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The **Melanesian Journal of Theology** is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and in duplicate.

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EDITORIAL

Towards a Theology of Religious Experience for Melanesia

For almost 15 years, thanks to generous assistance from the Programme on Theological Education (formerly Theological Education Fund) of the World Council of Churches, the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools has held Study Institutes every two years, at which seminary staff and senior students have been able to present and discuss papers on topics of common interest. These regular meetings, perhaps more than any other factor, have made MATS a truly ecumenical organisation.

The seventh such Study Institute was held at the United church Christian Education and Communication Centre, overlooking the magnificent volcanic harbour of Rabaul in East New Britain Province, from 23 to 26 September 1985, on the theme "Towards a Theology of Religious Experience for Melanesia". This theme was not chosen, as it might have been in Europe, with a view to discussing religious psychology or individual spirituality. Rather, we had in mind both the indigenous religious movements, which have become famous under the somewhat misleading title of "cargo cults", and the more-recent "Holy Spirit Movements", whose relationship to the former has by no means been clarified (three volumes in the Melanesian Institute's **Point** Series, Nos. 2-4, edited by Wendy Flannery, 1983-1984, have extensively documented both types of movements). In addition, we wanted to do justice to those elements in traditional Melanesian religion, which would make Christian spirituality a matter of immediate "experience" for Melanesians if they were incorporated successfully in the worship and evangelism of the churches.

Melanesians do theology best in the form of discussion, including story-telling and personal testimony. I should like to introduce the papers given at Malmaluan, by drawing on the often-lively discussions which followed them, under several headings:

Dreams and Visions: The paper by **Ellison Suri** of the Solomon Islands shows how these manifestations of religious experience, which are taken for granted as media of divine revelation in both the Old and New Testaments, function in Melanesian societies. Melanesian participants insisted that dreams contribute to understanding events, and are an integral part of Melanesian life, even in areas as sensitive as the divination of guilt, though it was conceded that larger modern societies, as distinct from the village community, or the tribal unit, need more "objective" means of establishing breaches of the law. We were told how the Methodist preachers of South Cornwall in England accepted the use of dreams in finding lost pigs, which contributed to the spread of Methodism in the area! Even in the West, dreams are being taken more seriously, which has not only contributed to mental health, but has opened up the whole realm of "myth" to deeper understanding (e.g., the "dreaming" of the Australian Aborigines). Sorcery and magic are being reassessed according to other peoples' criteria of the "good" and the "rational". Kasek Kautil stressed that Melanesians prefer to base their interpretation of events on "experience" rather than "ideas"; William To Kilala, that dreams and visions have a function of social control, which allows people to cope with their social situation as a whole; and Ronnie Tom, that the key to understanding them lies in appreciating the role of imagination in faith and theology.

Song and Dance: While we were enjoying a sumptuous luncheon at Rarongo Theological College, the Papuan students and their wives spontaneously broke out in the Peroveta songs and dances that **Ronnie Tom** had told us about the day before. We were confronted with an imagery in which "darkness" did not necessarily mean sin and perdition, but had overtones of the fruitful darkness brooded over by the Spirit, even before the missionaries came. It was suggested that the Peroveta are based on the songs of yearning sung by Motuan women while their menfolk were away on lengthy trading journeys (**hiri**) in their canoes (**lakatoi**), but in the Christian context they can be both prophetic and charismatic. Rhythmic movement is such an integral part of them that even the lively melodies of the Methodists seem foreign to those who are used to expressing their spirituality with body and voice, heart and mind, in this way. Such an experience cannot be "explained" intellectually, though it must be asked how the presence of God disclosed in the

Peroveta experience may be reconciled with the revelation of Him in Christ, which they affirm.

Authority of Word and Spirit: The well-known tensions between evangelicals and charismatics regarding the interpretation of ecstatic religious experiences in the light of scripture may lead us to think that the authority of the Word can be played off against the authority of the Spirit. **Jerome Burce**, while not minimising the problems posed by charismatic Lutherans in Enga Province, insisted that this need not be so. Faith itself, not its weakness or strength, as expressed in ecstatic phenomena or spiritual gifts, makes one a member of Christ's body. The basis of such faith is the authority of the Word, our only means of knowing Christ, though others urged the claims of "reason", "theology", and, of course, "experience", as playing a part in acquiring knowledge of Christ. We were warned that controversy about "faith" can sometimes be no more than a smoke screen for "Enga reasoning", i.e., local controversies, that would have gone on anyway. The need of Melanesian societies for unity, torn as they are by tribal and religious dissension (and sometimes by the former masquerading as the latter!), was set against the imperative of accepting cultural diversity, and even competition for people's allegiance, in the religious, as in the political, field. William To Kilala pointed out that it is not unusual for revival to follow evangelisation; in Enga, however, the two were virtually simultaneous, with the result that Christian faith has not yet become an integral part of the Enga personality. The record of a conversation between **Theo Ahrens**, a former missionary, and **Andrew Strathern**, a noted anthropologist, who recently joined a Pentecostal church, shows how much we still have to learn about respecting the always very particular forms of experience through which faith becomes effective in people's lives.

A stimulating paper by **Paul Richardson** is critical of both expatriate Christian sects, and indigenous religious movements, calling for more theological and spiritual discrimination in dealing with them. Some expatriate-based sectarian groups succeed in tapping indigenous sources of religious experience – but, unknowingly, which is possibly more dangerous than either rejection or manipulation. The issue of the fundamentalism, which is characteristic of many of these groups, has yet

to be squarely faced. In what sense does Christian faith "satisfy" people's needs, or "fill the void", of meaninglessness? Is it helpful, because it is true, or does its truth depend on its helpfulness? Or, to put it in more Melanesian terms: what is the source of the **pawa** (power) which is the focus of Melanesian interest in religion? Does it not lie in the paradox of the cross rather than in "feeling good", or "being saved", or "getting results"? Religious traditions, like individuals, go through an adolescence, during which they experiment with various roads to fulfilment. Melanesian Christians must have the same freedom, so long as they are able to remain in conversation with Christians of other traditions and in different situations.

Health and Healing: This subject, of the greatest importance, both in traditional Melanesia, and in revivalist Christianity, was unfortunately not treated at the Study Institute. However, two significant articles on it have appeared recently: a community-based approach to Christian health work by Brian Schwarz, "Take up your Bed and Walk", in **An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia**, No. 7 in the Melanesian Institute's **Point** Series; and a highly-sensitive account by Garry Trompf of the so-called "miracle girl" Ioa Boiori, "Can Anything Good Come Out of Baruni?", Some Comments on Christian and Traditional Healing in Melanesia, **Catalyst** 15 (1985) 286-295.

Churches and Sects: Bringing us down to the practicalities of religious experience in Melanesia, **Theo Aerts** presented a well-researched critique of the *Religious Movements (Control) Bill* proposed in 1981. Those present, quickly agreed that something of the sort is urgently needed, but attempts to contain sectarianism by legal means must be based on sound theology. Some felt strongly that Melanesian communities must ultimately be one in religious matters; others entered a plea for religious pluralism. It is one thing to control the entry of expatriate missionaries into the country; but when Papua New Guineans become Mormons or Muslims, their right to freedom of religion may not be infringed upon. On the other hand, the churches must be prepared to minister to former members of sectarian bodies, and, if necessary, re-accept them into their communities. The seminaries should ensure that future pastors have sufficient historical knowledge to discriminate among the various sects, in the light of their origins.

Theology and Religious Studies: One of the first lecturers in Religious Studies at the University of Papua New Guinea, Professor **Garry Trompf**, flew to Rabaul especially to brief us on the future prospects of the discipline at UPNG. They are not bright. Not only is there still residual opposition to religious studies among academics; the seminaries, too, are less than whole-hearted in their acceptance of it as a necessary complement of theology, and the proposed major in religious education at Goroka Teachers' College is meeting with stubborn opposition from certain public servants in the Education Department. If problems such as the relationship between traditional and Christian religious experience in Melanesia are to be tackled adequately, a long-overdue and very-fundamental debate on the most profitable ways of studying religion – one's own and others' – has yet to take place, most appropriately, perhaps, in the pages of this Journal.

John D'Arcy May
Executive Editor.

EXPERIENCING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A Conversation between Andrew Strathern and Theodoor Ahrens

Though dialogue between missionaries and anthropologists is regularly called for, examples of such dialogue are rare. In the following interview, a missionary, who has thought and written much about Melanesian customs and beliefs, Dr Theodoor Ahrens of Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany, asks a noted anthropologist, Dr Andrew Strathern, Director of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, about this conversion to the Pentecostal beliefs of the Mt Hagen people he has studied for many years. The interview is published in Melanesian Journal with kind permission of the two participants and by arrangement with the International Review of Mission *(see Vol. LXXV, January 1986).*

Ahrens: Dr Strathern, not long ago you became a member of the Filadelfia church, a Pentecostal church near Mt Hagen, among a people you have worked with for many years as an anthropologist. Did the encounter with this church change your mind?

Strathern: It changed my heart. Theo! I was an anthropologist, who had worked for many years in the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea, and had developed particularly close relationships with the Hagen people there. I had taken a negative attitude to mission work, insofar as I saw it simply destroying traditional culture. Through participating in services run by the Filadelfia church, and seeing what this church could do for people, I was moved to join them. My long experience with anthropology made me feel that it's important for some people to have a true concern for people here. Looking at various matters – as I was concerned with people in the past – I could see that, at least, missions have had that concern at their heart.

Also, in the end, anthropology without any kind of belief behind it is quite sterile. It gives us quite a good basis for understanding; but I found that after twenty years of working with it, there were still so many problems in my own life, and so many things I still didn't understand. It was pointless to imagine that anthropology, as such, was going to give me anything that I was looking for. That's quite clear I think. There is nothing mysterious about that. But – and I think it comes from a growing concern – if you stay a long time with people then you can't just study their problems. You've got to be involved in them. And when you share their problems, in many ways then, you are fighting for them as well as trying to find yourself.

Ahrens: As you searched with them for the truth of their lives, you were thrown back to the question about the truth of your own life?

Strathern: That is certainly what happened to me. They would ask me, from time to time, whether I had been through experiences they didn't yet know about. So I had to join the search with them.

Ahrens: It seems that these Pentecostal-type of Christian communities have sprung up in the last ten years or so. What do you think give them their appeal? What kind of questions do they answer?

Strathern: First of all, I think the appeal is emotional. Let us get that quite clear; their appeal is very strongly emotional. Now, to say that, does not mean to say that I think that is necessarily a good thing, or a bad thing, in itself. It is clearly answering some need that people have for an emotional involvement in their religion.

Along with that, there is a very strong personal sense of involvement. Each individual person is asked, or required, to make a commitment to remake the commitment, to continue to remake it. There is a definite appeal and claim made on **every** occasion of worship.

On the one hand, that puts really strong pressure on the individuals. On the other hand, if people feel they need it, then they always have the opportunity to respond. That's the good side of it.

Third, I think they are trying to bring alive the experience of the early Christians around Jesus Himself. They are trying to jump over the centuries of history and create a sense of that experience. There is a definite attempt to renew the faith from the Bible itself; in that sense they are a revival movement.

Ahrens: What about the response from the people themselves in terms of their own culture?

Strathern: Here I find that either, consciously or unconsciously – perhaps unconsciously – the Pentecostals are appealing to certain elements already existing in the cultures of the Highlands people.

Let me give you an example. There is a very strong understanding in Melpa or Mt Hagen culture that sickness and misfortune are the result of bad feelings between persons in the community itself. They have a term that means anger or frustration – it can be given various translations – but, around this concept, gather all sorts of ideas about bad things that may happen in life. The ancestors, who watch over life, will cause these misfortunes if things go wrong in social relationships; they will bring to light whatever is hidden or bad in relationships, and also give people the means to resolve these.

I find the Pentecostals are doing basically the same, though they are using a different vocabulary. They are using a Christian vocabulary of sin, the bringing to light of sin, of confession, repentance, and reconciliation between persons, just as, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been reconciled to God.

What they are going is, at one level, quite straightforward; it corresponds to the Christian understanding. But, at another level, it operates quite closely – even if unconsciously – with local ideas. This correspondence is the reason it is working.

But, at the same time, I do find there is still a lot of misunderstanding on the part of the people, that causes them to use this form of worship as a sort of ritual that can sort out some problems for them, but that is not necessarily a message for their whole life. Their life

is still morally compartmentalised, and, from time to time, this ritual will do something for them. But, at other times, their behaviour will be glaringly out of character with an ordinary understanding of Christian ethics. This disparity concerns me.

Ahrens: It seems that people grasp Jesus in the presence of His Spirit as a power of renewal for their lives. Against what background does that take place? Where would people in Hagen or Melpa societies see blind alleys in their lives, in their societal lives, or in their ethical systems?

Strathern: The basic problem is how to handle conflict between persons, what sort of reciprocity to establish. It is very strongly ingrained, that you pay back in kind and to measure for what has been done to you. It is also quite clear that that is categorically what Jesus said we were not to do. That is a very, very difficult conflict for the Highlands people. It is at the core of every problem, as I see it. And the Pentecostals attempt to overcome it by emotional means, by a special appeal to the Holy Spirit to bring about a complete spiritual change within a person.

Their appeal to the Holy Spirit is one of their important themes, and their church rituals are concerned with that. And, I may say, Theo, that I experienced it myself, though I did not expect to, when I joined this church. After all, I have been studying things, looking at them from outside for many years, and I have never had an inner experience of this kind. But I did experience it. I don't believe that everyone who goes through a certain form of behaviour in the church has really experienced the Spirit, because observation of their lives subsequently would suggest that they were not filled with the Spirit. If they had been, that would have changed everything they did. Now, that is a problem; the problem lies in the fact that, underneath, there is still a strong adherence to their own cultural principles that exist on an unconscious level.

Ahrens: Are you suggesting that they key issue between Christian faith and the principles of traditional culture is the issue of reciprocity?

Strathern: I think it is. At the same time, there are many things about traditional culture that have been opposed, like dancing and decorations,

but they have been opposed at the wrong level. I am for dancing and decorations. It depends what meaning you put into these things. The spiritual meaning you put into an activity is an activity of the mind and the heart, and that can vary. An activity may have had one meaning in the past; it can have a different meaning now. We need to look at the problem in this sort of way.

There has been too much negative rejection, and destruction of traditional culture, without any real understanding of what the issues are at a deeper level. That has upset and confused people for long periods of time in the Highlands. And it is still, I think, an issue that distracts their attention from the deeper problems they are facing. They think: Oh, if I give up decoration, then I am a Christian. That is just like observing some kind of taboo. It is on the same level as the spirit cults that they have also and in which, Theo, I have been a member as well.

If you oppose those things out of fear of what that cult may do to you, then you accept literally the power of the cult. You may even identify the power of that cult with the power of Satan. You can, however, also say that these are simply traditional customs with certain beliefs that underpin them; we happen to think now that these beliefs are not true. That is a very different point that I have never seen argued or discussed, and that distresses me. I want to see this discussed by people who are seriously concerned about the impact of Christianity. I do not want to discuss whether you should or you should not dance. We must discuss about people's minds and hearts, and the deeper underlying principles that inform their lives, because that is what Christianity is about. I see a very real problem in this question of reciprocity. Has any theological study been made on biblical material referring to this issue?

Ahrens: Offhand, I couldn't quote any major study, but certainly reciprocity is an issue dealt with permanently, both in the Old and the New Testament. There are many stories and sayings illustrating the point that, while God's blessing seems to be in response to good faith and proper behaviour, His punishment seems to be provoked by misconduct and sin.

In terms of social relationships, reciprocity is an issue. A "tooth for a tooth" may represent some sort of limitation of retaliation, while, before, an eye may have been taken for a tooth.

But to return to the previous point, obviously there was a stage when the prosperity of the wicked (Ps 73:3) proved to the faithful that they could not rationalise their fate on a customary logic of example, one just person potentially saving a whole city of evildoers (Gen 18), or those who come late for work in the vineyard receiving the same amount of pay as did those who joined already in the morning.

In other words, a logic of retribution is still operational, but now it is centred around the experience of grace and reconciliation.

But then, of course, the question whether success or luck are just man-made or a blessing, as the stories about Jacob and Abraham may suggest, remains.

Strathern: In a way, what I feel I need is more contact with theologians. This business about blessing is very important in the Pentecostal form of worship. People go to church to get blessings. If they come out, and they feel they have not got a blessing, they say: "Oh, I did not get a blessing today". What people are feeling, depends, in many ways, on how the service went, which is a corporate phenomenon.

Ahrens: What makes blessing so important?

Strathern: Blessing is one of the prime values, because it is associated with success. Now, here is another case where there is an opportunity for cultural imprinting. If blessing is assumed to give you success, then people can think that it has something to do with material success.

And that they do. In fact this is a definite part of it. Now, in the church, people are told that if you are blessed with some kind of success, including material success, you must not take pleasure in the blessing itself, but you must give thanks to God for it. So the church attempts to pull this cultural imprinting back into the framework of Christianity. But, for some people, it does not work like that. In other words, for

some, this idea of the blessing is used as a form of magic to ensure various forms of success, in an automatic way, as a result of their ritual performance.

This, I think, is a misunderstanding of the Christian idea of a blessing. Certainly, it is a part of Christian belief to feel that God can answer our prayers, or can give us blessings according to His own plan for us, and these we accept with thanks. But we cannot necessarily induce these blessings by a ritual. We can, however, pray, and we can leave some of our problems in God's hand through prayer, and ask Him to bless us if that is His will.

But let us return for a moment to the Old Testament. What about the biblical stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob?

Ahrens: In those stories, blessing is evidently a key issue. Blessing is evidenced in the promise of land, of a son, fertility of the herds, continuity of the clan, etc. There seems to be something like a double layer, or a dialectic understanding of blessing, however, because Abraham, though promised a land to live in, remains a nomad, and never possesses more than just a burial-ground in Israel. Or, shortly after being promised a son through Sarah his wife, in a moment of danger, he is ready to give away his wife to strangers. And, when, finally, the continuity of his clan seems to be secured through his son, he learns that he must be ready to sacrifice him.

Perhaps the Abraham stories reflect a more-sophisticated understanding of blessing than the Jacob cycle, where the concept of blessing seems to be more straightforward. Jacob knows a certain magic, and his herds grow faster than those of his father-in-law. Still, Jacob is portrayed not simply as a winner, but as someone who goes through many beatings and much fear before he is finally blessed in his reconciliation with his brother. In other words, to me, it seems that there is, in the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this layer, where blessing is equated with success. But then, as generations reflected on these stories, and handed them down to their children, another layer of experience was added to it, saying that Yahweh's blessing cannot be simply equated with success, fertility, growth,

continuity of the family, and security of the clan; the concept of losing, failure, and sacrifice must be integrated into a biblical understanding of blessing. I'm not an Old Testament scholar. But, to me, there is something of a dialectic in the biblical notion of blessing brought about by these layers of tradition that were added to the old one.

Strathern: That is a good way of putting it. There are some ways in which the notion of the ancestors, as the underlying forces ensuring that things go well in life, is similar to the first idea of the blessing that you have expressed. But, of course, there is the conflict, in that we are talking about God, in one case, and about the ancestors in the other case.

Ahrens: Well, where are they? Are they in the person of Christ? How does he relate to them, and they to him? Or are the ancestors silent?

Strathern: That question would be refused by the Pentecostals. I have explained to you that there is a way of thinking about these things, that forces all matters to do with traditional culture, to be seen as manifestations of Satan. I don't believe that. Nothing in my conversion experience has brought any message to me that has changed my idea that there are some things that are good in traditional culture that we have got to look at. But that is the way in which the whole issue is pushed aside. Anything that is pushed aside in that way, of course, is likely to come back later, and cause problems.

Ahrens: Now it seems, though, that people, from the very experiences of their daily life, are reaching out for some sort of renewal, really looking outwards for the source or power of renewal. Is that so?

Strathern: Absolutely. This is a very strong factor in the success of the Pentecostals over the last few years, and it is something that one admires. I can see it does something for people. It gives them even a positive feeling about not drinking beer (alcoholism is a big problem in the Highlands, nowadays). It gives them a feeling of achievement. I have seen this in people, and it is similar to the feelings I had myself. Where I can identify directly with it, of course, I can understand it better. It does give people a positive feeling about acting in a certain sort of way. It

gives them an emotional commitment. It gives them also a sense of community.

One of the important elements in every church service is shaking hands with as many people as you can. It is a community ritual of a kind easily recognisable from other cultures and contexts. They ask you to say certain things such as, "bless you". Or, "I love you with the love of the Lord", looking into the other person's eyes. That can be good and healing between persons. And, if they leave with a genuine good feeling from this, then it is bound to have some effect outside. My concern is that, sometime, that effect lasts only for about five minutes. I would like to see the effect prolonged.

It is not only that these congregations provide a refuge from the escalation of social problems outside, they also provide a very positive and good feeling inside the congregation. So, you are not just running away from something. You feel good, because you have got something else positive.

Ahrens: So, against critics, you would maintain that this is not just an escapist religion, compensating for the evils on earth with the promise of some transcendent salvation, but that Pentecostal religion has a positive, integrative function in the community here and now?

Strathern: I'm sure it has.

Ahrens: Is this integrative function comparable to the function that religion played in traditional society?

Strathern: I would say that it is doing exactly the same thing; if we agree that these functions are important, and that only religion can fulfil these functions, then we must recognise that there is also something worthwhile among the traditional practices as well. The point cuts two ways. It indicates that there is something good about what is happening in Pentecostalism; but it also indicates that there was something good before, something that now needed replacing. I would just ask them (the leaders of the church) to be conscious of that.

Ahrens: Looking back on the history of my own church, I recall that those local responses to the Christian message that concentrated too heavily on the pragmatic aspect of blessing, connected perhaps with a focus on ritual, were not only categorised as cargo cults, but as evil coming from Satan. In other words, non-Christian belief was objectified as something we were looking at from the outside; in more recent years, we have learned that whatever non-Christian, or un-Christian, form of belief we encounter, this will be recognised as such only because we know it from our innermost struggle for integrity and clear expression of Christian faith.

