achieve his own salvation? Salvation, seen from the standpoint of obligation, then, has numerous implications for the exaltation of Christ: firstly, an emphasis on obligation prevents Christ from being fully, or finally, embraced as Saviour; secondly, not being grasped as Saviour, men will, by no means, exalt Him as Saviour; and thirdly, if Christ is not exalted as Saviour, neither will men exalt Him as Lord. We may ask the question, "Would anyone readily submit to the Lordship of Christ, when they fail to fathom the necessity, extent, grandeur, and achievement of His saving work?"

In the end, Christ will duly be exalted. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. Phil 2:10-11). The intent of God, the Father, to exalt the Son will, by no means, be thwarted. But, in the meantime, it is certain that, if salvation is primarily viewed as an obligatory response by God to the actions of men, then Christ cannot be exalted. Even viewing salvation as partly of man and partly of Christ

[31] The saving work of Christ was according to the predetermined plan of God (Acts 2:23). What's more, the apostle Paul makes plain that this plan existed from all eternity. God's intent that salvation be found in Christ existed before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

fails to see the will and purpose of God in man's redemption. Truly, the gospel is about the salvation of men. But, more importantly, it is about the exaltation of Christ. Salvation must be understood as based on the work of Christ alone, for only in this way, can Christ be truly exalted in salvation.

THE GLORY OF GOD

"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation" (Rom 4:4 NIV). This statement shows that, if salvation is achieved by works, then it is simply a payment for services rendered. But the Bible plainly teaches that salvation is an act of God, which flows from His grace (cf. Acts 15:11; Eph 2:5; 8-9; 2 Tim 1:9). It does not grow out of the work of man, but, rather, out of the work of God, on man's behalf. It is God who has initiated the divine plan of salvation (cf. John 8:42); He is the one who sent the Son into the world, providing the one and only sacrifice that could achieve the forgiveness of sins (cf. Heb 10:11-12); He is the one who has accepted that sacrifice on our behalf, resulting both in our redemption and reconciliation (cf. Rom 5:10-11; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14, 20-22); and He is the one who credits the righteousness of Christ to us, so that we are declared just in His sight (cf. Rom 5:18-19). This is pure grace. God was not obligated to save man. What man deserves is the wrath of God, not the blessings of salvation. God, therefore, deserves all the credit in salvation, and, as such, all the glory belongs to God as well.

It is further evident from scripture that, not only is God glorified in man's salvation, He is also glorified in the exaltation of Christ (cf. Phil 2:11). The exaltation of Christ "fulfils the purpose of the Father, and so, brings glory to God".[32] God's grace acts to save man. In that salvation, Christ is exalted. In both acts, God's perfect plan and purpose are being carried out. Both acts work together to bring glory to God.

Indeed, God is to be praised for His glorious grace (cf. Eph 1:6). He is to be glorified in all of salvation. But, if grace is abandoned, and God is

[32] Homer A. Kent Jr, "Philippians", in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol 11, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 125.

seen as obligated to save, based on the merit of man's own actions, then, truly, man can boast in himself (cf. Rom 4:2). Praise and thanksgiving will be withheld from God, and given to man instead. Of the implications, which stem from understanding salvation from an obligatory point of view, this is the most serious of all. As long as man looks at salvation as his right – as repayment for fulfilling certain obligations – then man will be guilty of holding back from God the glory, which is due only to Him. Man sets himself up as worthy of honour, and belittles the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

To be found guilty of belittling the glory of God is no small thing. The consequences of this act are, indeed, grave. The danger of viewing salvation from an obligatory point of view is compounded, however, by the fact that one may not even be aware that one is doing so. People do not readily think about their worldview. They do not normally think about how their culture has affected their thought patterns and behaviour. It is simply the way things are. If, within the Melanesian context, one sincerely believes that salvation is gained through a reciprocal relationship to God, which is bound by obligation, this can only be expected. This is the normal pattern of relationship within the clan, and, in fact, within many other areas of Melanesian society.

The fact that this understanding can be expected, within the Melanesian context, begs the church to address this issue. It is well and good to talk about the importance of contextualisation, and the development of a Melanesian theology, but the grace of God cannot be sacrificed on the altar of culture. Reciprocity and obligation cannot be substituted for the unmerited favour of God. God's grace in salvation is a biblical absolute, which must be applied, and understood, in every context.

This article has emphasised the vital role, which the clan plays within Melanesian society. The relationships that are found therein serve as the basis for community. In a day when many Melanesian communities are disintegrating, the importance of the clan relationship, and the ties that serve to bind clan members together, cannot be overstated. At the same

time, though, the church needs to emphasise that man relates to God in a completely different way. The relationship between God and man is not one that, as in the clan, tends towards equivalence through giving and receiving. Man is dependent on God in all things. God, on the other hand, depends on man for nothing. That God chooses to relate to man at all is purely an act of grace. He is not bound by obligation to do so. Neither is He bound by obligation to pay back the perceived good works of men. The goodwill of God, in its entirety, is all of grace.

It must be emphasised, as well, that man, as the recipient of the grace of God, can, by no means, pay back that grace. God does not ask man to repay it. He calls upon men to freely receive it.[33] There may be no free gifts, within the clan context, but God does not operate by this principle. Any act of man, directed toward God, then, must be viewed, not as repayment for what God has done, but, rather, as an act, which flows from love for God, and gratitude toward Him.

Grace, properly understood, is essential to the message of the gospel. It is non-negotiable. Only in grace, can salvation truly be found. Only in grace, can Christ be exalted. And, only in grace, can the God of salvation be glorified. Ultimately, this is the will and purpose of God. May the churches of Melanesia strive toward this end.

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[33] This does not imply that man is devoid of responsibility to live a moral life. On the contrary, God clearly calls on man to walk in righteousness (see Rom 6:15-18). The point, which is emphasised here, is that no work of righteousness can ever pay back the grace of God. Reciprocity and obligation cannot be the motivation for holy living.

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