

THE CROSS AND THE TANOA



Gospel and Culture in the Pacific

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THE CROSS AND THE TANOA
GOSPEL AND CULTURE IN THE PACIFIC.

With Compliments

of

S P A T S

Edited by
J. RUSSELL CHANDRAN

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PREFACE

Publication of the report on the Consultation Gospel and Culture in the Pacific held in Suva, Fiji, July 27-29, 1987, is a further step in our common search for deeper understanding of the dialectic between Gospel and Culture in the life of the Pacific Island Christian.

The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) wishes to thank Dr Sam Amirtham and his colleagues in the Programme for Theological Education (PTE) of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, for suggesting the consultation and securing financial support for it. The consultation was held in conjunction with the biannual Meeting of PTE Executive. The presence of PTE members with the SPATS participants had a mutually enriching effect and broadened the perspective of the consultation. Thanks is also due to those who prepared papers, to Dr Russel Chandran for editing and compiling the Report, to Mrs Judy Finau for transcribing the recorded discussions, to Sister Mary Paula for designing the cover, and to Mr Seru Verebalavu of Lotu Pasifika Productions for finally preparing and publishing the Report.

The Report is recommended for further study and reflection, especially to all who are concerned with inculturation of the Gospel by the Christian Churches throughout the Pacific.

Rev. L. Hannan
PRESIDENT, SPATS

5 JULY, 1988.

GOSPEL AND CULTURE IN THE PACIFIC

INTRODUCTION

The concern for understanding the nature of the relationship and mutual interaction between the Gospel and culture is not new. During the last half century or more several books have reflected on the topic. A book on the history of Christianity in the early period by C.N. Cochrane had the title *Christianity and Classical Culture*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940). The book by Richard H. Niebuhr on *Christ and Culture*. (New York, Harper Brothers, 1956) is also well known. The World Council of Churches sixth assembly at Vancouver in 1983 recommended 'a programme of study and dialogue in the area of communication and culture. In response to this churches in different parts of the world have held conferences or consultations for exploring at greater depth the relationship between Gospel and Culture. The Consultation held in Suva, Fiji, in July, 1987, on Gospel and Culture in the Pacific is also part of the same study process.

The suggestion for a consultation to be organised for the South Pacific came from the Programme on Theological Education (PTE) of the W.C.C. It was warmly welcomed by the Executive Committee of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS). This was because Theological Colleges in the South Pacific have been concerned about grappling with the respective island cultures. Political independence of the island nations has been followed by the growth of nationalism and reaffirmation of the values of the Pacific Island cultures and the quest for a Pacific identity. The Gospel-Culture relationship is integrally related to this quest for Pacific identity and Pacific theology. Therefore, with the encouragement and support from the PTE, SPATS sponsored the consultation.

The Consultation was chaired by an outstanding Fijian theologian, Rev. Ilaitia Tuwere, Principal of Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva. There were 65 participants which also included observers. All the major churches in the South Pacific were represented but regrettably there was no one from the French speaking islands.

The three day consultation programme consisted of daily worship, main theme addresses, group discussions and plenary sessions. The daily morning worship was led respectively by Rev. Gabrielle Daunivucu of Pacific

Regional Seminary, Mrs. Ming-Ya-Teng Tu'uholoaki of Davuilevu Theological College and Rev. Iotia Nooroa of Takamoa Theological College. The closing worship was led by Rev. Oka Fauolo of Malua Theological College.

The programme also provided an opportunity for the participants to remind themselves of some important aspects of Pacific culture. On the first evening a cultural programme was presented by the students of PTC in which some of the positive elements of different Pacific Island cultures were highlighted. On the second evening the consultation participants met at the PRS chapel for a special worship service, following which there was a very profound exposition of the cultural symbols in the chapel.

At the beginning of the consultation the following questions were approved to be kept in mind as guidelines for plenary as well as group discussions:

1. What is the Gospel? How do churches in the Pacific understand and interpret the Gospel?
2. What is Culture? What are the distinctive elements in Pacific culture?
3. Has the Gospel made any contribution to Pacific cultures? Has Pacific culture in any way transformed the Gospel?
4. Is it possible to consider a culture transformed by the Gospel?
5. How far is it possible to speak of the Gospel fulfilling Pacific cultures?

Group discussions and plenary sessions of the consultation led to the adoption of a statement consisting of three parts, namely, positive affirmation on which the consultation was agreed, issues which needed further exploration and recommendations to SPATS.

What follows is a report of the consultation with the findings adopted at the end, the main theme addresses and background papers. It is our hope that these will stimulate further study and exploration of the different aspects of the Gospel-culture relationships so that theological education in the Pacific will become more relevant for the mission of the churches in the Pacific.