Strathern: I am very interested to hear you say that. Indeed, the former approaches of churches were too simple – too much was destroyed for reasons that were not understood at that time. The enemy we have to identify is not some particular aspect of a traditional culture but what is identified by Jesus himself: "There is nothing outside a man, which, by going into him, can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him" (Mark 7:15). That is the meaning of original sin. But it lies at a universal level in all human experience, not in the details of one particular culture.

Referring again to the passage from Mark that I have cited: Jesus shows there how the details of food taboos are to be transcended. Evil comes from the heart of man, and it is this that we need to combat. In a way, one could argue that the taboos, central to the previous covenant between God and the Israelites, are shown to be neutral and irrelevant in the new phase initiated through God's placement of Jesus in the world. They need not therefore be attacked as such, but Christians will not need them. This is the wider part of the message, and it provides a new model for the appropriate relationship with the cultures into which Christianity penetrates from outside.

Ahrens: Earlier we touched upon the motive of moral regeneration. Let me ask a further question about this. Do you recognise any millenarian overtones in the people's hope for moral regeneration? What is the horizon of their hope?

Strathern: This depends on what one means by "millenarian". There is certainly a strong emphasis on the idea of the second coming of Jesus, a sense of foreshortening of time, and a need to get people saved before Jesus comes, so that they may go to Heaven. This does not mean, however, that we are dealing with another version of "cargo cult". They are quite clear that it is moral regeneration that we are seeking. They themselves don't always relate this strongly enough to the social context in which they are working. If they did, I think it would be more valuable for the people.

Ahrens: Let me press a bit further on this issue of millennialism. Is not one aspect of millennialism to be concerned with the realisation of the kingdom in the here and now?
Strathern: Of course, that's true. There is a lot of discussion about the kingdom of God in this church, and I think to many of the congregation members this is a great mystery. The kingdom of God, insofar as it ever does occur, or will occur, in our lives here and now, is a kingdom that comes about from the change of our hearts. The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but about righteousness, peace, and joy. And this comes from having faith in Christ in your heart. This is definitely what they are trying to say.

Ahrens: Allow me to pick up one earlier thread of our conversation: the ancestors. In what sense have they been the focal point of conscience in traditional society? Are they feared or loved or both?

Strathern: Feared. But that fear one needs to qualify; they are feared only because they are still part of oneself. They are not feared as the other, as something different. And, in that sense, they are not bogey figures, demonic figures, or satanic figures. They are family members, still. All that has changed is that now "they can see things more clearly". That is a very strong Hagen idea.

The ancestors see things that we do not see. It is almost like "seeing through a glass darkly". Their role is to point out things that are wrong morally in the community. When there is somebody dying, there will usually be some divination to get their ghost to help solve certain problems that are unsolved in the community, suspicions that people

have of each other. The ghost is asked to identify the truth by some sign, because it now has the power of sight that before it did not have. Of course, the dead person loses all human senses, but the spirit is thought to have greater powers.
Ahrens: So, what about Christ?

Strathern: Well, Christ is, if you like, an enormously exalted ancestor figure, in the sense that He sees everything through the power of His Father. The power of the ancestors may be limited to seeing problems inside their own lineage, family, or community. But the power of Christ is not limited in that way.

Ahrens: Looking back some 30 years or so, we may say that the Lutherans and Catholics made a very great impact in Hagen and Chimbu, and other Highland areas.

Strathern: Yes, they did.

Ahrens: As I travel and observe our present situation, however, I am left with the impression of a certain tiredness, or may I even say staleness.

Strathern: Well, that is a common phenomenon. It happens to all organisations as organisations. Some of the people who belong to the newer sects seem to be getting a bigger "kick" out of them, and some are coming from Lutheran and Catholic backgrounds.

People say: "The Spirit is dead in them – it is alive in us". That's what they claim.

It is one way of rivalry, of course, on the local scene. I think there is also a danger in too much innocence. If renewal is not underpinned by deeper thought and deeper study on the part of somebody involved in that enterprise, then that enterprise is going to collapse as well. If one could have some of the harvest of reflection, thoughts, and care that have gone into the building up of some of the senior churches, and inject into that the rather innocent and fresh, yes, spontaneous feeling of the Pentecostal worship, then, I think, you would have a really good, strong religion. But, at present, I see that they are lacking on both sides. In that

sense, and for that reason, the way forward for the churches in Papua New Guinea has to be through a reaching out towards ecumenism.

Ahrens: In some places does the tension between established church authorities and those moved by the freshness of the Spirit coincide with the social conflict between the young and the old?

Strathern: Yes, new things are popular with the young. I think that the senior churches are making greater efforts now to provide some of these things within their own fabric for the younger people.

The guitar is of great significance in all this, because the guitar is a young people's instrument. They play all sorts of secular songs with it. They also play sacred songs, often to the same tune, with different words. The guitar enables the young people to be creative. And the guitar also irritates and annoys some of the older people who are not used to it.

Ahrens: In Africa, the World Council of Churches encouraged more-established, senior churches to relate positively to this new, spontaneous, charismatic-type of movement, in particular to establish a forum where some dialogue with their leaders could take place. Do you think something like that might be helpful on the Melanesian scene?

Strathern: Oh, I would like to see it happen. But there will be many problems to overcome. You see, people really do get upset about other people's forms of worship. What is all this emotionalism? What is this and that? I went through that, and the only way I overcame it was to try to understand what is behind it. What are they reaching out for? You may not like the forms they use to begin with, but if you understand that they are reaching out for something, that is the important thing. And you understand that they are doing something for people, and that is the other important thing.

Ahrens: If you compare the two types of Christianity – let us say the established-type of senior church, like the Lutherans, the Catholics, and so on – could the approach of the established, more-senior churches be characterised as: "If we have got a social problem, let's draft a social

action programme to deal with it", whereas the Pentecostals would say: "If they come to faith, everything else will be solved"?

Strathern: Yes, you are more or less right. The sad thing, it seems to me, is that both these positions have truth in them. And they can be true, either in combination, or they can be true separately. I have seen cases where people have been helped by education without going through one of these emotional experiences. Then there are documented cases of "rascals", who have been converted through an emotional experience, and they have stuck with it. They have not become "rascals" again. So it can do something wonderful for them.

You can have false versions of this, of course. Satan is always ready to assume the appearance of truth. So, it happens, that you get false conversions; you can also get true ones, purely on an emotional basis. Conversions of "rascals" occur when they have become defined as outcasts; there is no acceptable way for them to re-enter society. Only a very powerful change of a ritual nature can bring them in and legitimatise them. So, a Lutheran method of education, will always fail in relation to certain cases. But, on the other hand, once they are in, if no education is provided, they are just as likely to flip out because there is nothing to underpin the experience. That is my view.

Ahrens: Could not one also look at established churches as being tempted to try and justify religion by morality, or ethics, in the same way that any enlightened humanitarian could, or actually does, do?

Strathern: Exactly.

Ahrens: In other words religion has a purpose in itself.

Strathern: Quite. I accept that fully. The Pentecostals have made that point very clearly. That is their strength. It is also what affected me. It is the first time I saw that.

SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN OUR LAND: PEROVETA AS CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Ronnie Tom Ole

A word about Terminology

The search for what is "Christian religious experience", as reflected by Peroveta music, is the heart of this paper. The use of the phrase "Christian religious experience" is unusual, to say the least. Its unusualness may reflect the identity in thoughts – the pull between those Christians who call an experience "religious" and those Christians who prefer to identify an experience as "Christian religious". Using the term "Christian religious experience" communicates that a religious experience is one that is taking place within the Christian faith community, and, at the same time, one that is shared by followers of other faith communities. For these reasons, I have chosen to use the term "Christian religious experience" to describe Peroveta.[1]

Introduction and Background

The power of song is in the struggle for Papuan Christian religious experience – that is what the Peroveta is all about. I grew up in a small village call Hula in the Central Province, where Peroveta was (is) essential for the celebration of Christian religious experience. On certain nights, one could hear the sound, and feel the rhythm, of the Peroveta from a distance. These were children, women, and men who would gather near a house (occasionally in front of the pastor's or a deacon's house) after long hours or days of church activities. They needed to express their feelings. They needed to refresh their spirits in the sound and rhythm of Peroveta. And they did, sometimes peaceably, and sometimes with loudness and dancing. But, chiefly, they wanted to do it, to recall what God had done to their land.

Consider the first verse of this Hula Peroveta:

Ia lani kunenai pe ugamagi	Let us think of the old days
(Kunenai ia upura mukuna aonai gealuwai)	(Before our ancestors lived in darkness).
Iei ewagomona maekamo Keriso genai	We are now with Christ, in the light,
Ie, pe laik maeka melora lak veaira	We must walk as people of the light.

To interpret the theological significance of Peroveta for the Papuan Christian community, "academic tools" are not enough. The interpreter must feel her or his way into the power of the Peroveta music, responding both to its rhythmic content, and the faith images it affirms. Peroveta invites the believer to move closer to the sources of Papuan Christianity, and to experience the Papua Christian community's power to experience their God. One of my colleagues at Rarongo is fair when he observes that, "The God sung about in the Peroveta is probably not the same as the one in the *Sing His Praise*" (a commonly-used hymn book at Rarongo). Though the words of Peroveta may be translated, and may look alike, it is a different quality of energy they summon.

Peroveta is social and corporate music. Because it is only sung by Papuans, it is social, therefore it articulates the uniqueness of the Papuan community. It is an artistic expression of the Papuan Christian religious experience. It is corporate, in the sense that Peroveta is one kind of music that always occurs within the boundaries of the Papuan community for the sake of the Papuan Christian community.

Peroveta is historical music. It is rooted in the Christian heritage of the Papuan Christian community. It passes on attitudes and ideas from the past into the present, in the hope that they will influence and transform believers' decisions regarding their corporate future.

Peroveta is unity music.[2] It moves the people toward the direction of the knowledge of who their God is. It shapes and defines Papuan identity, and creates cultural structures for Papuan Christian religious experience. So, Peroveta is unifying, because it confronts the individual

with the truth of Papuan existence, and affirms that being Papuan is possible only in a communal context.

Peroveta is eschatological music, to use the language of systematic theology. Its sense of destiny is drawn from the images and meanings located in the originating Christian events. It rehearses those past Christian events to provide the power to move into the future. Peroveta recalls, or reinterprets, the Christian stories for the embodiment of the Papuan future.

Peroveta is sacramental music. It discloses the mystery of the God of Jesus Christ to unite with the Papuan believers. Peroveta becomes a holy instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. It is to be seen as the potential sacramental music of God, open to transformation.

Peroveta is ritual music. It is not music that wants to test God's existence in our land. How do Papuans know that God was in their land before the coming of the missionaries? Papuans do not ask that epistemological question. According to the Papuan viewpoint, it does not need proving. Papuans have already encountered the truth of God's existence, even before the arrival of missionaries. Instead of proving God, they "ritualise" God in song. This is what Peroveta is all about, a ritualisation of God in music. Peroveta is material for worship and praise to God, who has been present in Papuan history, despite the missionary movement.

Peroveta is also theological. It is theological in the sense that it tells the believers about a divine God, who, in ages past, has made Himself known in the history of both Old and New Testament Jews, and who is now actively moving the Papuans toward self-realisation.

My purpose is to examine the statement of Papuan Christian religious experience, as reflected by Peroveta. Several questions need to be raised that underline the assumption behind this concern. For example, what could it mean to sing "Lau ane baina abia", when one has no connections with the origins and history of a foreign nation? What could it mean to be an "Israel Besena" (generation), and a Papuan

surviving in a Jewish religion called Christianity brought by foreign missionaries?

Existentially, I want to stimulate discussion on Peroveta (especially among Papuans), because they are part of me. I sing and live them. Certain experiences, which created them, have shaped my faith journey. Moreover, Peroveta is a way of life. I affirm the reality of the Peroveta as an authentic expression of Papuan Christian identity, responding to them in the rhythms of dance. So I begin the discussion on Peroveta because I am the "Peroveta" and my life is Christian and religious. Without them, I cannot "sing" the Lord's song in my own land.

For this seminar, I will examine only two significant images of Papuan faith, as expressed in Peroveta, as a way to begin a long endeavour.

God in the Peroveta

Singing about the divine presence of the God made clearer by missionaries, as if this God was known throughout the entire Papuan history, seems to be the "bottom line" in any Peroveta. Peroveta show that Papuans do not believe that God created them to be "outsiders". Accordingly, they sing of a God who was involved in history – their history – making right what missionaries said, e.g., "from darkness to light".[3] Just as God, Yahweh, was with the children of Israel, He is also with the Papuans – past, present, and future. It is this certainty that informs the understanding of the Peroveta, enabling Papuan Christians to sing:

Ia, ia lani kunena e ugamagia	Let us think of our ancestors
U pura, amara lanira	In the olden days.
Maino auna auna na	Real peace
Maino auna auna na	Real peace
Iana pa apia	We have it now.

Even though there are Peroveta that record the coming of Christianity in their land, the basic idea of Peroveta is that "from

darkness to light" contradicts God; it is a denial of His existence, or more particularly, His pre-existence. To be labelled as a person of darkness is to be declared nobody. This form of existence contradicts God's creation of people to be His children. Papuans believe that they are God's children, and, therefore, they affirm their "somebodiness". This is why Peroveta focus on Biblical passages that stress the beginnings. Papuans sing about Adam and creation, and the **logos**. The emphasis is on God's pre-existence in the land where missionaries came. Papuan faith in the Peroveta is that God created people to be His children, not to be regarded as people of "darkness", and later be converted to "light".

At this point, it is important to note that one of the sources of Peroveta is Papuan culture. One could argue persuasively that there are elements of Papuan culture present in Peroveta, despite the historical missionary influence. If this is taken seriously, then there is a reason to believe that God in the Peroveta has historical reference. Papuans, as do any other Melanesians, view life as a whole, and do not make distinctions between the "secular" and the "sacred" that are found in Western culture. With this perspective as a starting point, it is quite reasonable to conclude that Papuan Christians do not accept a religion that negates the historical existence of God. As one may suggest, they combine their Papuan heritage with the gospel, and reinterpret foreign distortions of the truth in light of God's existence in the time of "Papuan darkness".

The other source of Peroveta is the experience of being regarded as people of darkness who are now living in the light. When asked where Papuans got Peroveta, one would respond:

Lani kunenai Palaguna Anop ra e kalao	In the beginning God created the world
Anopara e, Anopara e	The world, the world.
Anopara e kawa kawa o ai anina	The world was mad,
Mukuna maki	and meaningless
	And there was darkness too.

In view of this, it is no surprise to find Papuans singing:

Tamate[4] ralana e rigo	The blood of James Chalmers
Papua anoparanai	was poured out
	In the land called Papua.

It is not "sin", mind you, but the experience of being regarded as people of "dibura" (darkness in Motu) which guarantees that Peroveta is not imprisoned by the missionary movement.

The Papuan Christian's view of God embraces the whole of life. And Papuans' basic belief is that God is ever present, and that his/her God will make non-Papuans realise God's existence in time and space. This is the central theological assumption of God in Papuan Christianity and faith, as reflected in the Peroveta.

Jesus Christ in Peroveta

Statements about God in the Peroveta are not theologically distinct from statements about Jesus Christ. Jesus is understood as the king, "lohiabada" in Motu, or "Velekou" in Hula.

Iesu Keriso Velekou e	Jesus Christ, the King
Pa avumu, Palaka oma	We seek you and will walk
mapararai e	with you every day.

Peroveta do not deal with abstract theological speculations about the person and work of Christ. In Peroveta, Jesus is not a subject of theological question. Jesus is perceived in light of the two sources of Peroveta already mentioned, and Papuan Christians affirm both His divinity and humanity, without spending too much time debating the philosophical question, "How can God become man?"

The divinity of Jesus is affirmed in the Peroveta. For instance, the "Amana" (Father) and "Nauna" (Son) in Hula become two ways of talking about the reality of the divine presence in Papuan history. They stand for that reality, which enables Papuans to transcend the limitations of "darkness". The choice of name (Amana or Nauna) often depends upon the rhythm of the language rather than the intellectual content of the language.

Palagu Nauna Iesu	God's Son is Jesus
Ma ulamagina e veneriao	He gave us through His love
Maguli, maeka, maino	Life, light, peace,
Ulamagi, verere	Love, joy.
Iesu evenirao	Christ was given to us
Amara genana . . .	From the Father.

It is as if Papuan Christians are affirming the divine presence of Amana-Nauna through the rhythm and the motion of language, and more practically through dance. To encounter this Christ is to encounter Him in mind, body in motion, emotionally, and rhythmically. So, Jesus is a practical experience in motion, moving the Papuans to self-realisation.

Furthermore, when Papuans encounter His presence, they also meet the Father, who sent the Son to give His people light.

Palaguna (amara) e ulamagirao	For God loved us
E, e, Ia Nauna e uguao	He sent us His Son
Ia Nauna e uguao, Ia Nauna e uguao	He sent His Son, He sent His Son
Maeka e veamai agaio	He brought light.

Peroveta also tell us about Jesus' life on earth, His rejection and death on the cross – His humanity. Peroveta do not reflect a gnostic Christ, who only appeared to be human. Christ's suffering was real.

According to Peroveta, the meaning of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection is found in identity with people of darkness, who need the light. He has come to bring them out of darkness to restore their wholeness. He is the "Velekou", the crucified one, who has come to bring light to the "etena" people in their own land. This is why the Papuans want to sing:

Io kula lakai	Wake up!
Io laka etene ai	Go to the people of darkness
Ila maguli pie apai	So that they will receive light.

The death of Jesus in His own land means that He died on the cross for Papuans in "darkness". His death is a symbol of their lives, living in darkness in their own land. They knew the life of darkness when it crept over Jesus hanging on the cross.

Through being told that they are "dibura taudia" (people of darkness), they transcend the limitations of space and time. Jesus' time becomes their time, so a new historical existence is encountered. Through the experience of being in "darkness", they encounter the theological significance of Jesus' death. Jesus makes a close identification with those in darkness.

If this is taken seriously, Jesus was with the Papuans, and the Papuans were with Jesus. This means that Jesus was not alone when "darkness fell upon Him", and the Papuans were not alone before the missionaries came. Christ came to put an end to misunderstandings that lead to suppression. Herein lies the meaning of resurrection. It implies that death is not the last word. Death is not the end of God's great drama of salvation.

Ia Kwareao leana anona na	The tomb where Jesus died
Pe vamagulira . . .	Will save us.

The resurrection is the "divine guarantee" that the lives of Papuans are in the hands of the Conqueror of darkness, and they are now "free" to do what is obedient to the "Amana", the ever-living One. Papuans do not have to be regarded as people of "dibura taudia" anymore.

Vali nama ema kwarao	The good news came
Ano lmaparana e maekao	The world was in light
Ae, Iesu arana pakunai	Because of Jesus.
Mukuna kalara pie aiki	The work of darkness will end
Maekamo kalara pe kalara e	The work of light will begin.
Raoparana e vama aiao	He brought the way.
Palagu gena ulamagi anira	The meaning of God was
Iesu na e vama airao	revealed by Jesus.

Palagu e, po vele paikina	God, You are Lord,
Gemu maeka ai maparamai po venimai	You have given us Your light.

While Papuans hold that Christ is ever present in their presence, they also look beyond, to the future of Jesus. This is another aspect of resurrection, as reflected by Peroveta. The Peroveta do not only speak of what Christ has done, and is doing, for Papuans. The full consummation of God's salvation will take place outside the historical sphere.

Anopara ikana	The end of the world
Lanina, lanina wa veaina	Will be like this:
Aneru pie vaemai	Angels will appear
Kala rakvara aura	The sinners, the righteous
Kala rori rori aura	will be separated
Pie ware kava lugara	The sinners will go to the
Kalova aonai pie agie	fire
Wanai ila pie agie	They will cry and break their
Ila kari kari ra	jaws.
Mapie kala koki koki	

He is coming back to complete God's will to take those of darkness home with him.

The Papuan composer was quite certain that God's ultimate future would end darkness.

For Papuan Christians, then, Jesus is God breaking into the human historical present and transforming it, according to divine will. There is no need to worry about living in the "light" because Christ has already revealed Himself. It is already at hand in the person and work of Jesus, and then it will be fully consummated in God's own future.

This is the "bottom line" of who God is, and who Jesus Christ is, as reflected in the Peroveta.

My contention is that there is a complex world of thoughts underlying the Peroveta. Both sociological and theological analyses are needed to uncover this thought, and the fundamental worldview it

implies – i.e., missionary movement, colonialism, etc. In any case, the clue to the meaning of Peroveta is to be found in the Christian religious experience.

FOOTNOTES

1. The term "Peroveta" is quite debateable. Some Papuans would argue that it is associated with missionary influence – the introduction of the English word "Prophet". Others, however, would say that it originally emerged from the most famous Papuan Hiri. The author is yet to explore the origin of Peroveta. Peroveta is a category of song. "Ute"is another kind.

2. A little book, written by the late Revd Dr Percy Chatterton, **Day That I Have Loved**, is very informative on the concept of Papuan community, especially the chapter on "The Melanesian Way".

3. The phrase "from darkness to light" is taken directly from a little book that came out during the 100 years centenary celebration in Papua – 1972. The meaning of the term "darkness" for the Papuans is a concept that may not necessarily refer to "Sin" (wrong-doing). It also refers to the period before the arrival of the first missionaries in 1872. Again this is another issue the author is struggling with.

4. **Tamate** stands for Dr James Chalmers, an early missionary. Papuans could not pronounce his name properly so they called him **Tamate**.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN CULTURES

Ellison Suri

INTRODUCTION

Melanesian religion had its root in nature and the veneration of ancestors. The ancestors controlled the events in the world of nature, and watched people's everyday-life activities. The people maintained close relationships with ancestor spirits. Sometimes, these ancestor spirits punished their children or grandchildren for breaking the ancestors' rules, but often they helped and protected them. A man often called on his dead father to act as an intermediary, or go-between, when he sought the support or forgiveness of an ancient and powerful ancestor. Different ancestors had different powers when they were alive, and conferred them on their descendants. Thus, a person might look to one ancestor for powers to grow taro or yam well, to another for power to earn shell money and give big feasts, to another for power to win victory in war, and to another to escape vengeance.

For a Melanesian, the spirit world and the material world belong together. Everything that is around him, and everything that he does, or a community does, is religious. He is born into a religious order, and his life, his work, his way of thinking, and his whole being, are devoted to that order.

Therefore, religious experiences, before Christianity came into our islands, played an important role in the life of the individual Melanesians, and in the life of the community, in traditional Melanesian cultures. At this point, I would like to give a few examples, with special reference to Lau District of Malaita, Solomon Islands.

PRAYERS

Traditionally, prayers played an important role in the Melanesian society of Lau. Both individual and communal prayers were offered to the ancestor spirits to receive assistance for daily activities in life, such as fishing, hunting, gardening, fighting, building houses and canoes, making shell money, and feasts. Here are two examples of prayers said at sea:

O you Alidea (name of ancestor)	Oe a do
Draw the canoe	Dau ana ola
Lighten and speed the canoe	Fa eli eli mako fa hala ola
That we may reach the place	Eri mika dao ana fera
Where we are bound to be	Na milea fuana
Save us on the deep	Ada suli gami lao asi
Save us from the tempest	Ada suli gami fasia hao
And bring us to shore in peace.	Nali gami kou i lao na fanualama.

O you Dela (name of ancestor)	Oe a do
Bring different kinds of fish	Nalia mai ia ete gi sui
From our bays	Fasia fakili gi
Put them into the net	Alu gera lao furai
And let them die there	Eri gera ka mae i lao na
Powerful you are	Oe na ramo
Man of the sea.	Wane aua asi.

Usually these prayers were said by the leaders on behalf of each group.

Prayers were intimate communion with the ancestor spirits. The people believed in the power of prayer, because, through it, they received what they asked for.

Just as in Christianity today that prayer is an act of faith. By it, power is released into our own and others' lives.

DREAMS

The people of Lau believed in dreams. If someone was sick, and if it was supposed that an ancestor spirit was the cause of that sickness, the friends and relatives of the sick man sent for the professional dreamer to find out what ancestor had been offended, and to make it up with him. The dreamer slept, and, in his dream, went to the place where the sick man had been working. There he met a man, the ancestor who caused the sickness, and learned of his name. The ancestor told him that the sick man, as he was working, had encroached upon his ground, the place he haunted as his own, and that, to punish him, he has taken away his soul and impounded it in a magic fence in the garden. The dreamer begged for the return of the soul, and asked pardon on behalf of the sick man, who meant no disrespect. The ancestor spirit pulled out the fence in which the soul was enclosed and let it out. These dreamers were able to visit Anogou, the place of the dead. Sometimes, if a child was sick, it was supposed that there was someone in Anogou drawing away its soul.

The dreamer, having received his fees, went in a dream to Anogou, and interceded with the ancestor. He got back the soul, and the child recovered. In case of theft, or of any hidden crime, the dreamer went into sleep, and, when he woke up, declared that he had seen the culprit and gave his name.

The dreams pointed to the needs of the one who dreamt. They did this in the form of a story or part of a story. The message was hidden, and only the dreamer who had the gift of interpretation could interpret it. Sometimes the dreamer dreamt, and interpreted the meaning of the dream for himself, to meet his needs.

Here is one of the dreams the Bible tells us. St Peter dreamt that out of the sky came a ship's sail, on which were animals. Some of these were animals, which Jews were forbidden to eat. Three times, a voice told St Peter to eat them, because God had made them. Each time Peter said that he could not eat them because they were unclean; then the sail went back into the sky (Acts 10:9-16).

Through this dream, Peter found out something for himself about his own needs. He discovered thoughts, which had been in him before the dream, but which he had not known. He was a Jewish Christian, and up to that time had never eaten food with Christians who were not Jews. For a long time, he had been thinking that perhaps he ought to eat with such Christians, but it was through this dream that these thoughts became clear to him. Then, he had the courage to take action. He sat down to eat with Cornelius, the Roman, the non-Jew.

We can say, therefore, that sometimes a person has a dream through which he/she sees the truth about himself/herself more clearly. It may be truth, from which he/she usually hides, because he/she does not like it. Recently, Momoe had been quarrelling with her mother. She felt very sad, and got very sick, and wanted to commit suicide. One night, she had a dream in which she saw a coffin in her room, and people sitting around it, moaning. A priest was called in for payer, counselling, and interpretation of her dream. The priest explained the dream: the coffin was herself, because, all the time, she was thinking of killing herself. After saying prayers, spiritual counselling, and interpretation of her dream, she got well.

From this, we can see something else about a dream, that, through it, we can see what are the things in which we especially need God's help. Momoe saw that she needed God's love, care, mercy, and forgiveness in times of sadness, hardships, difficulties, and suffering.

Through a dream, we can also discover what decisions we should take. Aumae had been working in the Ministry of Finance for many years. One day, he had a dream, and in his dream he saw a white ship sinking in the lagoon at Malu'u Bay. He swam to save the lives of those who were drowning. When Aumae thought about the dream, he told himself, perhaps the ship is the church of God at Malu'u, the people who were drowned are God's people who turn away from their faith and become backsliders. Perhaps I am called by God to preach the good news of salvation to my people, to save their lives, and to strengthen their faith in God. This dream had been in his mind for many years, and, at last, he decided to go to Bishop Patteson Theological Centre at Kohimarama to train to be a priest. He is now a fourth-year student at

the Centre, and will be ordained deacon at the end of this year, and priest at the end of the following year. Hopefully, he will be posted at Malu'u to serve his own people there.

The people of Lau, even today, take dreams very seriously. To them, the message of the dreams must be explained alongside the deepest truth, which we know about God and man. If the message contradicts such truths, then the message is not a true message.

The people are convinced that dreams offer practical advice, from the unconscious to the conscious. The message in the dreams, therefore, is important, especially if they are serious dreams. If there is no one to help the dreamer to explain his dream, he will be struggling to find the meaning of his dream. So, someone must help the dreamer to explain his dream. Today, people contact laymen and priests who are gifted in interpreting dreams, and, after the dreams have been explained, the people go back satisfied with peace and joy.

The people of Lau fear dreams, in the same sense that Christians fear God, a voice from the unknown. Therefore, the people respect dreams as important gifts from God to man. It is in this sense that Christianity does not destroy an indigenous culture, but fulfils it.

SYMBOLS

In ancient Lau, natural objects, like stones, plants, animals, mountains, streams, valleys, or man-made things, like canoes, houses, images, masks, etc., were symbols. These symbols suggested meanings, which were important to the people.

For example, in Lau, the **bae** was a sacred place, and, in it, the stone altars (**eri no qwaisusiagi**) were made. These stone altars were symbols of sacredness and sacrifices. They were fenced around, lest they should be rashly trodden upon. Each of the stone altars was sacred, taboo, and belonged to ancestors. If a tree, growing in the **bae,** were to fall across a path, no one would step over it. In entering a **bae,** a man, who knew the ancestors and sacrifices, went first, those, who went with

him, treading in his footsteps. In going out, no one would look back, lest his soul should stay behind. No one would pass a **bae** when the sun was so low as to cast his shadow into it: the ancestor would draw it from him.

Sharks were symbols of incarnation. People often thought them to be the abode of ancestors, as men, before their death, announced that they would appear as sharks, and, afterwards, any shark remarkable for size or colour, which was observed to haunt a certain shore, rock, or bay, was taken to be someone's ancestor, and the name of the deceased was given to it. Such a one was Baekwa i Aruma of Lau, in which offerings of pig and porpoise teeth (**alualu**) were made. It could be called upon to help in times of danger at sea.

Masks also played an important role in the lives of the people of ancient Lau. A person would wear a mask that was made in the likeness of a particular ancestor, to win his character, personality, and support. If a tribe was planning to go to war, the warriors would wear the mask of an ancient warrior to win his support, and to gain his power to be more courageous and strong.

Through these symbols, and many more, living persons established contact with the divine and ancestor spirits.

The Old Testament story of Jacob's dream is a typical example of how, thousands of years ago, men felt that a living God, or a divine spirit, was embodied in the stone, and how the stone became a symbol. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." And he was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on top of it, and dedicated it to the Lord. And he called the name of that place Beth-el (Genesis 28:10-19). And Jacob went to Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun has set; and he took off the stones of the place to sleep. And he dreamt, and, behold, a ladder, set up on the earth, and the top of it reached heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am

the Lord God of Abraham, the Father and God of Isaac; the land where thou liest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed."

For Jacob, the stone was an integral part of the revelation. It was the mediator between himself and God.

Even in Christianity, animal symbolism plays an important part. Three of the Evangelists have animal emblems. St Luke has the Ox, St Mark: the Lion, and St John: the Eagle. Only one, St Matthew, is represented as a man or an angel. Christ, Himself, symbolically appears as the Lamb of God, or the fish, but He is also the serpent, and lion exalted at the cross. These animal attributes of Christ indicated that even the Son of God Himself (the supreme personification of man) can never leave out His animal nature and spiritual nature. The sub-human, as well as the super-human, is felt to belong to the realm of the divine. The relationship of these two aspects of man is beautifully symbolised in the Christmas picture of the birth of Christ in a stable, among animals.

The cross is a symbol of Christ, because of His sacrifice on it. It is also a symbol of Christianity. Theologically, it stands for salvation, redemption, and atonement.

VISIONS

New knowledge of events was believed to be conveyed to the people by an ancestor spirit, speaking through the voice of a person, who had the gift of seeing visions. He, himself, would be unconscious, while speaking. In Lau, men of the village would be sitting in their **beu ola** canoe houses, and discussing some undertaking, probably an expedition to attack some enemies. One among them, known to have the gift of seeing visions, would sneeze and begin to shake, and become unconscious, a sign that an ancestor spirit had entered into him. Then a voice, not his own, would be heard in his throat allowing, or disapproving, of what was proposed. This is an ecstatic type of vision, known as **Agalo qwea**. Another type of vision is known as **Mato'o**. This is the vision that is seen with naked eyes. Again, the person who had the gift of seeing visions, would see things, which convey messages

of victory, defeat, warning, successful harvest, peace, and healthy lives in the community. These visions were never vain, meaningless, and lying. They always had a clearly moral and teaching content. The people always found fulfilment of truth in them.

On Mount Sinai, Moses had seen a vision of the burning bush, and he heard a voice calling him to undertake a special task, to lead the children of Israel from Egypt into the Promised Land (Ex 3).

Isaiah had experienced a vision in the Temple, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, and heard a voice bidding him to go and bear witness to his people (Is 6).

Paul had experienced a vision on his way to Damascus, when he saw a blinding light, and heard a voice, which led him, who was an arch-persecutor, to become a heroic witness to the faith he had once sought to destroy (Acts 9).

Due to rapid change in the Pacific, we Melanesians must hold firmly to the foundation of our culture contained in our religious experiences. If we lose our ability to express ourselves creatively through them, we lose an important part of our cultural heritage. Our aim should be to preserve correctly, and continue with out Melanesian religious experiences. Better understanding, care, and love must be given to the Melanesian religious experiences today than has generally been the practice in the past by our missionary churches.

Our creator God was at work in our cultures even before missionaries and churches came into our islands. Paul, writing to the Galatians, says: "All baptised in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27, 28). These verses challenge us to rejoice, and enjoy the rich diversity that God-in-Christ brings to all our cultures and languages. Christ has come to fulfil and make perfect out Melanesian religious experiences.

KRAIS WANPELA TASOL

The *Solus Christus* Response to the Crisis of Authority in Enga Lutheranism

Jerome Burce

"I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8).

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8).

The Apostle Paul suggests that, within the body of Christ, glossolalia for its own sake, and divorced from an evident goal to strengthen the bond of love which unites one to the other, is an empty and pointless noise (1 Cor 13:1). Harsher still, is the verdict on theological endeavour, which does not have, as its constant referrent, the specific questions and confusions, the struggles and pains of living human beings, and which does not seek, as its final purpose, the care, comfort, and invigoration of people who have names and faces through words about the Word made flesh, the mystery of God in Christ. Such disengaged endeavour implies the Apostle in the succeeding verse makes of the person, who indulges in it, a nothing-at-all. With this in mind, and to the end that the subsequent discussion will be rooted in the self-same realities in which Christ our Lord, through His Spirit, seeks still to root Himself, I begin with some stories of life amid the Movements, Lutheran-style. Dateline: Enga Province, 1985.

The young man was distraught when he finally came to see me. School fees were due within the week, and he was without a toea to his name. What had he been doing over the holidays to find some money, I asked. And now the story came out. It seems that, shortly after the conclusion of the previous school year, he'd been invited to join a group of young people, both men and women, in so-called ***wok misin*** *activities,*

travelling around among the eight or so congregations of one of the Gutnius Lutheran church's sub-circuits to conduct informal services of prayer, preaching, and song, with the goal of reviving the interest of the area's youth in the church's message and life. The lay leader of the sub-circuit, who organised and promoted the activity, appointed the young man leader of the group, and promised that at the end of the holidays he would pay his school fees for him, both as thanks, and recompense for services rendered. The same lay leader instructed the group carefully before sending them on their way, emphasising that whereas they were not all of the same kin by birth, they were now, by virtue of their baptism, brothers and sisters; and that if they truly had faith in this new reality, then they would understand, also emotively, that relations between the male and female members of the group were governed by the same incest taboos that apply to one's blood kinsmen. So, how did it go, I asked. Well, said the young man, at least with the ***wok misin*** *aspect of things, although it was terribly difficult not to be attracted to a certain young female member of the group who happened to be the wife's sister to the lay leader. Imagine his difficulty, then, when upon conclusion of the work, and the disbanding of the group, he found himself spending a few nights in the lay leader's house together with the attractive young thing; and when it came time to go to bed at night, the lay leader retired with his wife to one of the house's two bedrooms, indicating that the young man, the wife's sister, and two or three young children were all to share the other bedroom.*[1] *And, in the dead dark of the second or third night, temptation came in the form of the wife's sister snuggling close. Things happened, which are virtually bound to happen in such circumstances. One of the children noticed something, and told mama the next morning – and the young man was slung out of the house amid much noise and hullabaloo, and sent on his way without the earned and promised school fee. I kept a promise to the young man to speak to the lay leader on his behalf. While confirming the young man's story it its essential details, he was surprised at the suggestion – and unwilling, in the end, to grant it – that he had placed undue temptation in the young man's path, and that a little mercy was therefore in order, given the young man's school fee predicament. Instead, he returned again and again to his disappointment in the young man, which was both painful and profound. "And here I thought he was a real believer", he said over*

and over. ***"Em I semim mipela nogut tru"*** *– in the eyes of uncommitted onlookers he has made a mockery of us all and of all we profess.*

I drove up to the building where a meeting of the Gutnius Lutheran Church Council was in progress, and I was delighted to see standing there two of my students, who had been spending the year away from the seminary fulfilling practical experience requirements. My delight quickly passed to resignation, however, when I caught the less-than-happy glances they were darting at each other, and the grim tones in their voices. A suspicion that they were picking again at the same old bone was quickly confirmed as I stepped between them to keep the peace. Student A had been assigned to work in an area, which had recently experienced a wave of charismatic activity. Student B was posted to a congregation within A's home sub-circuit. B, an older man, and, by nature, cautious and conservative, was intensely annoyed that A had brought a group of young folks from the area where he was now working down for a visit to his home congregation – onto B's professional turf, in other words – to do some ***wok misin****; and that, while there, A and his group had said and done things commonly associated with local charismatic and Pentecostal movements, which to B's mind, were* ***ipso facto*** *un-Lutheran. A, the sort of person who will be reproved by no one, least of all a fellow student, asserted that while he had indeed encountered and learned some new worship habits this year, he saw nothing in them that substantively contradicted what he had learned from his teachers; and that all he wanted to do was to introduce the folks of his home area to the same spirit of commitment and joy[2] that he had encountered in the congregations with whom he was now working. B's rejoinder was to repeat that, far from bringing joy, A's group had simply stirred up turmoil and confusion with statements and actions that were in inherently suspect, and in violation of standard Lutheran ideas and practices.[3] And so it went. With each exchange, A and B hardened their respective positions, ceased any attempt to listen with sympathy to each other, and rejected any intimation, also from me, that there might be the faintest smidgeon of merit in what the other was trying to say. I finally called things to a halt by firmly instructing each to get back to his place of work, mind his own business, and look forward next year to some exciting sessions of sorting things through in the classroom.*

The husband and wife of twenty or so years were experiencing severe strains in their marriage, and he was starting to carry on a serious courtship of another woman. My inclination was to attribute much of the difficulty to the fact that husband and wife were living apart, he at his place of work, and she at home with the school-age children. When I suggested this to the husband, however, he dismissed it. "We've lived apart before", he said. "We didn't mind it then, so why should we mind it now? My problem with her is that she's mixed up with that One Way mob,[4] and spends so much time with them, chasing around to this and that activity, that she neglects her proper responsibilities at home. My pigs aren't being looked after properly, nor are the children for that matter." Several counselling sessions later, it became apparent that, as was only to be expected, the matters at issue between the two were several and complex. Yet, when it came time to state terms and conditions for a rapprochement, the husband ignored all other questions in favour of the matter of the wife's denominational affiliation. Unless she renounced her second baptism, forsook the "One Way" group, and returned to the Lutheran congregation, of which he continued to be a member, he would divorce her and take the new wife. He claimed to have heard a prominent leader of the Gutnius Lutheran church give his public blessing to such a move. In the end, she finally agreed to his terms, on the condition that he would call off his other courtship. At least, for the moment, victory was his.

For a couple of years now, an officially-sanctioned and so-called ***"diwai kros"*** *movement has been under way in one of the five regions of the Gutnius Lutheran church. A movement of moral reform, it centres on the making of solemn public vows to abstain from specific activities – fighting, post-mortuary payments, and feasts (****kumanda****)[5] – venial demands for compensation in cases of injury and death, lewd or inflammatory speech –which have always occupied a prominent place on the official list of the cardinal sins of the ancestors. Supposedly, all Christians assented to a ban against these activities when they were baptised, but – or so it is commonly perceived – virtually all have continued to dabble in them. And so now, comes the chance to up the ante, and get serious about things. Those who wish to (or in some cases are invited to by congregational leaders), undergo an intense course of basic catechetical instruction, similar to that prescribed for catechumens*

in the church's early days. Upon its conclusion, a grand worship service is held, attended by representatives of numerous neighbouring congregations, and presided over by the local bishop, with the assistance of as many of the region's pastors as can be mustered for the event. The keystone of the service is the making of the vows of abstention, and the bestowing, as a sign of those vows, of a silver cross on a black string, which is hung from the neck of the recipient. If, at a later date, the vows are broken, the cross is to be taken away from the offender, and hung in the church building, in plain view, and he or she is to be barred from receiving communion. An act of public repentance is required before the cross can be returned, and communion privileges restored. And now come reports of an emerging two-tier structure in certain of the congregations that have experienced the movement. In one place, the story goes, two cups are provided at communion: one for those who have "received the cross", and one for those who haven't. In another place, those who have received the cross, supposedly commune first; the "ordinary Christians" follow. Curious about these stories, I quizzed a few of my students, who been through the movement themselves. No, one of them said, he knew of no such distinction of persons emerging in his congregation within the context of public worship; although the evangelist who had led him and his group through their pre-ritual course of instruction had emphasised that, after receiving the cross, they were to acquire plates and cups of their very own, and were no longer to share the use of these with those who had not been through the ritual; nor were they to permit these unpledged others the use of their clothes or beds and mattresses. The stated point of these new arrangements was to prevent close contact with the non-committed, and so to avoid being enticed into breaking one's vows. He, himself, was ignoring these stipulations, he said, but not so his mother. She, also a recipient of the cross, was beginning to annoy her friends and neighbours with her unsocial behaviour.

Finally: Responding to an invitation, I attended a meeting of the evangelists of a sub-circuit, which had "gone charismatic" in 1983. I was astounded to discover that, of the three burning questions (I so express myself in all seriousness), which had prompted them to summon me there, two were as follows: "May we clap hands when we sing?" and "Will we be in error if, at the conclusion of the public worship service,

we invite people to raise their hands, and join together in saying Alleluia and Praise the Lord?" I knew that the missionary to that area had already affirmed them in their freedom to do these things, and had done so on more than one occasion. Why, I wondered, should they have felt obliged, even once, let alone again and again, to ask about such things?

So much for story-telling. I could continue endlessly, and with ease, but will not do so, thanking you instead for the patience with which you have listened thus far. Most of you, no doubt, have a wealth of similar stories to relate. Certainly, and colleague of mine in the Enga province is rich in these, and that unavoidably.

For the Enga Province of 1985 is gripped in a fervour of interest and activity with respect to matters spiritual, to the extent that it would be nigh impossible to find anyone – man or woman, old or young, Christian or non-Christian – who is not in some way touched and affected by it. Any reader of the literature of recent years on Melanesian religious movements will already have noted the prominent place that the Enga Province assumes in it. While it is not my purpose here to contribute to that literature, from the point of view of descriptive analysis, a few quick comments along those lines are nonetheless required for the sake of clarity in the discussion to come.

Even a casual hearing of the above stories will have prompted the observation that new activity among Enga Lutherans is as varied as it is abundant. Understanding "new activity", in the broadest sense, as anything which challenges and moves beyond a **status quo**, it is possible to identify at least six streams of such activity, which are distinguished from each other by source and scope, as well as by their relation to the structures, models, norms, and presumptions of that which is perceived as being "traditionally Lutheran".