J. Russell Chandran
Editor

A REPORT OF THE CONSULTATION

In his opening address welcoming the participants and introducing the theme of the consultation, the Chairman, Rev. Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere drew attention to what the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches had said on Gospel-Culture relationship "The question of the nature of the relationship between the Gospel and culture has been with us for some time, but the issue of culture has arisen in a fresh way because we are coming (a) to a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of culture and of its plurality, (b) to a better understanding of the ways in which the Gospel had interacted with cultures, and (c) to a clearer realization of the problems that have been caused by ignoring or denigrating the receptor cultures during the Western missionary era that often went hand in hand with Western colonial expansion". Explaining the objective of the consultation he said, "We have been called together to wrestle with this great and important theme and we hope that it will be an occasion when we understand one another properly and deeply. We are invited to get into the deeper meaning of what the Gospel is all about, what culture is and how Gospel and culture interact with each other". He also referred to the changed political situation in Fiji following the coup in May, 1987, and described it as reflecting "Fiji's struggles, with all its groanings at the moment, waiting for the break of the dawn of a new day".

Greeting the members of the consultation on behalf of the World Council of Churches and its Programme on Theological Education (PTE) Dr. Samuel Amirtham, the Director of PTE, drew attention to the task-force in the World Council of Churches for co-ordinating the study of Gospel and Culture established after the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC for implementing the recommendations of the Assembly. He mentioned two aspects of the task of theological education in this regard, namely, first equipping the Church to express the Christian faith and to communicate it authentically through the local culture and secondly helping the churches to develop "Gospel patterns of ministerial leadership in the Church", including the ministry of women.

Then followed the presentation of main theme addresses and discussion on the issues raised in plenary sessions as well as in groups. There were three main theme addresses:

1. Case Study on Gospel and Culture in the Pacific by Dr. Finau

Tu'uholoaki, the Principal of the Davuilevu Methodist Theological College in Fiji.

2. Biblical Perspectives on Gospel and Culture in the Pacific by Rev. Otele Perelini, Lecturer in New Testament at the Malua Theological College in Western Samoa.
3. Theological Reflections on Gospel and Culture in the Pacific by Rev. Finau Lokotui, Lecturer in Theology at the Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga.

In addition the Consultation had also the benefit of the following background papers:

1. The Gospel - A challenge to Pacific cultures by Rev. Kerry Prendeville, Lecturer in Anthropology at P.R. S., who had served in Papua New Guinea for some years.
2. The Gospel - Culture Dialogue - Towards a Christian Pacific Theology by Rev. Dr. Samiuela T. Finau Lecturer in Pastoral Studies at the Pacific Theological College.
3. Gospel and Culture by Rev. James Mason, Lecturer in Theology at Bishop Patteson Theological College in the Solomon Islands.
4. Wholeness of Life - Perspective from life in the Island by Rev. Fiamia Rakau, Lecturer at the Talua Ministry Training Centre in Vanuatu.
5. The Land of Bouru by Rev. Maroti Rimon, Lecturer at the Tangintebu Theological College in Kiribati.

Before presenting his paper, Dr. Finau Tu'uholoki introduced himself as follows: "I would like you to know who I am so that you may get into the spirit of the paper. I am originally from Tonga. I came to Fiji and in Fiji I was brought up by my adoptive parents and we lived very much within an Indian community. I was educated in a school which was highly Fijian oriented. When I got into the Ministry the first thing they told me was to learn the Fijian language and the Fijian customs. After I graduated from the Theological College with all the Fijian culture I was posted to serve in an Indian circuit and I was among the Indian people in Fiji. For my post-graduate studies I went to the United States, where I met my wife, a Taiwanese who had lived in Brazil. We have a daughter who was born in USA. If you talk about ecumenical family, mine is one. It is from this perspective this paper is written and it is an attempt to invite the participants to understand the situation we face in Fiji today".

that when he was baptised he surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. At the same time the Chiefly system was continued and "the Gospel got married with chieftainship". He described the Fijian culture developed under the impact of Methodism as having a strange combination of two drives among the people, "giving all" and "getting more".

Rev. Akuila Yabaki asked a question about the mission dimension in the context of the multi-cultural society in Fiji. Is it proper to talk about Fijian Christianity in isolation from the multi-cultural context? Dr. Tu'uholoaki admitted that in presenting his case study he was dealing with one particular area and he did not look at it from a multi-cultural perspective. He believed, however, that only from a particular as the base one can talk about the multi-cultural. Otele Perelini asked about the philosophy of getting more and more. "Are you implying that it is not something that is inherently Fijian but imposed later on which affected the Fijian way of life?". Dr. Tu'uholoaki explained that he did not mean that there was no such thing as "getting more" within the "giving all" structure. What he had in mind was a particular pattern of "getting more" structure, but something related to the capitalist system.