The first such stream has its source in the vigorous endeavours of a growing number of historically non-Lutheran groups, which, because their mission appears to be as overtly directed to baptised Lutherans and Catholics as it is to the unchurched, I term sectarian. Most prominent of these – and also the oldest, with roots dating to the first years of Christian evangelistic activity within the province – is the Seventh-day

Adventist church. Much less aggressive in its competitive activities, is the Apostolic church, which, likewise, has a long history in the province, at least in certain areas.[6] In the late 1970s, other groups began to make an appearance, here and there, among them, the Assemblies of God, the Church of Christ, and the Four Square Gospel organisation. Lutheran congregations have been directly touched, and exercised, by these groups, only to the extent that one of them should set up shop in the near vicinity and begin efforts at proselytisation.[7] Their indirect influence has been far more pervasive, however, inciting widespread debate concerning the nature and proper practice of baptism, and provoking much enquiry, and anxiety with regard to things eschatological.[8] Such of these groups as are Pentecostal in character are also making a significant contribution to an ongoing furore over the nature of the operations of the Holy Spirit.

A second stream, related to the first in its present character as extra-Lutheran, is nonetheless distinct from it by virtue of its origin as a movement within certain Lutheran congregations, which culminated in schism and the establishment of a new organisation, avowedly independent not only from the Gutnius Lutheran church, but also from the aforementioned sectarian groups with which it shares many common characteristics, particularly a requirement of re-baptism by immersion and a heavy emphasis on moral reform.[9] Commonly called **WanWe** by Lutheran non-adherents, this group continues to have a strong impact, particularly in those areas where it was first established, through pronounced dedication to proselytising activity.[10]

Still, a third stream of activity flows from the presence of a strong charismatic movement[11] within Lutheran congregations of the Saka and Kandep regions of the province.[12] Regarded with deep suspicion by the bulk of the church's leadership, as well as by the many congregations outside these areas, whose only experience of charismatic activity comes through their contact with groups which also insist on re-baptism, the Saka and Kandep charismatics assert, with determination, their Lutheran identity and commitment to continued life within the structures of the Gutnius Lutheran church, and, likewise, are at pains to demonstrate their stance within the accepted bounds of orthodoxy.

The fourth stream centres on the activities of the **diwai kros** movement described briefly in the story above. Found particularly in the Sirunki/Lagaip region of the province, it has surfaced also in congregations within the Wapenamanda district. The unique characteristics of this movement are two. First, it is almost wholly indigenous, embodying, as it does, a central rite, set within a complex of associated activity, so completely bound by the framework of Enga culture, as to be unrepeatable elsewhere. While an outsider can detect a superficial similarity in intent to the rite of confirmation, there is no one within the movement itself who makes that association.[13] Second, the movement has surfaced with the unquestioned support – some would say at the instigation – of the clerical leadership of the regions concerned. Since this clerical leadership includes some of the most prominent officials of the Gutnius Lutheran church, critique of the movement by the skeptic, whether expatriate or national – and there are any number of these – is deemed a dicey business. Nonetheless, at least one of the church's assistant bishops has forbidden the movement to congregations over which he exercises supervision, without, however, openly challenging those of his episcopal colleagues, who are promoting it within their jurisdictions.

Fifth: Large numbers of congregations are experiencing waves of activity in which the newness consists not so much in the nature of the activity itself as in the level at which it is being done. Thus, youth groups form and travel, both within and beyond the congregation's immediate area, singing songs and conducting informal services of worship; nightly devotions are held at different locations within the parish; women's groups begin to meet; Sunday worship, still conducted within the framework of traditional liturgies, is marked by vigorous singing of recently-composed songs set to what have recently become the new standard melodies; increased attention is given to moral standards within the congregation; efforts are made to collect funds for the erection of a permanent church building or a new parsonage. In general, emphasis is placed on heightened activity along traditional lines, though with a high degree of lay leadership and participation.

Finally, one might conceivably speak of a sixth stream, distinguished from the fifth primarily by degree; the level of activity is

lower, the clerical onus for instigation and leadership is far more pronounced, the mistrust of anything smacking of innovation is far stronger, and the corresponding tendency to assert adherence to the norms of "traditional Lutheranism" is much more in evidence. Yet there is newness also here, newness in the struggle to define what does and does not correspond to the perceived tradition, and newness in the attempt by the congregation as a whole to achieve a measure of renewed interest and involvement within the constraints of that tradition. Interestingly, it is also within this stream that one encounters new desires to reconcile Christian faith with officially-condemned aspects of traditional Enga culture, chief among these being participation in the activities associated with **tee** (the Enga **moka**), or exchange ceremony, on the one hand, and **kumanda** on the other.

So much for description, and now on to analysis. Many of you will already have noted that of my six so-called streams of activity, only a few – clearly the third, perhaps the first, and, by stretching definitions, also the second and fourth – correspond with what the literature has come to identify as new religious movements within Melanesia. A cursory scanning of titles of the articles and papers, which touch on such movements, quickly reveals an almost exclusive focus on two types of activity: either that which explicitly identifies itself with the operations of the Holy Spirit, or that which is overtly syncretistic, drawing heavily on the ideas and constructs of traditional Melanesian religions, at the expense of the Christian content of the faith. I may as well unburden myself immediately, then, with the assertion that, to this point, the definition of what constitutes a new religious movement has been too narrow. Sir Isaac Newton put into words for the world that the world, so I suspect, had instinctively known from the beginning: that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Both action and reaction are movements. Both actor and reactor are re-shaped and re-moved with reference to the former **status quo**. New religious movements breed, by way of response, new religious movements. To observe that the latter are less noticeable than the former, owing to their reactionary tendency to sharpen the norms, re-assert the values, and operate within the structures of the challenged **status quo,** is to say nothing of their quality as **new** events. It is on these grounds that I claim to find Lutherans of the Enga Province engaged with at least six new religious movements,

freely admitting that I arrive at that number through several acts of arbitrary definition. Another observer, using another measuring stick, could well find more – though not, I think, fewer.

Six religious movements, each in competition to varying degrees with the others, each seeking to define itself over against the others, each reacting to the others' acting and prompting the others to react in turn to it. Back we go to Newton's realm for another analogy: bodies acting and reacting vigorously to each other give off energy in the form of heat and light. When the interacting bodies are bodies of people; and when the interacting attains a certain pitch, and the sparks generated achieve a certain level of intensity: then the results are confusion and pain. Of confusion and pain there is now an excessive measure in the circles of Enga Lutheranism. To this, the stories I related earlier bear eloquent witness, and it was primarily for the sake of bearing that witness that I related them. If the theologian's chief task is first to plumb, and then to make accessible, the depths of God's Good News in Christ; and if that good news is addressed, in the first place, to those enmeshed in the toils of confusion and pain, "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36) – and I here join countless theologians before me asserting the axiomatic nature of both of these propositions – then it is precisely at this point that our urgent engagement, as theologians, with the reality of today's religious movements must have its beginning.

A careful observer of the Enga Lutheran confusion will quickly notice several things. First, with the exception of one highly significant affirmation, to which I will have cause to return later, there is virtually nothing which might be deemed a verity. Name the idea or the practice, and someone can be found who will take issue with it.

Second, one is struck by the speed with which people pass judgment on the unfamiliar, by the superficiality of comment on it, and by an apparent inability to identify and evaluate principles, as opposed to their manifestations.

Third, one detects at all levels, from little old **lapun mama,** all the way up to the ranks of episcopal leadership, a tendency to rely heavily on instinctual and emotive grounds when reacting to the religiously different, to the near exclusion of the intellect.[14] There follows from this,

a corresponding inability to articulate the grounds upon which discrimination is based.

Fourth, debate over religious matters is frequently, if not usually, intertwined with conflicts, whose roots are buried elsewhere. In such situations, the usual inability to address the religious conflict with clarity affords ample opportunity to make of it a smokescreen with which to conceal otherwise unjustifiable agendas in a haze of righteous outrage. In turn, efforts to achieve mutual understanding in the religious matter are impeded by the felt need of both parties to triumph over the opponent in the objectively-unrelated conflict, which lies as close, if not closer, to the heart of their difficulty with each other than does the religious problem; one dare not permit a useful smokescreen to be blown away. Worst of all, this intertwining of motives and aims is so taken for granted that any attempt to address seriously a religiously-based conflict must first conquer a mountain of suspicion and cynicism, which presumes that fine words always, and necessarily, conceal a dubious agenda.[15]

Fifth, one is impressed by the amount of actual harm done by erroneous theological assumptions, by the ease with which such false assumptions are accepted, and by the extent to which they are allowed to remain substantively unchallenged. (I recall again my amazement that a vibrant young man should be not only permitted, but instructed, to spend a night in the same room with the young lady of the house, and that the resulting triumph of flesh over spirit should then provoke surprise, let alone consternation.)

Sixth, as in the case of the people who sought endorsement for the clapping of hands, one senses a widespread yearning for repeated assurance that "we are right in doing what we are doing".

Seventh, one struggles frequently to suppress either a smile or a grimace over the credulity with which outrageous statements are received and inquired about: the anxiety over 666; whether it is true that the Spirit alone is carrying on divine operations, while Father and Son enjoy a well-deserved rest; whether my uncle's cousin's assertion of apostolic authority has any validity to it; whether a divorce will, in fact,

be beyond the reach of God's evaluative comment, provided one has the good sense not to get married in church; etc., etc.

Eighth, one is quickly dismayed by the readiness of opponents in debate to stake out hard and fast positions with respect to each other, and by the rapidity with which communication breaks down, efforts at understanding cease, and disagreement degenerates into unyielding opposition.

Finally, one hears on all sides a demand for conformity, particularly in matters of practice, and a corresponding denigration of those whose habits in matters religious are other than mine. Lingering in the neighbourhood of all such loud talk is a palpable sense of unease and the unmistakable scent of fear.

At what point does the pained onlooker approach this mess with a helpful word or two? One tack might be to identify and extract the common assumptions shared by all, and to pursue conciliation and amity, the basis of these. Such assumptions are indeed to be found, and in abundance. For example: **Mipela mas I stap stret long ai bilong God** – it is necessary that we be righteous in the sight of God; **Mipela i mas bihainim stretpela pasin** – righteous behaviour is required of us; **God i no save lusim sampela rong** – certain behaviours place one beyond the pale of God's forgiveness. Very quickly, one perceives, in all quarters of the church, a deep concern over the nature of God's verdict on human beings, generally, and on the individual, in particular; a conviction that that verdict is related closely to the quality of human behaviour, and that human behaviour can influence the divine verdict; that present experience can afford an indication of the state of God's relation to, and opinion of, the individual; that the principle of due reciprocity, which is of such utter significance in one's relationships with other human beings, is, likewise, of utter significance in one's relationship with God. Taking these, then, as but one of several families of assumptions on which one could find broad and general agreement: what does one now do with them? Each assumption serves only to prompt new questions: if God's opinion of me is of crucial importance, what is that opinion? If my behaviour is of significance in shaping that opinion, which behaviours will produce the desired conclusion? If

experience provides an indicator to the present state of God's verdict on me, how is that experience to be interpreted?

Deafened by the shouted babble of irreconcilable answers, which are the fruits of his labours thus far, the observer does well to set aside his chagrin, and to focus on the one happy result of the noise: each of the several streams has now been driven by the process of answering the common questions, to identify the authorities upon which its unique answers are based. And, suddenly, one finds oneself gazing on the roots of the chaos. . . . For what is cited as an authority by one is rejected as an authority by others; and what is claimed as authoritative by all quickly reveals an inherent inability to function on its own, in a sufficiently authoritative fashion.

So it is, for example, that scripture-quoting is as popular in the Enga Province as it is anywhere else in Christendom, with one and all citing, as the supreme authority for their words and deeds, the Holy Bible. But, in the complete absence of clear and clearly-shared hermeneutical principles, the throwing back and forth of Bible passages in a debate on the merits of baptism by immersion becomes an exercise in utter futility. Again, many will seek their authoritative refuge in the creeds, the catechism, or **Tok Bilip bilong Yumi**; the PNG Lutheran statement of faith. The immediate response is to wave a New Testament in the air, while denigrating "doctrine-based faith", as opposed to "Spirit-based faith", an impressive-sounding distinction, which leaves the opponent speechless.

A favourite authority, of course, is the Holy Spirit, whose activity is said to be responsible for the varieties of charismatic experience. But sceptics about in the wings, ready to observe loudly that, even if the genuineness of the claimed experience was not open to question – which it is – everyone knows full well that unholy spirits are in plentiful supply within the cosmos, and that there is no guarantee that the claimed experience, even if genuine, does not proceed from one of these. Dreams and visions, another frequently-cited authority, are fair game for aspersions cast on similar lines. So try experience in general, depended on by many for signs of God's gracious favour, and for authentication of positions taken over against other. Sad to say, it takes little imagination

to point out that He makes the sun to shine, and the rain to fall, on the unjust as well as on the just, and, in the end, the righteous join the unrighteous in the sleep of death. Equally hapless, are attempts to point to the sanctity of one's behaviour – or the behaviour of one's group – as sufficient reason to presume that one is on the right track. The fate of the Pharisees is too well known; and in any event, there is no way, in the end, to settle the debate over God's opinion on **kumanda,** or the chewing of betelnut.

On to human authorities: missionaries are still looked to for the last word in wisdom, particularly those missionaries with a history in the place; but only by some, and then only when it can be assumed that the missionary will confirm my preconceptions. But let him once attack those preconceptions, and reference is speedily made to 1975, and the meaning of independence.[16] National church leaders are even less reliable, for all that they've been duly elected and elevated, and for all the high regard that people are wont to show to officialdom. Enga leaders lead, after all, by consensus. Let one try to swim against the tide of widespread opinion, and the clay feet of his not-so-secret bad habits will be pointed out for one and all to mutter over: as everyone knows, nothing beats the good old **argumentum ad hominem** (argument based on personal characteristics).

And so it goes, leaving one and all to wonder, in the end, where to turn to next. So it is that we, the onlookers, now stand at the crux of the problem in Enga Lutheranism. The authorities are failing. That which is necessary to maintain common presuppositions; to ensure a common understanding of Christian language; to identify and censure foolishness; to adjudicate controversies; to provide trustworthy direction; to assure the fretful and calm unspoken fears; to command a common allegiance; and to function as that focus of obedience around which all can unite; to be that sufficient authority from which all other authorities derive their integrity: this is missions – or better, this is being missed, among Enga Lutherans.

What follows, as an inevitable result, is this: whenever somebody, whether an individual or a group, suggests an idea or recommends a practice previously unknown, the resulting need to evaluate it drives one

immediately to one's authorities. If it should happen that those authorities recommend the new suggestion, well and good, at least for one's relations with the original proposer. Should it happen, on the other hand, that one's authorities frown on the new notion, and if the proposer of the notion, having already committed himself to it, chooses to take issue with the authorities cited, recommending, instead, authorities of his own, then confusion necessarily ensues. One's options are now limited either to remaining confused or to withdrawing behind one's own inadequate authorities, and starting a shouting match. In either event, the body of Christ is not edified. Neither is one freed, for all one's bluster, from the pains of doubt and fear that the other might, in the end, be right.[17]

Comes the rub – and I speak now no longer as an uncommitted onlooker, but as a participating interpreter of the Word, attempting to make my own voice heard above the babble: that doubt and fear, which lingers on after the noise dies away, is the first unmistakable sign that all is, in fact, not right with God. Thus, the man and the woman quaked when God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening. Insufficient authorities reveal fully their insufficiency precisely at this point, that they cannot assure one, **beyond question**, of the forgiveness of sins. By thus leaving the door open, however slightly, to doubt and uncertainty with regard to God's gracious intentions, they render it impossible to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind"; and they thereby provoke that defensive posture, from which one is unable to "love your neighbour as yourself". Thus, they leave the confused and terrified conscience justly terrified, and the self-righteous prig justly condemned for his self-righteousness.

And so the crisis of authority in Enga Lutheranism is, indeed, a crisis worthy of the name, not only because it renders chaotic relations between persons and groups within the church, but, above all, because it reintroduces chaos into the relations between all involved and the very God whom all claim to profess, and whose will they seek to discern and obey. That large numbers of those involved do not recognise the chaos at this utterly significant point – and I speak here not of the consciously-doubtful and seeking, but of those hunkered behind the barricades of their arbitrary authorities – is no argument against its presence. The

Word given the theologian to explicate is prophetic, as well as apostolic. It is a Word about a God who reveals His wrath before He shows His grace, a God who refuses, with adamancy, to be had by human beings on any terms other than those which He, in His mercy, has chosen to set forth. His insistence is that He be looked to, and depended on, because of who He is, not because of what anybody or anything else might happen to be – whether bishop or missionary, experience or intuition, presumed Spirit or righteous behaviour. In a situation, such as that which pertains to the Gutnius Lutheran church, the theologian's first task is to make this obvious: to break down the barricades of the insufficient authorities, and to drive those behind them into the horror of no-man's land, where there are no safe and handy rules, no false assurances, behind which to cower; where all can be rendered equally dazed and uncertain, and all can be driven to ask again the agonised question of the Philippian jailer: "What must I do to be saved?"

And what then? Then, let it be that all are reminded of that sole verity, alluded to earlier, which all have always held in common amid and, despite their bloodiness, over against each other: namely the definitive Christian confession that Jesus is Lord. That this should have been missed, as indeed it has been, in the quest for sufficient authorities, speaks loudly of the extent to which that confession has yet to be understood by those who profess it. It does not say anything, on the other hand, of the tenacity and conviction with which the confession is made. But, it is at just this point of blind and thoughtless faith that the theologian's chief and proper work begins: which is, in the first place, to lay bare the content of the confession of Christ's Lordship in order that it might be explored and seen for what it truly is; and in the second place, to point its implications in the direction of the specific questions being asked, and the concerns being raised.[18]

As to the content of the confession, the following aspects of it require urgent clarification within the present context of Enga Lutheranism.

First, that "Jesus is Lord" is an epistemological statement (i.e., a statement about the way we know things). Jesus, Son of Mary, is none other than the Lord Christ, Son of God. Omega, whom we hope to

behold, is also Alpha, the point at which our beholding begins. Less cryptically: the **one sure and unmistakable revelation** by God of His good and gracious will toward us is the historical career of Jesus of Nazareth. What was said, and happened there, in Palestine takes precedence over all else in determining what God now thinks of us. All other epistemological authorities are authoritative only because of, or to the extent of, their relation to Him. "In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers through the prophets; but now in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son". And again: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have beheld His glory, full of grace and truth".

In the second place: the confession "Jesus is Lord" is a soteriological statement. Jesus is Lord because He is Saviour. It is because of His exclusive possession of salvific power that we look to Him. He alone has earned, through His thoroughly innocent death, "the authority on earth to forgive sins". All other salvific authorities, e.g., word, sacraments, and church, are, in fact, salvific only by virtue of their relation to Him. He alone is the certain demonstration and authentication of God's love for us.

In the third place: the confession "Jesus is Lord" is an eschatological statement. It is He and no other who awaits us at the close of the ages, and it is His Holy Spirit who now seeks to lead us there. He is the one who will separate the sheep from the goats, and it is on the basis of His existing relationship to us that such separation will take place. He who has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil for our sakes, and who now claims us as His own will "neither leave nor forsake us" until that triumph is complete, and we "behold Him face to face". He is our Lord, because He is our Righteousness, the sole sufficient ground upon which we can hope to stand with utter confidence before the unveiled glory of God.

So much for a brief review of the content of the confession. Without presuming to be exhaustive, allow me, again briefly, to sketch the implications, which the confession has for some of the pressing and practical questions being asked in the Gutnius Lutheran church.

First, with respect to matter epistemological:

The authority of holy scripture derives from the unique prophetic, and apostolic, witness it bears to Christ, who, in His person, is the authoritative revelation of God. "Search the scriptures, for these are they which testify of Him". Scripture, therefore, is always to be read with reference to its Christological centre. Mere bandying of Bible passages, without such reference, is blather, and not to be trusted.

Creeds and confessions have their proper role, having grown out of the church's historical efforts to identify clearly that Christological heart of holy scripture. Faith, which shuns doctrine in favour of ephemeral "spirit", is ungrounded and utterly foolish.

The authority of the Holy Spirit is the authority of Christ, whose Spirit this is. It is to the authoritative Forgiver of Sins that the Spirit leads. Promptings in directions other than Christ proceed from spirits other than His, for, apart from Christ, no one can hope to stand in the presence of the Father. God is Trinity, not tri-deity.

If popes and councils can err,[19] so can bishops and missionaries. What is to be trusted about them is not their persons but their words about the Word enfleshed. If such words are lacking, then shun or replace them. If those words are there, then lend them your ears.

"Jews demand signs, and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified"; and again, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Demands for experienced evidences of God's power and favour are, at root, unfaithful. The sign already given in Christ cannot be surpassed. Neither can it be negated. **Satis est**. So let it suffice.

Leaving behind a pile of unfinished business, we move on to the consideration of some matters soteriological (i.e., to do with salvation):

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." What makes for hope and salvation is not our actions toward God, to which He

must respond, but rather His action toward us in Christ, which calls forth a response from us.

That called-for response is nothing other than faith, which is to say, confidence that what God so wildly and impossibly says of us in Christ is, in fact, true. Moreover, in the matter of seeing before us the visage of a gracious, as opposed to a wrathful, God, faith is or it isn't. There are no quantitative or qualitative measures that must first be met. For "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us".

To continue without reference to what God has already done in Christ, in attempts to curry His grace and favour, and demonstrate our own merited worthiness before Him, is blasphemy.

On the other hand, good trees bear good fruit, bad trees bear bad, and it is "by their fruits that you will know them". Confidence in the graciousness of God has immediate and practical consequences. Where there are no consequences; there is clearly no confidence.

God's choice of incarnation, as the mode for the performance of His greatest work, suggests that the ordinary and the day-to-day, as opposed to the extraordinary and the out-of-this-world, is likely to be the preferred realm of His continued salvific activity among us. Water, bread, and wine, and the droning voices of clay-feeted preachers, are more deserving of confidence than the resplendent flashiness of the wonder-workers – especially since the promises of Christ are clearly attached to the former.

"For freedom Christ has set you free. Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." By the same token, do not burden others with demands that they conform in every jot and tittle of practice with you. Liberated life in the Spirit of Christ is life freed from an unrelenting pressure to conform, for comfort's sake, to human demands. It does entail conformity to the Christ, who alone is our Comfort, in our obedience to His rule of love and service. But such conformity is gracious and bestowed fruit, not relentless pre-condition.

On, again too quickly, to matters eschatological (i.e., to do with the last things):

"Fear not, little flock; it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." Again, "if anyone is in Christ he **is** a new creation. The old has passed away, the new **has** come." He, on whom Christ has laid His claim, may hold his head high with the impunity of unquestionable authority. Fear mongers are to be laughed at.

Baptism is the first specific promise, and holy communion the "foretaste" of the feast to come. He who has once met us, and made us His own, is thus ever with us, to the close of the age.

The Revelation of John is read in the light of the Gospel of John, not the other way around. Beast or Antichrist, it matters not. For "He has subjected all things to Himself". "The Lamb, who was slain, has begun His reign", which is a reign without ending. Alleluia.

The future's certain promise is the gift, in the present, of the Spirit, whose chief gift to us all is faith in the Christ, through whom we can call God "Abba", and heaven our home (Gal 4:6, 1 Pet 1:4). Beyond this, the Spirit's gifts are manifold, bestowed on each, not for the arousement of rivalry and jealousy, but for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). The common good is this that the Body is built up **in Christ**. That which so strengthens and confirms the Body is of the Spirit, and a reliable sign of the things to come. That which works against the Body is instinctively to be shunned.

But enough for now. My purpose in all this, has been to suggest that when Christian religious movements collide, the focus of the theological task is the addressing of the confusion and pain which results; that a likely well-spring of confusion and pain in such circumstances is a reliance by the several parties involved on inadequate authorities; that in his calling, as a spokesman of Almighty God, the theologian's first duty is to further the confusion by calling the authorities into question, especially insofar as those authorities provoke the wrath of God by obscuring the gospel of Christ; that it is, then, that same gospel as the sole sufficient authority to which the theologian must

point; and that, in this pointing, his responsibility is to elucidate the significance of that gospel for the specific questions being asked in the struggle at hand. More than that, the theologian cannot do. The Law, having been preached, and the gospel announced, the ball passes into the court of that Spirit who blows where He wills, raising harvests of His own size, and choosing, in the hearts of men and women, whose internal appropriation, interpretation, and application of that Word of Christ is their own proper task in the theological realm.

By way of postscript, a confession: even as I pen these last lines, it all sounds a trifle shop-worn, almost trite, no doubt because none of it is particularly fresh and new after several years of teaching and preaching on just these themes. Familiarity does breed contempt. Breath-taking caverns of meaning, to which words like sin, forgiveness, gospel, and faith are but the entering doors, are ever more easily passed by and ignored, for the simple reason that the doors themselves have taken on a tawdry and weather-beaten appearance. I hear the word "gospel", and it – the word itself – no longer invites me. It leaps from the mouth too glibly, and strikes the ear with too tired a ring. The temptation is to seek intellectual adventure, and emotional satisfaction, elsewhere.

Having so identified the log in my own eye, it were better, perhaps, that I refrain from asking the question, whether anyone else here present is also weary of old words, and on the verge of yawning over what has seemed to be little more than a re-hashing of a received tradition, and a Western tradition at that. I ask anyway. For it strikes me that, at this time of high enthusiasm for the cause of a uniquely Melanesian theology, the matter needs to be raised among us – and spoken to more clearly than it has been thus far – what the relationship, if any, is, and ought to be, between theological endeavour in today's Melanesia, and the tradition of theological endeavour in other places, and at other times within which each of us stands. More specifically: in the turn toward a Melanesian theology, from what do we turn away? Is the immediate answer here is, as I would expect it to be, "Western theology", then the next question is, to what does that wretchedly nebulous expression refer? If it is theology of the West, or theology from the West – or both? Is it Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or Pentecostal, of the 13th, 16th, 19th, or 20th centuries, or some or all of

the above? Does "Western theology", in the pejorative sense of that which is inapplicable to Melanesians, denote only that theological talk, which is ridden with the cultural conceits and idiosyncrasies of the West? Or does it embrace also the apostolic **regula fidei** of 1 Cor 15:1ff, which Western missionaries brought to these shores – the **Krais Wanpela Tasol,** to which Western theologians, at their best, have powerfully attested, and, at their worst, have hideously obscured?

But the crucial nature of this distinction is, I trust, apparent. Equally apparent, should be the crucial importance of making that distinction constantly, and with great care. For if our weariness with old words should tempt us to turn away not only from that which is truly peculiar to the West but also from that which God in Christ addresses to all people and cultures of all times (and which, by the way, continues to be as foreign in origin, and culturally offensive to the West, as it is to Melanesia); and if our otherwise laudable concern for distinctly Melanesian words should lead us to pursue the novel idea, the fresh formulation, the culturally-apt approach, and this for its own sake, without first and final reference to the Lord Christ, whose authority as Alpha and Omega encompasses also our endeavours as theologians in this place, then we will have succumbed to the very ill which has been the focus of the foregoing discussion. We will have forsaken the sufficiently authoritative Word of Christ for inadequate words and authorities of our own choosing, and we will have laid ourselves open to the hellish consequences of so doing.

Not the least of these consequences, by the way, is that we will have failed utterly in the task we are about, which is to respond to the cry of Melanesians – of people, like the **lapun mamas**, the young mothers, the questing teenagers, the bewildered elders, the floundering evangelists, who make up the Lutheran congregations of the Enga Province – who, in these uncertain and confusing times, are thirsting, above all, for a faith which is vital and secure. But such a faith is to be found only within the tradition of the Word of God Made Flesh, at the spring of **solus Christus**. As He Himself once put it to a woman by a well in Samaria, only there will the thirst of the thirsty be slaked for good.

And so the cure for our weariness with old words is not to be found in turning away from them. Quite the contrary. It is to be found by turning toward them, by grappling with, and passing through, them again to come face to face with Him, who, through those words, seeks still to root Himself also in us. "Come to Me all you who are weary – all you bored and jaundiced theologians, as well – and **I** will give you rest." Come to think of it, I got it wrong several pages ago, when I said that the theologian's first task is to lay open the gospel for others. Surely his first, and highest, task is to grasp the gospel for himself. His fundamental calling is not to speak, but to shut his mouth, to step down for a moment from the ranks of the teachers, and to take his place among the hearers again. There let him shuck the garb of his objectivity, and stand naked once more before the Word of God, where he too can be savaged by wrath, and solaced by grace; where he also can be killed in his conceits, and resurrected in the Spirit of holy joy and delight. Let him take his first stand before the cross of Christ, there to be shown the cross, which is his to bear, and given the wherewithal to bear it gladly. For the sake of the Christ and His people, whom we would serve, God grant as much to each of us.

FOOTNOTES

1. How times have changed from the not-so-distant days when husbands and wives, to say nothing of unmarried young people, were not to be caught dead sharing sleeping quarters.

2. For a description of what he could well have been referring to with his comment on joy (Pidgin: **amamas**), see Wendy Flannery, "Mediation of the Sacred", **Point No. 4: Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (3)** (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984), pp.128ff.

3. This is a generous translation of a frequently-heard phrase: **i no fit long lo bilong Gutnius Luteran Sios**.

4. Several years earlier, the wife had joined a grou, which had broken away from the local Lutheran congregation – of which the husband was still a member – and had accepted re-baptism. The group continues to put heavy emphasis on frequent communal activities, to which members contribute time as well as money and produce.

5. For a description of what the traditional **kumanda** entailed, see M. J. Meggitt, **The Lineage System of the Mae-Enga of New Guinea** (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp.181ff. These days, it is impossible to find a consensus, particularly among younger adults, on what exactly participation in **kumanda** involves, and whether or not it requires the compromising of Christian principles. Some would insist that it absolutely does not. Others are not nearly so certain.

6. I hesitated to include the Apostolic Church in these ranks, precisely because its level of competitive activity has been so significantly lower than that of, say, the Seventh-day Adventists. Their presence on the list is due to two things: first, because of the theological challenge, which their teaching on, and practice of, baptism pose to Lutheran congregations; and also because there has, in recent years, been an increase of movement on their part into previously all-Lutheran areas.

7. At times, the reaction by the established Lutheran congregation to the incursion of one of these groups had bordered on violence. In 1984, several students told me of an attempt by an Anabaptist group to establish themselves in the students' home area. On the day appointed for the first re-baptism ceremony, the local Lutheran circuit and congregational leaders descended on the Anabaptists assembly and began a yelling match, which culminated in the Anabaptists being rolled around in the mud by their Lutheran assailants amid shouts that "if you want to be re-baptised, then this is the way to do it". Those telling the story, did so with relish and evident approval. Of particular enjoyment to the listeners, was the claim that one or two expatriate Anabaptist missionaries were among those given the "mud treatment".

8. Two incessantly-asked questions: "Who is the beast of Rev 13:18, whose designation is 666?" and "Will the world end in the year 2,000?"

9. See the reference to this group in Wendy Flannery, op. cit., p. 152. Not having inquired for some time, I do not know whether the name cited by Flannery, **Sios bilong Jisas Krais Wok Aposel**, continues to be the official designation of the group.

10. Another group, established some five or six years ago in the Wapenamanda area, maintained ties for quite some time with an expatriate body, by whom it was supplied for a year or so with a missionary. Last I heard (though unreliably), the group had declared its independence, and sent its missionary on his way; in which case, it would probably fit well into this second stream described here.

11. My use here of the term "charismatic", follows the definition by John Barr in "The Age of the Spirit", **Point No. 4: Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (3)** (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1984), pp. 165 ff.

12. Described by Gary Teske, "The Holy Spirit Movement Among Enga Lutherans (Kandep)", and Tony Krol and Simon Es, "Enga Catholics and the Holy Spirit Movement" in **Point No. 3: Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (2)** (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1983).

13. Indeed, at the service, in which I first witnessed the performance of the rite, a separate rite of confirmation was conducted for young people preparing to make their first communion. Confirmation and first communion have been so associated with the Lutheran tradition.

14. In this regard, I recall a recent visit to Timothy Seminary of a contingent of staff and students from Lutheran Highlands Seminary, Mt Hagen, during which the present topic was discussed. In preparation for this meeting, students and teachers at Timothy Seminary prepared a list of practices associated with new movements in the Enga Province, and organised this according to the categories of good, indifferent, and unacceptable. The most striking feature of the finished product was the absence of any reference to, let alone discussion of, the criteria upon which the various items on the list had been assigned to one or the other of the categories.

15. Those schooled in the ways of Luther's Small Catechism will recognise this as a violation of the eighth commandment, which requires us to "put the best construction on everything". By no means unique to the present situation in the Enga Province, this malady, nonetheless, seems to be more openly pronounced there than in other places and cultures of my experience.

16. Dr Willard Burce, of Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, enjoys a near-legendary reputation in certain areas of the province, where he began working as an evangelist missionary in 1948. In 1982, he was requested to make a tour of congregations, which had been touched by a growing wave of charismatic activity, many of them in the area where he had originally worked, to address the subject of charismatic renewal. It was instructive to observe how even he, for all the authority he carries, was subjected to constant challenge during his tour.

17. Reflected in the all-too-frequent parting shot of Enga religious debate: "We'll see who's right on the Last Day".

18. Cf. Hermann Sasse, **We Confess Jesus Christ** (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), p. 9.

19. Luther's famous statement at the Diet of Worms in 1521, made in connection with his own quest for the Sufficient Authority.

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, AND THE SEARCH FOR A MELANESIAN SPIRITUALITY

Paul Richardson

In his book, **We Drink from Our Own Wells,** Gustavo Gutierrez makes some comments on the spiritual experience of Christians in South America, which will find a sympathetic response in other parts of the world. Gutierrez refers to a split between the daily lives of most Christians, and the spiritual discipline the church commends to them. Religious life, as the church presents it, is geared to minorities, to people who belong to privileged cultural and social elites. The stress of many spiritual guides is on the interior life of the individual, who is called on to pursue perfection, with little regard for what goes on in the world. This, in Gutierrez' opinion, is not a way of spiritual growth, which can comment itself to the poor, oppressed and dispossessed masses of Latin America.[1]

Of course, the situation in Papua New Guinea is different from the one that confronts Gustavo Gutierrez. The extremes of wealth and poverty that can be found in Peru or Chile do not yet exist in our country. But many priests and church workers would testify to some kind of gap between the official spirituality of the church and the experience of the people. To a considerable degree, this gap is due to cultural factors: our written liturgies (often in a foreign language), our discipline of prayer and worship, our approach to meditation, are all too Western. Students have often told me that, while people in the villages can feel the presence of the ancestors, the Christian God often seems far away from them, a remote being who can be known by faith, or with the help of reason, but who rarely shows His power in the daily events of life. "Power" is a key word. Melanesians want a God who shows His power, who gives people signs of His presence, and becomes part of their experience. They do not want a God who serves as the source of morality, or as the ultimate explanation of the universe. They want a God they can meet with in their own lives, who answers their prayers, and reaches out to them, and blesses them.

To some observers, the growth of Pentecostalism in Papua New Guinea over the past few years is the answer to this need. Reading the four volumes of papers and reports on new religious movements, published by the Melanesian Institute,[2] one comes across numerous remarks to the effect that now, at last people, have seen the power of the gospel. John Barr sums up these impressions in his introduction to volume two:

> It is overwhelmingly clear to many participants that the Holy Spirit is theirs in a truly indigenous sense. The coming of the Holy Spirit marks the end of "foreign" Christianity, and a chance to encounter faith in a spontaneous manner, with "power" – to encounter spiritual realms with confidence and authority.[3]

Other contributors to the four volumes voice reservations. Both Sister Wendy Flannery and the Revd Gary Teske are, on the whole, enthusiastic, but they express some hesitations. Flannery wonders whether some of the practices she has observed are just a substitute for similar practices carried out in traditional religion.[4] Teske reflects on the Christian understanding of "power", as we find it in St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and compares this with the expectation that religion must, somehow, commend itself by miraculous cures, or other striking phenomena.[5]

We have a problem here, which has troubled missionaries down from St Paul's time to the present: how do we distinguish between religious practices which are truly indigenous expressions of the gospel, and those which represent a continuation of pagan beliefs in a thin Christian disguise? Or, to use the terminology made popular by Dr Charles Kraft, do followers of the new religious movements use forms that are at least partly traditional to convey meanings that are essentially Christian, or do these traditional forms really distort the gospel, and retain their own meaning?

There is no simple answer to this question. In this paper, I would like to draw attention to four areas where, it seems to me, there is reason to question the teaching and practices of the new religious movements. The points to be discussed do not, by themselves, constitute grounds for

the rejection of such movements; they are offered merely as criticisms, which ought to be weighed when a final balance is made. Other commentators have drawn attention to the benefits Pentecostal revivalism has brought to the churches in Papua New Guinea. I would like to try my hand, not at being a judge who is competent to pass final sentence, but rather at making out a case for the prosecution. In other words, I am playing the devil's advocate.

1. A number of observers have pointed to the presence among adherents of the new movements of attitudes normally associated with cargo cults. Groups have often sprung up in areas of economic deprivation, where the people feel cheated of the fruits of development. The Bilip Grup, for example, is active in the Garaina area of the Morobe Province, where an important tea project closed in 1970, because it was no longer financially viable. Transport problems have made the substitution of other cash crops difficult. Sr Wendy Flannery tells us there is a lack of confidence in government officials, and a general reluctance to maintain roads or pay taxes. The emphasis is on **wok bilip,** and she reports people as saying **"long lotu tasol ol samting i kamap"** (prayer alone is the answer to development).[6] Before Flannery's visit, there had been definite signs of cargo activity. In 1979, people had cleared an abandoned Summer Institute of Linguistics airstrip, and lined up waiting for cargo to arrive. Garden work had stopped.

There is an interesting parallel with the situation just across the border in the Oro Province. There, the Christian Revival Crusade is active in an area which has experienced little economic development, partly because of transport problems. The Anglican church once ran a small boat along the coast, and bought copra from the people, but this stopped in the mid-1970s. An attempt to set up a development association, known as KOMGE, collapsed, leading to a good deal of frustration. Today, many of the villages, which supported Komge, are centres of CRC activity, and a number of people who were prominent in Komge are leaders in the CRC church.

The Revd Gary Teske refers to two cases of activity with cargo cult overtones in the revival in the Enga Province, but says that they died out quickly, and he knows of no other. Clearly, it would be wrong to

exaggerate the influence of cargo ideas in the new movements, but there are some signs of it. Of course, the fact that a revival is taking place in an area of economic deprivation does not mean that it is like a cargo cult. A religious movement can represent a protest against economic or social inequality without, in any way, showing signs of cargo cult influence. There is evidence that young people and women have been especially attracted to Pentecostal movements, and seen in them a way to improve their status, and play a bigger part in church life than was possible before.

On the other hand, we should not ignore the fact that popular expectations of the imminent return of Christ, which are found in most Pentecostal circles, can be an encouragement to the growth of the kind of hope for the future seen in cargo cults – a factor which is acknowledged by Flannery, and seen to be significant in the case of the **Bilip Grup**.

2. In a number of cases, there are reports of the Holy Spirit turning the followers of the new movements into diviners, and of practices being carried out under the Spirit's influence, which are similar to traditional methods of detecting wrong-doers. Of interest in this respect, are the "dogs" found among revivalist Baptists in the Enga and Western Highlands Provinces. A group of people, called "dogs", seek out sinners, and encourage them to confess, sometimes with the help of a stick, which points to the guilty party.[7] Among Lutherans involved in the revival movement in Enga, there are reports of prophets having visions, in which they see the sins and wrongs other people have committed. Women, who are believed to have practised as **sanguma meri** (sorcerers), have been taken to court on this kind of evidence.[8] Prophets claim to be able to detect wrong-doers at worship, and to be able to tell sick people whether or not they will die. Sister Wendy Flannery describes spirit-empowered diviners in Garaina, who are known as "scientists", and are believed to be able to locate medicinal substances in trees, or copper, or gold, in the earth.[9] Teske reports from Kandep that a good number of visions he heard reported had to do with identifying sorcerers.[10]

Related to this is the problem of the use of dreams by those involved in the new movements. Dreams have always been regarded as

a source of revelation in Melanesia, and there are moving accounts of people in the Enga being converted to Christ in this way. Back in 1970, in an account of a cult in the Highlands, Kenneth B. Osborne reported that the cult leader was so worried about the possible misuse of dreams that he drew up a list of three tests to be applied to verify the authenticity of dreams.[11] However, such care is not always exercised in revival movements. Talking about a movement at Ialibu, in the Southern Highlands, Roger White mentions one dream, in which a young man saw two catechists of the area drunk and fighting. Not surprisingly, this caused a stir when it was reported to a prayer group.[12]

3. Reports of new religious movements in Papua New Guinea often emphasise outbursts of ecstatic phenomena, such as convulsive shaking (**skin guria**), or speaking in tongues. Many of these practices, which are today interpreted as decisive evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, were common in traditional religion. In the 1940s, in the Enga Province, for example, a religious movement took place, in which people would shake as they faced the sun. F. E. Williams reported ecstatic shaking (known as **jipari**) among the followers of the taro cult in the Oro Province.[13] When **jipari** took place, people believed that they were possessed by the spirits of the ancestors. On a visit to Ioma, in the area where the CRC is very active, I asked an old man, who was a member of a CRC congregation, if the practices, common in his church today, were similar to the **jipari** of the taro cult. He told me that it was similar, but that, whereas before people were thinking about the ancestors, now they were possessed by the Holy Spirit.

This brings us back to the problem of deciding whether traditional religious forms, which have surfaced again in the new movements, have now acquired a Christian meaning, or whether they represent a continuation of pre-Christian ways of thinking.

A Westerner ought to hesitate before passing judgment, but, perhaps, I can offer some observations. Reading accounts of the revival movement in Papua New Guinea, it is apparent that the Holy Spirit is often seen, not as a person of the Godhead, but as a kind of impersonal power that can be possessed for a time, but also can be lost. Amos Aenyo, from Kandep, tells us that the Holy Spirit can leave people, and

warns that this happens if water is thrown over a sleeping man, if someone speaks loudly when the spirit is entering a man, if a man, possessed by the spirit, is rubbed with a special leaf that causes swelling, or if someone, who has the spirit, carries heavy loads, or does heavy duties.[14] Clearly, behind this way of thinking, lies the idea that the spirit is some kind of power, whose presence can be gained or lost, depending on the observance of certain taboos. This is quite different from the Christian belief that the Holy Spirit is a Person of the Blessed Trinity, who dwells permanently with us to enable us to respond to Christ, and to be remade in the image of Christ. Simeon Namunu sees the issue, when he refers to the problems that can arise when Melanesians substitute the Holy Spirit for traditional spirits, and then continue to interpret the Holy Spirit from within the old framework of beliefs. So, for example, the Holy Spirit is seen as having a place in a hierarchy of spirits that may have existed in traditional religion, and there may be the belief that He is used by God to do both good and evil. People seek to regulate the activity of the Holy Spirit by the performance of ritual, which is regarded as more important than moral behaviour.[15]

4. Time and again, in reading reports of new religious movements, one discovers that they were welcomed by the people, because they, at last, gave evidence that the gospel has power. Melanesians expect spiritual beings to show their power in some kind of way – by granting a good harvest, for example, or by miraculous cures. People involved in the new movements often say that now they know the gospel has power. As they phrase it, **samting tru i kamap.** They feel joy in their hearts, and they know that God is for real. Christianity, they claim, has come alive in their own experience; they do not have to accept it on the word of some expatriate missionary. This is the greatest strength of the Pentecostal revival in Papua New Guinea, and an important reason for claiming that it represents a step forward towards the indigenisation of Christianity. T. Wayne Dye has recently devoted two articles in **Catalyst** to the theology of power.[16] He finds ample evidence from the New Testament that we should expect that signs of power will accompany the preaching of the gospel. When Paul and the other early Christians proclaimed the good news, their message was authenticated by the defeat of evil spirits, and by miraculous cures. Acts 5:15 tells us that people waited in the streets so that Peter's shadow would pass over

them as he walked by, and they would be healed. Paul reminded the Corinthians, in 1 Cor 12:12, of the many miracles, signs, and wonders he had performed among them as an apostle. Any Melanesian theology, Dye argues, must take the question of power seriously. In doing so, it will both meet the concerns of Melanesians, and be faithful to the New Testament. Above all, a theology of power must not just be formulated: it must be exemplified in the lives of Christians. "The heart of any effective teaching about power will be the demonstration of God at work in and through Christians, to heal and strengthen, and show his greatness."[17]

I suspect that Gary Teske will have some reservations about Dye's approach. He pinpoints what he calls the "effective power criterion", which is often used in Papua New Guinea to decide on the value of a particular church, or method of worship.[18] In the light of this, he wonders what the followers of the new movements are prepared to make of the famous passage in 1 Cor 1:22-23, where Paul condemns both the Greeks, and their desire for wisdom, and the Jews, with their hunger for miracles.

He makes this telling observation:

> Our friends in the new religious movements need to look at themselves, and judge whether they are exploiting a timely appetite for miraculous and experiential power to put together an exciting movement, and, if in the process, they are missing the real uniqueness and ageless significance of the miracle of Jonah.[19]

Passages in the New Testament can be found to support the views of Dye, but a number of other passages can be quoted to show that Jesus Himself was wary about using miraculous signs of power to support His message. In the quotation, to which Teske alludes, Christ's response to a request for a miracle is reported by Matthew as not being very sympathetic towards those who hunger for such signs; "An evil generation looks for a sign. The only sign you will be given will be the sign of Jonah" (Mt 12:39).

According to Luke 10:19-20, Jesus promised the 70 that they would be given authority to perform numerous acts of power, but then He added: "Nonetheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." To those who had faith, the miracles were truly signs of God's power, but Jesus must have known that there were miracle workers alive in His time who claimed greater powers than He did, and He never used his miracles to convert unbelievers to His side.

In the end, as on so many occasions, when scripture appears to point in two directions, we have to see how the Holy Spirit has led the church to interpret the matter. In the history of the church, miracles, and similar spectacular signs, have been valued as evidence of the truth of the gospel, but the greatest sign has always been the witness of the martyrs. It is in their lives, above all, that we see the gospel has power. In them, we see the same self-sacrificing love we see in the death of Christ. Next to the martyrs, we put the saints, men and women, whose lives were often accompanied by miracles, but who are chiefly memorable for the sanctity and holiness that they displayed.

CONCLUSION

On the evidence that has so far been gathered, the new religious movements we are seeing in Melanesia at the moment, are neither heretical nor evil. They have done much to revive and quicken the church, and have brought many to a deeper faith in Christ. At the same time, there are aspects of them that seem to me to call for a further evaluation. Perhaps I could suggested that Melanesian theologians approach them in the kind of sympathetic, but critical, spirit that Kosuke Koyama brings to his analysis of the different religious of is native Japan in his book **Mt Fuji and Mt Sinai**. Putting my own criticism rather bluntly, I would say that I do not see in them enough of the Spirit of the cross, of the readiness to die with Christ that one finds in, say, the desert fathers, or the lives of Ini Kopuria or Peter To Rot. There is vitality, enthusiasm, commitment, excitement, power of a kind, but is there any sense of the paradox Paul grasped when he was led to tell the

Corinthians that it is when we are weak that we are strong? (2 Cor 12:10).

To return to the point with which I began, does all this mean that spirituality has to be world-denying, and monastic, and, therefore, remote from the lives of ordinary people? Am I, after all, advocating the kind of spirituality that Gustav Gutierrez condemns? I do not think so.

In the first place, we need to remember that the idea of self-sacrifice is not something foreign to the Melanesian experience. There are, for example, many stories of **dema** deities, who gave life to their own people by their own death. Many practices, traditional in initiation, are based on the belief that we must all pass through the discipline of suffering before we can be adult members of the community. Stories of culture heroes often involve the hero in a long journey, in which he faces severe testing, and overcomes obstacles before he gains his prize. Above all, the church in Melanesia has produced an abundance of Christians, who have faced hardship, even death, in the service of the gospel.

But, in the second place, we need to remember that Christianity does not teach a gospel of renunciation for its own sake: death is always the way to life; victory over selfishness and sin is the first necessary step on the road to resurrection.

As Melanesian society becomes more and more divided between the haves and the have-nots, and as Western materialism continues to spread under the cover of pidgin catchphrases like **pinisim laik,** or **Laik bilong wan wan**, so the relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ will become more and more apparent. Dedication to the cause of justice and peace, readiness to sacrifice oneself in the service of others, love for one's neighbour – these are the real signs of the power of the gospel. Gutierrez is right. We need a spirituality, which is relevant to the experience of Melanesians in their daily lives. But, let us make sure that it is a spirituality which encourages Melanesians to grow close to Him who came not to be served but to serve, and to give up His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:41).

FOOTNOTES

1. Gustavo Gutierrez, **We Drink From Our Own Wells**, pp.13-15.

2. **Religious Movements in Melanesia Today** Vol. 1, 2, and 3 – all published as issues of **Point**. See also **Religious Movements in Melanesia – A Selection of Case Studies** (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1983-1984).

3. **RM** Vol. 2, page vii.

4. **R M** Vol. 3, page 149.

5. **R M** Vol. 2, page 248.

6. Ibid., page 158.

7. Ibid., page 100.

8. Ibid., page 118.

9. Ibid., page 170. Flannery also gives an account of **wairles** men, who receive messages about God's will for people. Sometimes they receive these messages by standing beside a coconut tree and experiencing a pain in the ear. They are also able to discern messages from God in the activities of fireflies, blowflies, and flying foxes. There are also comments on the "scientists" on page 133 of **R M** Vol. 3.

10. **R M** Vol. 2, page 119.

11. **R M – Case Studies**, page 118.

12. Ibid., page 164.

13. F. E. Williams, **Orokaiva Magic** (London: Clarendon Press, 1969).

14. **R M** Vol. 2, page 133. An interesting link between traditional religion and modern Pentecostalism is provided by Teske, when he describes the practice in the Kandep area of "sunrise shaking". This occurs as the sun rises, when people shake and feel filled with the Spirit. It is similar to the dancing of the sun gazers in the Enga Province in the 1940s, and, according to Teske, there are a number of parallels between the two movements, Ibid., page 117.

15. **R M** Vol. 3, page 113.
16. **Catalyst** Vol. 14, No. 1 and No. 2 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984).

17. Ibid., Vol. 14, No. 2, page 174.

18. **R M** Vol. 2, page 247.

19. Ibid., page 248.

DISCUSSION

The Law and the Sects

Theodoor Aerts

1. THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS CONTROL BILL

Early in 1985, the minister of the newly-created Home Affairs Department,[1] Mr Kindi Lawi, told a press conference of his determination to place a ban on any new churches trying to enter the country. He promised to see this policy through, even if he had to recommend constitutional changes. There were, he said, enough missions already, resulting in the fact that "about 95 per cent of the population" knew about God and Christianity, while in recent years, instead of setting an example of unity, some missions were preaching against one another, thus causing confusion and instability.[2]

A perusal of the national paper, *Post-Courier*, shows clearly that the concern of Mr Lawi was nothing new. Already in 1980, Mr Tony Bais, then Chairman of the General Constitutional Commission, called for the establishment of a "Provincial Council of Churches" (1-5-1980), whereas other members of Parliament, such as Mr Steven Tago (Minister for Science, Culture, and Tourism), Mr Lenie Aparima (MP for Obura-Wonenara), and Mrs Waliyato Clowes (MP for Middle Fly), repeatedly blamed the missions for destroying the culture of the people. As a matter of fact, they made a distinction between "the bigger, older-established churches" and "a bunch of radical expatriates", commonly referred to as "the sects" (1-9 and 15-7-1980). Apart from some concrete incidents at that time, on New Britain, and in the Northern Province, and the rumblings caused by Mr Jacob Lemeki's *Employment of Non-Citizens Act*, and the issue of work permits for mission personnel (26-9-1980), there was also a public discussion, initiated by Colin De'ath, with responses by Archbishop Herman To Paivu, Fr Kevin Barr, and Revd Percy Chatterton (12-12-1980 till 6-2-1981), and some more academic publications by C. De'ath, E. Schieffelin, R. Robin, and S. Hecht, all rather critical of the missionary presence in Papua New Guinea. Over

the following years, more causes for concern, and also some voices in defence of the missions, were heard. The **New Apostolic church** in East Sepik was blamed for favouring "cargo cultism", but a Catholic priest, Fr Cherubim Dambui, took up its defence (9-7 and 24-12-1981). Churches were attacked for endorsing political candidates (17-12-1982), but people asked for "priests in politics", defending their right to vote for anyone who had the potential, and who did work for the people (27-7-1983). There were several cases of religious unrest, affecting, e.g., the **Melanesian Evangelical Alliance** in the Western Highlands (6-2-1983), the **One Way** people on the Duke of York Islands (3-10-1983), the **Seventh-day Adventists** in Morobe (21 and 24-10-1983), and the traditionalist and charismatic factions of one particular **United church** congregation on the Gazelle Peninsula (21-12-1982 till 27-6-1983). In addition, the mainline churches hit the headlines when the services of the police chaplains were terminated (13-8-1982), or when Catholics in New Britain (14-12-1982), and Lutherans in Morobe (22-8-1983), were taken to task over the payment of land tax.

The dissatisfaction of the politicians prompted the minister, the Hon. Steven Tago, to introduce a private member's bill, called the *Religious Movements (Control) Bill 1981*, but no effect was given to this initiative. Then, about two years later, the idea was taken up again, and the heads of churches, and some church-related institutions, were approached to supply relevant information concerning this proposed piece of legislation. The Bill aimed at curbing unwarranted intrusions "by new religious organisations", and "by old churches, in the areas of others". Therefore, from the start, not only new sects, but also the established churches, were to be put under Government scrutiny. The idea, floated by Mr Tony Bais in 1980 (1-5-1980), and realised in East New Britain's "Religious Affairs Committee" (15-11-1983), now became a national issue, and even obtained, it seems, the backing of W. Ataembo, General Secretary of the **Melanesian Council of Churches** (29-11-1983). There was, as yet, no definitive text of a Bill available, so the religious authorities could only react to the "considerations that (would) form the basis of the Bill", which was sent to them. The latter appeared in a letter from the National Parliament, dated September 8, 1983. Since this is the only document describing the proposed

legislation, it deserves to be quoted **in extenso**. The "considerations" include the following eight points:

1. Any foreigner entering Papua New Guinea, claiming to be a missionary, must show, in writing, an ecclesiastical authority from his or her home church. This is done through the Migration Office of the Foreign Affairs Department, which approves, in consultation with the Melanesian Council of Churches, such entry. Those who sneak in at the back door will be punished.

2. All churches and missions, already in Papua New Guinea, must give notice to each other if they are intending to go on missions, or to preach their doctrine in the other's jurisdiction. Failure to do this will be punishable.

3. If a member of a church, or part of a church or mission, is intending to invite certain missions to their area, village, homes, or institutions, they must seek permission in writing from their established mother church.

4. Any church that preaches against the good customs of Papua New Guinea will be restricted from spreading such practices, and if it is done by a foreigner, he will be deported by the State.

5. Any church that does not contribute much in the real and whole development of the nation, that is, in spiritual and material development of the people, and the nation, but chooses to preach and pray only, will be restricted from spreading.

6. If any quarrels occur between churches, the leaders involved must be informed first to settle it. If they are unable to do so, the Government will step in to act.

7. Church representatives, as appointed members in all levels of Governments, will be provided for in this Act. That is, to be involved in the political affairs of the country as well.

8. Any other views of a particular or general nature relevant to such a proposal.

Since 1983, occasional problems have cropped up; a church house fell victim to the "religious war" on the Gazelle Peninsula (20-3-1984), and a "Holy War" started brewing in the Capital to prevent the Latter-day Saints, or Mormon church from settling down in a traditional LMS-United church area (9-5 and 21-8-1985). On the other hand, church and government forces were joined, in particular, to tackle problems of law and order, youth, and employment. Two important meetings may be noted: the Goroka workshop of February, 1984, between representatives of the churches and the government, and the Port Moresby meeting between the Prime Minister and other ministers, together with the heads of churches, on March 7 of the same year. It would appear that right now people are working on appropriate policies, and on a redrafting of the Bill of 1981.

2. OLD AND NEW CATHOLIC POSITION

It is not my intention to sum up the positions taken by non-Catholic churches, and church-sponsored organisations, not even to outline the most-recent developments within the Catholic church (because there, too, the underlying problems are a constant concern, especially of the present Pope John Paul II). Let it suffice to present the common position of Catholics, as enshrined in the Vatican II **Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae),** promulgated by Pope Paul VI at the end of the Council. Even though this document is almost 20 years old, it is still very relevant, especially because it officially proposed, for the first time, an important shift in Catholic theology, which apparently has not yet reached the rank and file level of the faithful, even within the Catholic communion.

Let us admit from the start, that Catholics have a not very brilliant record in matters of religious freedom. It has been customary to blame them for using double standards: freedom for the church, when she is in the minority, and intolerance for others, when the church is in the majority (Rahner, 655). This kind of accusation has not escaped the perspicacity of the Council Fathers (Garrone), and it will serve our purpose to assert briefly the older Catholic view, because it sheds light on some of the spontaneous reactions in contemporary Melanesia.

In the Middle Ages, and generally before the 20th century, the "common good" was defined according to the needs of a homogeneous society, that is: Catholics tended to preserve and promote their traditional order of values, and had – at the time – not much concern for the individual's freedom in matters religious. This is exactly the stand taken by many Papua New Guineans today, who fight to preserve the order and peace of their own, tradition-bound societies. These views are not unlike the so-called "Roman theology". During the last century, however, with the intrusion of an "outside world", the homogeneity of the past collapsed. Experiences, especially in the USA, led to a new problem; not that of preserving the stability of ages past, but that of living together with people of other creeds and races. In addition, the moral sense also developed, giving more attention to each person's freedom. Hence, the emergence of new insights, also among Catholics. Since Papua New Guinea is now becoming an integrated and pluralistic society, the way followed by Catholics during Vatican II should, once again, prove most helpful in finding appropriate answers to the more-recent questions. For the battle at the Council was not won without difficulty. The draft text, **On the Church** (ch. 9), prepared before the Council, still reflected the long-standing ambiguity of the "Roman theology", but, in the end, a new vision prevailed, and the final **Declaration** was accepted with a remarkable unanimity (2308 for; 70 against; 8 invalid).

In sum: before the Council, there were those who stood by the philosophical principle that "Only the truth has rights; error has none whatsoever". This principle does rely on the tradition of Pope Gregory XVI (+1846), Pius IX (+1878), and Leo XIII (+1903), who were most suspicious of the forces of democracy, which they considered as anti-religious or, at best, as favouring religious indifference, and degrading

religious beliefs and expressions to mere private concerns. After these Roman pontiffs, with the more-recent Pius XI (1922-1939), and leading up to the innovative John XXIII (1958-1963), the tide turned.

Of special importance is Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter **Pacem in Terris**, written some four years after taking office, and only four months before the first Session of Vatican II ended. It greatly influenced the Council's **Declaration on Religious Freedom**.[3] The initial draft of the new text was presented at the second Session as part of the **Decree on Ecumenism** (ch. 5). Later it became a separate **Declaration**, appended to the same **Decree**.

During the third Session, it assumed independent status, and saw, all in all, five corrected versions in print. One of its main architects was the American Jesuit, Fr John Courtney Murray. It should be added, though, that the document is not a solitary bird among the 16 papers of the Council. Other relevant materials can be found in the decrees or declarations on Ecumenism **(Unitatis Redintegratio)** (21-11-1964), on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions **(Nostra Aetate)** (28-10-1965), but especially in those on the Mission Activity of the Church **(Ad Gentes),** and on the Church in the Modern World **(Gaudium et Spes),** both promulgated on the eve of the closing day of Vatican II (7-12-1965).

As indicated, **Dignitatis Humanae** was one of the most-controversial documents of the whole Council, because it broke new ground. And the new ground was not exactly the idea of religious freedom, but the issue of development of doctrine, which lay continuously below the surface of all the Council debates (Murray, 673). In addition, this document was the only one that addressed itself to Christians and non-Christians, both religious believers and atheists. Cardinal Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago, said at the time: "The importance of this declaration is so far-reaching that if the Council were not to approve it, nothing else which it might do would satisfy the expectations of men" (for summary and commentary see Appendix).

In professing the principle of religious freedom, the Catholic church was surely not breaking new ground, as far as world history is

concerned; still she has now taken a courageous stand which makes her, also in this area, "a light for the nations"! How does her teaching, based on reason and revelation, affect the recent political initiatives in the Independent Papua New Guinea?

3. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED BILL

The very fact of having a Bill introduced to control religious movements may cause some surprise, since freedom of religion is such a basic human right. So says the United Nations **Declaration of Human Rights** (1948), Art. 18:

> Everyone has a right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone, or in community with others, and in public and private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Papua New Guinea's membership of the United Nations would imply that the State subscribes to such a principle.

In addition, Papua New Guinea's own **Constitution** (1974) not only proclaims in its Preamble to uphold both "the worthy customs of its ancestors" and "the Christian principles", which have now become its own, but the **Constitution** is also most explicit regarding religious freedom (Art 45), and the related "basic rights" of the citizen (Art 5d).

However, as we stated from the start, there have been some recent experiences, which have caused concern: they manifested disregard for traditional ways, disturbed the peace in society, or appeared detrimental to the much-sought-after development of the nation.[4] The paradoxical result is that the proposed Bill ends up singling out the Christian churches for their undesirable practices, and intends to curtail their presumed rights.

Some said "There is too much freedom!" Hence the call for Government intervention, the imposition of a certain course of action,

and the threatening with punishments, and even deportation – an evolution which is not unlike the course of action observed in many other independent States, say, in Africa.[5]

One might wonder whether the proposer of the Bill did specifically intend any anti-Christian bias, or whether some, at least, of the Bill's implications flow from the fact that there is as yet no definitive text available, but only some "considerations", which are still unpolished by legal draftsmen. As things present themselves now, it is hard to make a fair comparison between the two documents under review. The Roman text is a carefully-worded declaration, which has gone through at least five successive stages, while the proposed Bill not only leaves much unsaid (cf. n. 8), but lacks a definite unifying vision. The first text tries to teach and defend human freedom in matters religious, as a right of the highest value, while the Papua New Guinea document belongs to the political arena, and sees, first and foremost, the need of limiting the exercise of certain rights, and of imposing certain obligations. Context, form, and aim of the texts are very different. Still, there is scope to make some general comments.

A. The need of a correct terminology

There is in the text, a lack of clear definition – a deficiency, which surely would call for the attention of the legal experts. As the "considerations" stand now, reference is made, e.g., to religious movements, to churches (old, home, and mother church), to missions and missionaries, and to (new) religious organisations. Although the term "Christian" is nowhere found, the reference to "established churches", and their (geographically-determined) "jurisdiction" can only refer to them. Hence the Bill is discriminatory to the Christian religion.

There is a need to consider in the Bill:

– the so-called mainline churches: Catholics, United church, Lutherans, Anglicans . . .

- other ecclesiastical communities (including the "Free Churches")

- non-church-tied missionaries (such as, perhaps, the SIL translators)

- non-Christian religious groups (e.g., Mormons, Baha'i, Shinto . . .)

- various traditional religions in Melanesia (from 5 up to 30 percent)

- new religious movements (including so called "cargo cults" . . .)

These, and other groups, each have a different self-understanding, and, therefore, a different attitude to God, the world, the environment, the common good, and development, human freedom, etc. The lawgiver has to be aware of the variety of problems likely to be caused by each group, and avoid lumping all religious groups together. It might be necessary to specify more, in detail, how religious bodies have to be "incorporated" in law, by an Act of Parliament, or under some particular Ordinance, and also to spell out what rights and duties, for persons and properties, would follow from that particular legal status.

Our first general remark regarding more-precise definitions has several very practical implications. One would be to further define what are, in law, the proper ways of operating, thus distinguishing between legitimate witnessing to the truth, and reprehensible "sheep-stealing", or "breaking and entering" in other churches' domains. As a matter of fact, some religious groups specialise in home visitations, which some non-adherents resent. Others aim at constituting a spiritual elite, and, therefore, regard churchgoers as their most-promising candidates. Others, again, do not object to having a "dual identity", which allows them to establish themselves first with academic or technical credentials, and manifest themselves later as missionaries and builders of new religious communities. Others slip easily into personal attacks, and defamation of competing missions and missionaries – which would

require that the law protects not only individual church workers, but also the moral entities, which they represent, and which sponsor their activities.

A further particular implication, concerns the definition of what are "the good customs of Papua New Guinea", or, vice versa, the bad customs, which so-called preachers of the gospel introduce into the country. Some contemporary complaints refer to traditional dress and dances (versus European clothes), abolition of crop-harvesting ceremonies, discriminatory attitudes against polygamists (no baptisms), or payment of high bride prices. Accusations of the past have included also the destruction of spirit houses, and of ancient artefacts, interference with initiation rites, etc., while at the time, civil legislation usually objected against infanticide, child marriage, tribal warfare, and disrespect for the dead. In general, however, the various administrators preferred a plurality of denominations, and occasional outbursts of sectarian strife, to the brutalities of tribal warfare, and the ambushing of the pre-Christian era.[6]

It is not easy to predict which other areas of conflict might one day oppose the government and the churches. Experiences from other countries go in the most-diverse directions, including, e.g., the introduction of Christian names (cf. Africa), the use of a particular language (cf. Poland), the observance of certain days (or hours of a day) for religious meetings, etc.

Hence, the question of what traditional elements of culture are good, and worth preserving, and, secondly, who is going to decide this? The problem is most intricate for a country of 700 languages and 1000 tribes.

B. More consideration for the real situation

The Bill seems to imply that Papua New Guinea is neatly divided among a limited number of "churches", but this was never the case in "historical times". With the arrival of foreign cultures, some bridges were established across tribal boundaries, and some divisions came about

within the same cultural groups. Whatever the British intended, with their "Spheres of Influence" (1890), or the Germans, with their "Mission Districts" (1891), or the Australians, with their similar attempts, when opening up hitherto restricted areas of the central Highlands (1957) did not work out successfully, because these States did not have the right to legislate in such a way, but infringed something more basic to human nature, and what is now called "religious freedom".[7] So, it is obvious, that to insist on present-day "jurisdictions", or definite areas reserved for particular "churches", is only heading for confusion and disaster.[8] As a matter of fact, some of the existing groups will split up naturally,[9] or also work towards a merger,[10] while there is always the possibility of individuals freely changing their allegiance (conversions).[11]

According to the Roman Declaration, the basis for religious freedom is not any subjectively-understood "freedom of conscience" ("I have the right to do what my conscience tells me to do"). This term seems to be avoided, because the declaration zeroes in on the "objective truth", which decides what is right and wrong (Murray, 679, n. 5). In this perspective, it is "right" to seek for the truth, and to live it, and man's dignity demands to be free from coercion in order to pursue this universally-human good.

C. Proper understanding of the role of the State

The proposed Bill is deficient, because its fundamental vision is too narrow. The State is not the giver of man's basic rights, nor the one who, say, through police measures, is to maintain some semblance of public order. The Roman Declaration here teaches that "the protection and promotion of the inviolable **rights** of man ranks among the essential **duties** of government" (n. 6)! In other words: rights come first on the side of the individual, and duties first on the side of the State. What a person's rights entail is spelled out in nn. 4-5 of the same Declaration: they are individual and communitarian, concern divine worship, and human organisation, cover instruction and organisation, training of staff and appointments, communication among the group, and with outsiders,[12] erecting buildings, and acquiring properties.[13] When all this is achieved, the **common welfare** of society is a reality. One cannot say:

the more laws and regulations, the better! Instead, the common good comes first! As a subsidiary principle, comes the justification of restrictions, and regulatory norms, so that the **public order** be safeguarded. Here again, the rights of others are primary, and the basis for obligations towards the other side. The Declaration says: "It is the special duty of government to provide (this) protection . . . against the possible abuses committed on pretext of freedom of religion" (n. 7). It is noteworthy that, in principle, any limitations of freedom could be self-imposed, and fundamentally based on the moral law ("how things should be"). Therefore, proof has to be provided that an abuse has taken place, and no government is entitled to determine arbitrarily what is punishable, and forbidden, or obligatory. Now, society is an order:

- of justice; hence the need of settling disputes (violated rights)
- of peace; hence the need of assuring public order
- of morality; hence the obligation to defend public morality.

As long as there is no sufficient proof given that a violation of any of these three accounts has occurred, there should be no limit whatsoever to the freedom of religion (Murray, 686, n. 20). But, as soon as sufficient evidence is provided, the law can step in and punish the offender.

It would appear that the concept of public order, in its threefold dimension, could well replace the unwieldy concept of the people's "good customs", referred to earlier, in order to achieve the objectives intended by the lawgiver.

4. FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON INDIVIDUAL POINTS

1. It is proposed that the Melanesian Council of Churches act as a clearance house for future missionaries. But this is beyond the nature of this free association of churches, which is rather comparable to a "secretariat", fostering such

services as the flow of information, providing a forum for inter-church discussions, and assisting in projects of mutual concern. Like, say, the Bible Society, it is not a kind of super-church, with a definite creed, its own ministers, and forms of worship, etc. As a matter of fact, the Melanesian Council of Churches, and similar councils of churches do not cover all "churches", but usually only the main Protestant denominations.[14] In Papua New Guinea, the Catholics happen to be full members, but there are many free churches, associated with the "Evangelical Alliance,"[15] which are not members, or with the National Council of Pentecostal churches, which are not members.[16] As to "newcomers", there is no information available yet which might contravene these. Are foreigners' own rights of religious freedom not a desirable objective. In fact, if Papua New Guinea is a democratic and a free country, it has to respect both the basic principle of natural justice (cf. PNG Constitution 59(2)), and also the rights of non-citizens. In addition, there are other "ecumenical" organisations (like the Melanesian Institute, or even the Religious Studies Department at the University), which might provide useful advice, but these, too, are private initiatives, and they, too, cannot bear the authority the Government wants to give them. Let it be noted, also, that it will be hard to police "freelance" and short-time "evangelists", who come and go, and cause a lot of turbulence, and are untraceable for the slow-moving arms of the law.

2. To impose obligatory notification to other churches denies the very principle of religious freedom, even for individual preachers, and for individual converts.[17] Again, the second "consideration" tries to establish (or presumes to exist) a clear religious geography of Papua New Guinea, which does not exist, especially in towns, training institutions, plantations, mining sites, etc. The implications of this disregard of reality are far-reaching, and affect constitutional rights, such as freedom of movement within

the country, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of the parents to educate their children, etc.

On the other hand, there is reason to condemn "sheep-stealing", and other unfair means of competition and "proselytism". God does not want forced converts (physically), but neither does He want tricked converts (morally). Hence, there is scope to spell out in detail what is fair and unfair competition (giving presents, spreading false information, attacking the good name of individuals and of "churches" as moral entities, etc.).

3. To impose obligatory notification on one's own church authorities is plain interference in church matters, and cannot be taken for granted, since it denies freedom of an individual to see and live the truth.

4. Consideration 4 has already been addressed when noting the need for "definition".[18]

5. The State is not the judge of what a person, or a group in society, considers as valid goals of action, as long as others' rights are not tampered with. Hence, it would seem that to foster religious values and insights is a worthwhile cause, and not only the things which produce economic profit. Again, some religious bodies might decide to focus their attention on personal moral problems, such as drinking and gambling, and issues of law and order, while other religious groups would show more interest in so-called macro-ethics, and issues which range from employment policies to international concerns of war and peace. As to the Catholic church, the opposition made here between evangelisation and development is a false dichotomy, since salvation is for the whole person, body and soul, and religious life can only flower where there is a decent living standard achieved. Catholics have no quarrel with the "integral human development" exalted by the Papua New Guinean

Constitution as the first "national goal and directive principle".

6. The modern state is wedded to the principle of the three arms of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. The text seems to imply that, without the provision of specific laws, the executive can step in (e.g., through police action). Instead, there should first be clear laws ensuring both rights and duties (common welfare; public order): only then might independent action be warranted. As to the right of the State to be the arbiter of religious truth, this is again overstepping the natural bounds of its competence, and smacks of totalitarianism.

7. It is not clear whether "church representatives" are, in the first place, "ministers of religion" for churches having such a category (by reason of ordination, or without it), or whether any church member may be intended. If the intention is to intervene in the formation, appointments, transfers, etc., of church ministers, or to burden them with public or civil duties (some of which they carry out already, e.g., in registering marriages), the proposed Bill would show an undue interference in religious matters. If the aim is only to make allowances for "priests in politics", the Catholic church, for one, would not object as a matter of principle, although she sees this task rather as an exception, left to the discretion of the local bishop, and ordinarily entrusted to the lay people.[19] If, finally, any church member is intended, one could concur with the reply from the Evangelical Alliance, and say that "the Christian churches are already being represented in all levels of government, and are fully involved in the political affairs of the country. This is through the elected Christian members of Parliament (National, and Provincial), and in key positions in the public service, etc. Thus, these people, through their God-given wisdom and ability as Christians (as the church), are contributing to the policy, planning and decision-making process of the nation."

GENERAL CONCLUSION

It is a fact that the proposed *Religious Movements (Control) Bill 1981* met a mixed reaction among the ten or so religious groupings, which were approached, and actually did air their views. In the opinion of A. Maniot, for the government, the most positive support originated from the United and Lutheran churches, and from the Melanesian Council of Churches (although a written position paper of the latter was never tabled). One could add to these three groups also the position taken by the Salvation Army, while opinions coming from the Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and from the Evangelical Alliance expressed objections of varying weight. As a matter of fact, peaceful coexistence of churches is not always achieved. The problems are not so much on the level of church leadership, but rather on the village level. One may also add that the daily newspapers tend to overplay the dissensions, when they use such loaded terms as "holy war", etc., which, in the Melanesian context, bear no comparison whatsoever with the manifestations of religious fanaticism elsewhere in the world.

Nowadays, in Papua New Guinea, a climate of goodwill is growing. Assisted by the government, a workshop was held with various church leaders in July 1981, resulting in a much-noted Christian Declaration on Youth and Development. In 1983, a frank discussion was possible about the controversial Bill. Early in 1984, combined church-government meetings occurred, resulting in a Joint Statement of views regarding religion and development. And even though Fr Momis was criticised for "using the pulpit for making political statements" (cf. McManus, 97), he soon afterwards joined ranks with his opponents. Then, there was the famous retreat for the so-called rascal groups, held at the Goldie River Barracks, between April 17 and 21, 1985 (cf. Senge; see also Trompf, 1986), and the several follow-up meetings, jointly sponsored by people from the government and the churches. Finally, and maybe the surest sign of cooperation, are the very substantial sums of money which were spent, e.g., by Christian bodies on behalf of the West Irianese refugees, and by the government to support the youth programmes undertaken by the various churches.

Since these events took place, there has been a change of government, leaving the new office-bearers only a short time before the new elections, and a lot of important business waiting to be attended to. It might be, then, that the time is not ripe for new legislation to curtail some of the liberties, enshrined in Papua New Guinea's Constitution, and that, meanwhile, there are sufficient means at hand to solve the problems occasioned by religious differences. As to the underlying problems of religious truth, and of integrated church activity, the State is not empowered to solve these issues.

APPENDIX

The Vatican Declaration on Religious Liberty **Nostrae Aetate**: Summary and Commentary

The **subtitle of the document**, from the fifth version on, narrows down the content of the Declaration to "Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious". This addition enlightens us that it is not the abstract philosophical question about truth and error, and about their respective rights, as envisioned in the traditional "Roman" theology, that is at stake. It also tells us that the document does not see religion as a purely private matter, or as something only concerning an individual's own relationship to the supreme Deity – as an "America" view might have preferred. In addition, the specific claim of the Catholic church is not explicitly stated, although the text and related documents do not ignore it altogether. Instead, it is understood that what the Catholic church claims for herself, she grants equally to other churches and ecclesiastical communions in their respective dealings with human societies and their rightful governments (see esp. n. 6c).

1a. According to the **Introduction**, the ultimate basis of religious freedom is "the dignity of the human person", which demands a free and responsible self-determination. It is only in recent times that the implications of this, also in social life, have become more apparent (cf. also **Gaudium et Spes** nn.12-22).

1bc. The Catholic church is convinced that true religion is found in herself (cf. also **Lumen Gentium** n. 8), and this fact constitutes an appeal to the individual conscience, without implying, however, any limitations of a person's rights, or entailing any individual or collective discrimination. A reference is here made to the "recent Popes", quoting explicitly Pope John XXIII and Pope Pius XII.

The main text of the Declaration, after the introduction (n. 1), is divided into two parts:

Ch. I: General principle of religious freedom (nn.2-8), and

Ch. II: Religious freedom in the light of revelation (nn. 9-15).

This order – putting human reason first – reveals the fact that non-Christians are also spoken to, although it is not hidden that the rights under consideration are known firstly through revelation, and secondly, through reason (n. 2c; also n. 9).

Chapter I: General Principle of Religious Freedom

2a. After the introduction, Chapter I opens with a paragraph in which the meaning of the right is explained. Any human person is entitled to religious freedom, i.e., freedom or immunity from coercion or force, so that in religious matters nobody is forced to act against his or her conscience. Nobody, within reasonable limits (also n. 7), is prohibited from following his or her choices and decisions. This divine and human right should become a civil right as well, when seen in the context of a political society. (It is not so that the State, on its own authority, would grant such a right, as other philosophies would like to have it.)

2b. **The basis and the range of religious freedom** are further explained. It goes back to man's fundamental duty to seek for, and to live, the truth, especially in religious matters. Hence, a person must be able to move with freedom. And, even when there occur cases of (objective or subjective) abuses in this area, the right itself is inalienable, "Provided that the just requirements of public order are observed". (In other words, the church is here acting on principle, and not on pragmatic grounds, or as a concession to contemporary circumstances.)

3. Again, man is a social being, who finds and lives the truth in interaction with other human beings who communicate with him their discovery of (real or imagined) truth. Hence, follows the legitimacy of external and communitarian acts, provided again, that any public limitation of one's rights is only inspired by "the just requirements of public order". (Hence the State cannot command or prohibit external expressions of religion.)

4. As a consequence, all religious associations are legally on the same level. (Note again, that the question of actual truth or falsehood is left aside, but allowance is made for a "Christian witness".) There is, however, a natural (not just a legal) limitation in expressing one's personal conviction, and that is the respect for the rights of others. Hence, "any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion, or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people" is out of place.[20]

5. There is a parallel between the public rights of religious associations and those of the family (e.g., regarding education of children), but this topic is left untreated

here, since the Council issued a separate Declaration on Christian Education, **Gravissimun Educationis.**

6a. Then follow the **limitations of religious freedom**, where a definition is given of the common welfare (a subject already treated by Pope Leo XIII in **Rerum Novarum** of 1891). The latter is a situation in which a person can reasonably and easily achieve his or her own perfection.

6b. It is mainly up to the State Government to protect the rights of individuals and groups "by (making) just laws and by other appropriate means".

6c. Even if, in given circumstances, a particular religion would enjoy a privileged status, one should still respect the rights of all citizens, and religious communities, to religious freedom. All are to be equal before the law.

7. The need to limit man's religious freedom can be justified on the grounds of (n. 7b):

– protecting the rights of all citizens and of peacefully settling conflicts,

– maintaining public peace, and

– upholding public morality.

The section concludes almost axiomatically, by requesting "as much freedom as possible, and as little restriction as necessary". Father Murray comments here that "secular experts may well consider this to be the most significant sentence in the Declaration" (687, n. 21).

8. To conclude the first chapter, an appeal is made, on the one hand, "to respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority", and, on the other hand, "to be lovers of true freedom". Religious freedom is meant to enable people to "act with greater responsibility in fulfilling their duties in community life".

Chapter II: Religious Freedom in The Light of Revelation

The way of arguing in the second half of the Declaration is explicitly Biblical, and the natural familiarity with the content matter may allow us to be more concise in giving the outline of nn.9 to 15, a section of almost the same length as nn. 2-8 of Chapter 1.

9. It is granted that, although the divine revelation does not teach explicitly the right to be free of external coercion (one might think here of the biblical judgment of

ancient slavery!), there is nevertheless a very definite stand in favour of human dignity. Thus further light is cast upon the insights of human reason.

10. "Man's response to God in faith must be free. Therefore, no one is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his or her own will."

11. The example and the word of Jesus and the Apostles provide guidance, both regarding the free response of man, and regarding the power and the right of the government. They sought to convince, never to compel.

12. The Catholic church is resolved to follow the way of the gospel, although "there has at times appeared a way of acting that was hardly in accord with the spirit of the gospel, or even opposed to it".

13. The good of the church, and the welfare of society, entitle the church to "enjoy that full measure of freedom which her care for the salvation of men requires". She claims this, both "as a spiritual authority" and "as a society of men (professing the) Christian faith".

14. It is the duty of every member of the church to understand ever more fully, faithfully proclaim, and vigorously defend this truth, yet "never having recourse to means that are incompatible with the spirit of the gospel".[21]

15ab. In the concluding paragraphs, the Council Declaration broadens once again the perspective, alleging, e.g., that most constitutions and international documents acknowledge religious freedom, even though there are instances where this right receives only lip service. The fact that "Catholics . . . (and) all men" are urged to defend the great good of religious freedom implies that there might even be Catholic totalitarian systems. Mankind is growing towards a greater unity, and religious freedom should figure as a treasured part in the establishment of universal harmony and peace.

FOOTNOTES

1. In 1978, religious matters pertained to the **Department of Decentralisation**, but this was changed in the next year, when these concerns, together with "youth and recreation" were reassigned the **Department of Community and Family Services**. In 1982, the office of Youth, Women, Religion and Recreation was transferred to the **Department of the Prime Minister**, while, in 1984, the "Religious Affairs Division" was set up as part of the **Department of Home Affairs**.

2. Cf. newspaper reports, dated January 18, 1985, in *Niugini Nius*, and in the *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*. The dates to be quoted in brackets all refer to news items in the *Post-Courier*.

3. Pope John's Encyclical ". . . on establishing universal peace in truth, justice, charity, and freedom", dated April 11, 1963, is referred to in the **Declaration** at the numbers 1, 2, 3, 6 (twice) and 14 (twice). "Catholic thought had consistently held that society is to be based upon **truth** (the truth of the human person), directed toward **justice**, and animated by **charity**. In **Pacem in terris**, John XXIII added the missing fourth term, **freedom**" (Murray, 687, note 21).

4. We may add that other issues, too, have fuelled some government-church animosity. These differences of opinion include the use of alcohol and tobacco (*PC* 20-6-1980), the casino bill (*PC* 2-10-1981), the functioning of the censorship board (sex and crime films: pornographic materials . . .), birth control promotion (availability of contraceptives . . .), the non-acceptance of boat people, the repatriation of the West Irianese refugees, the Pacific peacekeeping force, the nuclear-free Pacific, ways and means to curb the law and order problems (capital punishment, maiming . . .), legalisation of prostitution, and the eternal quibbles with financial implications (land rates, work permits, involvements in business . . .). One new small church was taken to task for using government buildings for evangelistic purposes (*PC* 28-11-1980).

5. It has been noted, with examples from Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Uganda, Zaire, Nigeria, and other neighbouring states, that "There is hardly a government in Africa, be it black or white, socialist or liberal, military or parliamentary, progressive or reactionary, which has not had trouble with militantly-marginal religious movements, and felt obliged to react with repressive measures." In the Republic of Congo, all but seven religious bodies were forbidden to operate, while Togo banned up to 30 sects, and Rhodesia curtailed the activities of even the mainline, let alone marginal, Christian bodies (Singleton, 6-7).

6. See Chapter 3 of G. W. Trompf's forthcoming book on **Payback**.

7. In 1904, Bishop A. de Boismenu defended the liberty of conscience", which was denied by the official policy of the spheres of influence. He demanded for the Catholic Church in (British) New Guinea "the full measure of liberty she has obtained from the British Government in every other colony, and from the German Government throughout its possessions" (cf. de Boismenu, 1905, 275). The legal status of Australia's mission policy was not altogether clear, but Governor Hubert Murray consistently attempted to observe natural justice, when the rights of Catholics (and Seventh-day Adventists) were at stake. Only after 1945 was the restriction abandoned (cf. Lutton, 1970, 11).

8. In its reply to the government letter of 8-9-1983, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints considered the possibility of drawing up the religious map of Papua New Guinea, as it presents itself today. Hence, this church wonders whether the criterion to be used would focus on churches with the longest **continuing presence**, or those with

the biggest **numbers**, and, if the latter, on those with a membership count based upon **records** held, or based on actual **attendance** at the meetings, and, if the latter, whether the membership is fixed by those living in the area, or includes those coming **from outside** today (cf. letter 18-10-1983), p.4, sub 2b).

9. On so-called "independent churches" in Melanesia, see Trompf, 1983. It might be necessary to define properly when a new religious movement becomes a "church", or is a "sect", or "cult", or whether any other name is more appropriate. John Barr, 1983, has given an overview of the recent Spirit movements in Melanesia.

10. **The Kwato Extension Association** (1917) split off from the **London Missionary Society**, with which it joined ranks again to form the **Papuan Ekalesia** (1962). The latter amalgamated in 1968 with the **United church of Port Moresby**, and with some **Methodist Missions**, to eventually constitute the one **United church of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands**. Another merger was that of the Lutheran Churches, that is, the **Siassi Lutheran church** (of Australian foundation) with **ELCONG**, the **Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea** (of German foundation by the **Rheinische Mission** around Madang, and by the **Neuendettelsau Mission** around Finschhafen). At the foundation of the **Evangelical Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea** in 1956, the American-founded **Wabag Lutheran church** in Enga – now known as the **Gutnius Lutheran church** – preserved its own identity.

11. As noted during the government-churches meeting of March 7, 1984 (when discussing the conditions for entry visas), the establishment of new religions will be hard to stop once a single Papua New Guinea citizen has embraced the new faith and starts, e.g., applying for land or constructing religious buildings on his property. As a matter of fact, this approach was used by the Catholic Bishop L. Couppé to break through the religious boundaries imposed by German authorities on New Britain: the youths, who were educated at the Catholic Mission, and settled a so-called Wesleyan Mission District, were the ones who called in the ministers of religion of their own choice. (Jaspers, 1984, 54-58).

12. Outside contacts are not confined to the Catholics, Anglicans and Seventh-day Adventists only, but affect also other churches and religious groups who are, in one way or the other, members of the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Baptist World Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation, the Asian Baptist Fellowship, and the like. (Loeliger, 1978, 7).

13. Acquisition of property, too, have served, in the past, to break through the spheres-of-influence policy (as with the establishment of the Catholic Church in Orokolo: cf. Delbos, 272), and is at the basis of some present-day difficulties (such as the planned establishment of the Mormon Church near Hanuabada, Port Moresby: cf. *PC* 9-5 and 21-8-1985).

14. The present membership of the **Melanesian Council of Churches** includes the following seven churches: Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea; Gutnius Lutheran Church (of Wabag); Roman Catholic Church; Salvation Army; United Church in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands; and Western Highlands Baptist Church.

Associate membership is held by Church of the Nazarene Mission, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Campus Crusade, Scripture Union, Bible Society, etc. Noteworthy is that some sections of the United and Baptist churches belong to both the Melanesian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance.

15. The **Evangelical Alliance of the South Pacific Islands** (1964) is a kind of umbrella organisation for many "free churches", fellowships, and the like. At present, the following 25 churches are full members:

Aiyura Evangelical Church
Apostolic Church (PNG)
Asoroyufa Evangelical Church
Assemblies of God (PNG)
Boroko Baptist Church
Christian Brethren Church (PNG)
Christian Life Centre Church
Christian Union Church
Church of the Four Square Gospel (PNG)
Church of the Nazarene
Conference of the Churches of Christ
Evangelical Church of Manus
Evangelical Church of Papua
Faith Fellowship Church
Ialibu Gospel Church
Lae Baptist Church
Sepik Baptist Union
South Sea Evangelical Church (PNG)
South Sea Evangelical Church Solomon Islands
Tiliba Christian Church
Tokorara Baptist Church
United Church – Highlands region
Wesleyan Church Corporation
Western Highlands Baptist Union, and
Wewak Christian Fellowship.

Associate membership of the E.A. is held by 13 more churches:

Apostolic Church Mission
Assemblies of God Mission
Asia Pacific Christian Mission
Australian Church of Christ Mission
Bamu River Mission
Christian Mission in Many Lands
Christian Union Mission
Churches of Nazarene Mission
Faith Fellowship Mission
Four Square Gospel Mission
Gospel Tidings Mission
New Life League Mission
South Sea Evangelical Mission.

Both the Swiss Evangelical Brotherhood Mission and the Swiss Evangelical Brotherhood Church have, at present, observer's status within the Evangelical Alliance.

16. At present, the **National Council of Pentecostal Churches** (1979) has the following membership:

Apostolic Church (PNG)
Apostolic Mission
Assemblies of God Church (PNG)
Assemblies of God Mission
Christian Life Centre Church
Christian Revival Crusade (PNG)
Church of the Four Square Gospel (PNG)
Faith Fellowship Mission
Four Square Gospel Mission
Highlands Christian Mission
Mendi Pentecostal Church
New Guinea Fellowship
Open Bible Mission.

As with M.C.C. and E.A., there is also overlapping between the affiliation to E.A. and N.C.P.C. for the following six groups: Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God Church and Mission, Christian Life Centre, Four Square Gospel (American branch, but not the Australian branch), and Faith Fellowship Mission.

17. The Mormon Church's reply to the government letter of 8-9-1983 remarks that if the notification intended is a mere matter of courtesy, it should, perhaps, not be a subject of legislation. If, on the contrary, the text intends to give an entitlement to the church

having "jurisdiction", one needs to specify the grounds on which permission can be refused, and also the means available to challenge a withholding of permission, or an unreasonable delay in considering the request. (Cf. **Letter** 18-10-1983, p.4, sub 2c).

18. Matters, which some churches have considered as conflicting with their religious objectives, are listed above, note 6. They are also referred to in the reply of the Evangelical Alliance, which adds such "imported customs" as wild disco and six-to-six parties for their disruption of traditional life patterns.

19. Following Vatican II (**Apostolicam actuositatem**, n.2 end), the most-recent **Code of Canon Law** (1983) has this to say: "Lay members of Christ's faithful . . . (have) the obligation and the right . . . to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world. . . . They have also . . . the special obligation to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things . . . particularly in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions. . . ." (Canon 225).

20. Father J. C. Murray comments here (683, note 10) that "it is customary to distinguish between 'Christian witness' and 'proselytism', and to condemn the latter. This distinction is made in the text here. Proselytism is a corruption of Christian witness by appeal to hidden forms of coercion, or by a style of propaganda unworthy of the gospel. It is not the use, but the abuse, of the right to religious freedom." This useful distinction is taken over by Jaspers, 1983, 9, and by the Joint Statement of the Government-Church Workshop (1984), 6.

21. It may be obvious that such an attitude is most relevant, both regarding the freedom Christians may enjoy within the church, and the freedom they should have with other Christian individuals or groups. However, these various applications are not spelled out in detail.

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REPORT

Melanesians, Indonesians, Australians in Dialogue

MCC-CCI-ACC Consultation on Church and Society
Dhyana Pura, Bali, 26-29 Nov. 1985

The tripartite consultation, held in Bali from 26 to 29 November, 1985, was the result of 15 months of planning and negotiation between the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC) and the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI), with the support of the Australian Council of Churches (ACC). This is not to say that the meeting was the end of our short relationship; rather we believe it to be the beginning of many more consultations, dialogues, and visits, as a means to understand and respect each other as close neighbours. The churches of Papua New Guinea have had historical relationships with Australian and Pacific churches. We also had some ties with churches in other Asian countries, but, sadly, we had no formal ecumenical relationship with Indonesian churches. I found that the Roman Catholic church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands has had more ties with the Catholic church in Indonesia, especially in East Timor and Irian Jaya, than any of us had realised.

Till about June 1984, MCC was neither informed about the problems of border crossers from Irian Jaya, nor was it involved in extending humanitarian services to them, for which, at that time, we lacked resources. I was able to glean enough information about these issues to prepare a report for the Annual General Meeting of ACC in Melbourne. Most people at the meeting were interested in my report, but it was challenged by a former Deputy General Secretary of the (then) Council of Churches in Indonesia, Dr Wirakotan. As a result of our debate, our ACC friends suggested that consultation would bring mutual understanding and respect, and that joint study programmes would not only help us to know our situation better, but would provide churches outside Indonesia and Papua New Guinea with up-to-date information.

In August 1984, accompanied by Revd Jim Baital, Chairman of MCC, I was invited to attend the first-ever MCC-CCI-ACC meeting. At this meeting, we agreed on the following points:

a) To foster closer relationships through mutual visits – attending each other's church synods and conferences, encouraging exchanges of social and cultural activities.

b) To seek to establish, where possible, joint-action programmes to help the border crossers.

c) To plan and prepare for a larger inter-church conference in 1985.

Between August 1984 and November 1985, we had seven follow-up meetings, both in Papua New Guinea and in Indonesia. These meetings helped to bring us closer together in a very short time. Many church people, and members of the public, in Papua New Guinea are frightened of Indonesians, thinking that Jayapura or other places in Indonesia are unsafe to visit. I found these fears to be based on misconceptions and misunderstandings amongst our people, as Indonesians are very hospitable and friendly, and you can walk the streets without any fear.

The Bali Consultation

The Australian Council of Churches, as well as our Indonesian counterpart, took this meeting very seriously, because it was the first of its kind in the history of the two countries. While ACC takes a special interest in the relationships between Indonesian and Papua New Guinea churches, it does not understand itself as a mediator, nor is its role in any way paternalistic. Seeing the importance of the bilateral ecumenical relationship between the two countries, ACC made it financially possible for MCC to send a representative group of delegates to the Bali meeting, but it left us completely free to use our own discretion as to how and where ACC funds were used, and what we do or say in matters relating to the refugee issue.

Australia, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea are all important in this relationship, as we are close neighbours, and our mutual cooperation in our dealings with each other should be correspondingly close. By the same token, the churches from the three countries agreed to involve themselves in helping to solve the problem of the border crossers in any ways they see fit, although ACC abides by its decision to assist **only through** MCC.

The meeting took place in one of Bali's choice locations, though beyond the reach of foreign tourists. Bishop Mastra of the Kristian Protestant church of Bali, and Mr Budhi, manager of the Dhyana Pura Christian Resort, and his staff, were very hospitable. I found the meeting itself to be open and friendly. We all expressed our disagreements, our fears, and our disappointments freely in a friendly and Christian spirit. There were no hard feelings amongst participants. Everyone played his or her role well, and everyone left feeling happy that we had successfully set out feet on the first step of our walk together towards the future. Some observers said that history had been made.

Each day, each of the three delegations presented papers on one of the following themes (the MCC speakers are mentioned in brackets):

1. General introduction to church and society (Walter Ataembo);

2. Hope and expectation of a modern society (Gagoa Gaigo);

3. Relationship with people of other faiths (Jim Baital),

each in the context of their own society, and under the general consultation theme "Moving Forward Together into the Future". At the end of the consultation a joint communique was issued (the full text was published in **Catalyst**, March 1985). It has since been ratified by all three participating Councils. The consultation resolved to form a Standing Committee to continue its work, to which each Council would send two delegates. MCC has authorised Revd Jim Baital (Lutheran), Fr Robert Lak (Catholic), and Bishop Gagoa Gaigo (United church) to represent it at these meetings, the first of which was held in Port

Moresby on 6-7 February, 1986. The communique stipulates that the Standing Committee facilitates, but does not replace, direct correspondence and negotiation between the three Councils themselves.

The process of tripartite dialogue, on which we have embarked, is part of our duty to the welfare, peace, and prosperity of this nation. We need the support of individual Christians, churches, and the government to enable us to do what we agreed to do.

Walter Ataembo, General Secretary,
Melanesian Council of Churches, Port Moresby.

BOOK REVIEWS

HOUTEPEN, Anton, **The People of God: A Plan for the Church** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1984) pb, US$10.95, 224 pp.

Anton Houtepen has written with the aim of making his readers look again at the church. At a time when even some believers have become disillusioned with institutional religion, he argues that it is impossible for us to live as people of God without coming together as a church. We need to turn to each other to be nurtured in faith, and to find support in walking the way of discipleship. Yet Houtepen acknowledges that the church may well be marginal to the interests of many in the West because, in the past, both Catholics and Protestants have failed to do it justice. Roman Catholics have been too concerned with questions of organisation and power to see the church for what it is, as the fruit of God's initiative in history for the salvation of His people, while Protestants have stressed so much the personal relationship between the individual and God that the church has almost completely disappeared from view. Orthodox ecclesiology is not mentioned.

Against the background of these misconceptions, Houtepen sets out to consider what the church must be like if Christians are to live together as people of God. This involves him in discussing a great many issues. Secularisation, belief in God, Christology, soteriology, ethics, the role of creeds and confessions of faith in the life of the church, baptism, the eucharist, ministry, ecumenism, and the papacy are all considered. Obviously, it is impossible to deal adequately with such a range of topics in the space of 200 pages, and there are places where the discussion is superficial and inadequate. On the other hand, Houtepen does manage to say something fresh and illuminating about quite a few of the questions he raises. As a senior lecturer at the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological Research at Utrecht (as well as Professor of Theology at Rotterdam), he is well aware that the church is a universal body, and he does set out to have a global perspective, but, despite this, the main focus is on the church in the West, and on occasions (e.g., the discussion of ministry), it is the problems of the Roman Catholic church in Holland that occupy the centre of the stage. Liberation theology is mentioned

only in passing, and in a way that suggests Houtepen is not really sympathetic.

Granted the limitations of his approach, how successful is Houtepen in making a plea for the church in at least his own Western culture? It is important that such a plea should be made, because there is no doubt that in Western Europe the church faces a stiff challenge from secularisation. Fewer and fewer people find the Christian gospel credible. This is the root of the problem. The church's message no longer carries conviction, and, as a result, the institution itself appears irrelevant and unimportant. Before the idea of the church as the "people of God" can appeal to the human imagination, there has to be belief in a God, who not only exists, but is capable of acting in the way that Houtepen and the Christian tradition affirm.

Houtepen devotes a chapter to belief in God, and sets out to give us a fresh way of dealing with the question, different from the old Thomist talk of a first cause, or Protestantism's reliance of God's own self-revelation. Unfortunately, this new approach is too undeveloped for us to grasp it clearly, let alone evaluate it. "Belief in God", we are told, "is surrender to a mode of being which weaves God's cause, God's initiative, God's guidelines, God's way, and God's kingdom into the web of our existence". This is perfectly acceptable as a plea of faith that expresses itself in action, but, as an attempt to make the concept of God meaningful to secular-minded people, it does not begin to do the job.

Houtepen's plea for the church is really two-fold. He wants us to see the central place of the church in God's work of redemption, but he also wants us to look with new eyes at how the church should order its life if it is to be the instrument of God's purpose. Rather surprisingly, there is no attention paid to the church's relationship to culture, and little said about its role in the struggle for justice – two issues that are surely of critical importance to the world-wide church at the present time.

My conclusion that Professor Houtepen has not made a successful plea for the church does not mean that he has written a bad book. On many issues, he is well worth reading. Particularly to be commended, is his sensitive approach to matters of ecumenical interest. Some readers

will dislike his vision of the church as a communion of local communities bound together in love and consultation, and in fellowship with the bishop of Rome, but I suspect that it is one that an increasing number of Christians from different backgrounds are coming to share.

Fr Paul Richardson,
St John's Anglican Cathedral, Port Moresby.

FABELLA, Virginia, and TORRES, Sergio, eds., **Doing Theology in a Divided World.** Papers from the Sixth International Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, January 5-13, 1983 Geneva, Switzerland (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985) pb US$11.95, 218 pp.

The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) goes back to discussions between three young theologians from Africa and Latin America while studying at Louvain in the mid-1970s. It was formed as the result of an international conference of theologians from third-world countries in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 1976. Since then, both regional and intercontinental conferences have been held in Accra (1977), Colombo (1979), Sao Paulo (1980), and New Delhi (1981). Most of the participants had been accustomed to dialogue – albeit, rather one-sided – with their Spanish, French, German, British, or North American "partner" churches; the experience of learning to dialogue with one another, across colonial and confessional lines of communication, and in the face of their enormous cultural and social differences, was a long and painful one. After the Delhi conference in 1981, they felt ready to resume the dialogue with theologians of the first world, but, this time, it was to be on their terms. EATWOT issued invitations to theologians from Europe and North America to meet with third-world theologians in Geneva, but it laid down certain conditions: participants were to be selected, not on the basis of their scholarly attainments, but because of their first-hand participation in liberation struggles. Most established professors of theology were thus disqualified from the start!

In the course of 1982, I attended some of the meetings of a West German preparatory group based in Munster, including one with other European groups in Geneva. As a result, I am able to appreciate the extreme difficulties encountered during the EATWOT conference, and openly admitted in the introductory chapters of the book under review. Many of the Europeans present were outsiders, both socially and theologically (a taxi-driver, a working mother with 13 children, a trade unionist, . . . and the radical Dorothee Soelle, who is very controversial in German Protestant circles). A number of third-world theologians, on the other hand, relished the prospect of crossing swords with their former theological teachers, and were sorely disappointed. Feminists from the first and third worlds found that they had very different agendas. There was friction between academics and grass-roots people. The Africans and Asians felt that the Latin Americans and Europeans were insensitive to issues involving culture and traditional religion.

Despite all these tensions and barriers to understanding, a genuine dialogue, in which all learned from one another, seems to have taken place. Here, I can only indicate some highlights: Europeans learning that their preoccupation with the **non-believer,** produced by the Enlightenment, needed to yield to a concern for the **non-person,** produced by extreme poverty and social injustice (Soelle); the firm realisation that theology was shifting from a Eurocentric to a "polycentric" orientation (Metz); the struggle of Europeans to forge their own liberation theology out of their opposition to the nuclear and armaments industries, or the "colonisation" of the handicapped and the mentally ill (Casalis); the re-interpretation of Asian spiritual classics as inspiration for storytelling, and personal testimony about involvement in the fight for social justice as the necessary prelude to social analysis and committed theology.

The "reception" of this conference, and its forceful final statement by Melanesian Christians, may not be without difficulty. There were no Pacific Islanders present. Most participants were politically of the "left", and shared a more-or-less explicit option for socialism. The evangelical and charismatic styles of Christianity, which are becoming more and more prevalent throughout the Pacific, seem to have been disregarded completely. Yet the "black theology", represented at the conference by

James Cone, has its roots in Pentecostalism, as does the Christian movement for the emancipation of women, ably advocated by Rosemary Reuther, Letty Russel, and Mercy Oduyoye. It was 19th-century evangelicals who agitated for humane working conditions, and the abolition of slavery. Why have evangelicals abandoned these positions to "ecumenicals"? Would not the EATWOT dialogue be more truly ecumenical if it paid more attention to the movement within evangelicalism to take social justice and dialogue of religions more seriously? Or would this compromise the very basis on which the Geneva meeting took place: the common commitment to expose the roots of poverty and injustice in the "social sin" of white racism, structural violence, and the oppression of women?

The time is coming for Melanesians to be involved in these difficult, but crucial, discussions. But, in order to make their own specific contribution, they must first know exactly where they stand as Melanesians and as Christians; their theology must be compatible with their identity. Those of them who tackle this book, with its bewildering variety of styles, standpoints, temperaments, and genres, will find much to challenge the way they see both themselves and the larger world.

John D'Arcy May, The Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

GNUSE, Robert, **You Shall Not Steal: Community Property in the Biblical Tradition** (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985), paperback US$9.95, 162 pp.

In writing this book, Robert Gnuse very convincingly illustrates the role a biblical scholar can play in critiquing the contemporary syncretisms which distort original prophetic visions.

In this case, his central concern is the decalogue against stealing, as it is enshrined within the biblical tradition of the people of God. His assertion is that this law was never intended to protect the private property of the wealthy, but rather, was meant to safeguard the rights everyone in the community had to acquire the basic needs for human living.

Through his thoroughly-documented arguments, the author issues a highly-relevant challenge to the deeply-ingrained Western assumption that property owners have an inalienable right to possessions, over against the legitimate human needs of the dispossessed.

His challenge takes up some of the issues which sociologist Maria Augusta Neal has discussed at some length in her study: **A Socio-theology of Letting Go** (New York NY: Paulist Press, 1977). There it was pointed out that, when the rich reinterpret aspects of the Christian vision to suit their own purposes, "the practice of Christianity loses its prophetic quality" (p. 2).

Gnuse reviews the prophetic sweep of the Israelite legal ethos down through the nation's evolving political and economic history, and traces the effects social change wrought upon the notion of biblical justice. An Assistant Professor in Old Testament Studies at Loyola University, New Orleans, it is in the areas of Israelite settlement, monarchy, and decline, that he offers his richest insights. This book, easily readable, with clear summaries at the end of each chapter, will provide Melanesian theologians with much food for thought.

Over and over again, the author points out that the aspect of the Israelite pastoral ethos, which made it so unique in the context of the urbane river civilisations of its ancient Near-Eastern world, was the idealism of the theologians, and their "courageous vision for society" (p. 36). Unequivocally, and often against mammoth odds, they strove to shape the goals of society, steer the nation in the direction of communal reform, and provide the prophets with a framework for their insistent and untiring statements of social critique.

Indeed, it was these same visionaries and law makers who provided Western civilisation itself with the humanitarian basis it required for the development of its enduring ethical and legal guidelines.

Central to Gnuse's thesis, is his chapter on the Laws of Israel: Mandate for the Poor. Here is outlined the unique blend of theological idealism, humanitarianism, and economic pragmatism, which can still

challenge theologians, as they struggle to formulate faith and justice directives for today.

Two examples used are the Gleaning Legislations (Deut 24:19-22; Lev 23:22), and the Jubilee Laws (Lev 25:1-10, 25-28).

In particular, the recurring Jubilee year, every 50 years, celebrated the people's right to reclaim property they had lost through any reason whatsoever. These solemn community occasions were to be prepared for by seventh-yearly Sabbath years, when everyone ceased normal activities, and remembered that all land and all possessions belonged to Yahweh, who had given them their liberation, their inheritance.

The vitality in these laws came from the religious vision of the theologians. Its focus was a liberated people's response in love to the great God, Yahweh's act of deliverance on their behalf. With all people called to freedom, by Yahweh's action, everyone thereafter had the right to respected status in relation to the land, which was their inheritance. This idealism of Israelite religion was woven into the fabric of all laws, inspiring a deeply-humanitarian concern for economic, political, and social equality.

From this perspective, one can gain further insight into the broad biblical interpretation of the prohibition on stealing. It always made allowance for rights-of-access to property to satisfy basic needs, and ensured that no-one took away from a needy person things required for his livelihood.

Although most certainly, these laws were often only an ideal not put into practice, nevertheless, they offered constant inspiration for attempts to maintain a type of society based on justice and compassion for all – an inspiration, to which prophets repeatedly recalled the nation.

As the author points out, it is good to remember that these visionaries, these lawmakers are our spiritual ancestors. They struggled to make sense of changing societies, conflicting value-systems, and movements of people out of a pastoral into urban living situations. The task that they undertook in their lifetime, can still inspire us in the tasks

undertaken today. Despite their seeming failure, their message remains a constant challenge.

Robert Gnuse has done us a service by ridding an original clear biblical message of the subtly-accumulated misinterpretations of affluent nations.

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Jerome Burce is a Lutheran pastor. Born in Lae, and raised in the Enga Province, he received his basic theological training at the former St Louis School, Christ Seminary-Seminex. In 1981, he was called to duties of pastoral and administrative oversight in one of the five regions of the Gutnius Lutheran church. He is now the principal of Timothy Lutheran Seminary, Wapenamanda, Enga Province.

Paul Richardson is an Anglican priest from England. He was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, and has worked in parishes in London, Norway, and the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea. Until recently, he was principal of Newton College, Popondetta, Oro Province, and in 1986, he has taken over the parish of St John in Port Moresby.

Theodoor Aerts is a Roman Catholic priest from Belgium. He is a member of the Society of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. After receiving the licentiate and doctorate in Sacred Scripture from the Biblical Institute in Rome, he came to Papua New Guinea. He lectures in Sacred Scripture at Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana.

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