In his paper on Biblical Perspectives Rev. Otele Perelini drew attention to the Gospel of salvation in both Old and New Testaments which involves liberation from domination and all forms of bondage and oppression. Contrary to the message of the Gospel the policies of consistent dependency, economically and also culturally, advocated by the colonial powers stunted growth and progress towards self identity of communities as people. He explained how the present situation in the Pacific is to be understood as the result of accommodation of capitalist values within the traditional cultures. According to capitalist values, "we should be aggressive individuals, shrewd with our clients and should aim at maximum profits and gains". These new values, he said, not only contradict the old traditional aspirations of sharing and communal responsibility, but are also responsible for the emergence of a minority class of elites who rules and controls the island economic social community. Referring particularly to the situation in Western Samoa, he said that the combination of capitalism and traditional matat or chiefly system had led to a minority maintaining their privileged status in the name of tradition and culture, thus keeping a large gap between them and ordinary people. Describing this as a false culture he spoke of the role of the gospel of salvation as one of judging the culture and reshaping the culture liberating people from injustice.

Ms Elsa Tamez from Costa Rica made two comments. The first was on the use of the concept of false culture. She said that there does not exist a false culture or a true culture. There are liberating as well as oppressive elements in culture. Therefore, she thought it better to use some other word instead of false. The second was that we should take care not to identify the Bible with Gospel. While discerning the message of the Gospel we are also aware of the cultural framework of the Biblical writings. She referred to her experience at an ecumenical meeting in Ghana where she learnt that in some of the African cultures they have traditions about creation and redemption which are more liberating than the Bible tradition and said, "We can have in our cultures some very good liberating elements that can challenge the Bible culture or the Hebrew culture". She, however, agreed that the Gospel which is the good news of salvation should always judge our cultures.

Dr. John Pobee, the Associate Director of PTE, in commenting on the subject raised three questions. First, pointing out that the Old Testament represents the amalgam of revelation and Canaanite culture and practices and that we have got to be careful about drawing our lines and distinctions he suggested that the crucial question would be the criteria for drawing those distinctions and for determining which is the Gospel and which is not. Secondly, affirming that we have a divine right to create culture, he said that this confronts us with the question of how you test whether the culture that you have created is consistent with the will of the creator. Thirdly, referring to the Biblical message that Christ fulfils he pointed out that it is possible to argue that Christ fulfils our humanity and therefore our culture. This raises the question of criteria for determining how Christ fulfils different cultures. He asked, "In what sense is Christ fulfilling my culture from Ghana, the culture from Rome, the culture from Indonesia, the culture from Korea? I hope by putting that question we are going to get away from very negative attitudes to culture. But in what sense is Christ the Prince of Peace the liberator, the agent of new creation fulfilling our respective cultures?"

Russell Chandran, commenting on the Biblical foundations for the understanding of culture said that in both the Old and the New Testaments there is a kind of dialectical relationship between what the people develop as culture and the Word of God. In the New Testament, both Jesus and Apostle Paul are seen as limited by culture and at the same time going beyond culture. Jesus' choice of only men to be his apostles is an example of his

accommodation with culture. Paul's word in his letter to the Corinthians asking women to keep silent and to be subordinate to men is also to be understood as accommodating with the situation in Corinth. But in many ways Jesus challenged the tradition of his people and what we see prominently in the Gospels in his mission to transform culture. Paul's ministry too, witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ called for the transformation of the culture. The question is how the principle of accommodation and transformation may be applied in relation to culture in the Pacific. Appreciating Otele Perelini's observation about the growth of elitism through the accommodation of the Church in this context. He spoke of the super power rivalry and the deliberate attempts made to prevent the Soviet and other socialist influences coming to the Pacific and asked whether the churches in the Pacific should continue to keep silent on this. Should not the Gospel message of liberation towards an egalitarian society inspire the churches to make a stand against the capitalist pollution of traditional cultures in the Pacific?

Dr Sam Amirtham made three brief comments. The first was on the relationship between Hebrew culture and Canaanite culture. The Hebrew culture was indebted to Canaanite culture for many things such as the name el and elohim for God, the acceptance of kingship etc. What can we learn from this for our attitude to culture? Secondly, with regard to the influence of capitalism on the social culture what is needed is not just a gospel critique, but a more concrete and scientific ideological critique of culture. For this social sciences will be useful as instruments for analysing culture. We need an ideologic critique with the help of social sciences in order to grasp the realities and see the relevance of the impact of the Gospel. Thirdly, in The New Testament there is a multiplicity of cultures. In Acts and in Revelation, in the Kingdom of God there is going to be a multi-cultural beauty, a rainbow of God's grace manifested through different cultures bringing their wealth into the Kingdom. The dialogue of cultures, the multiplicity and mutual enrichment of cultures is also a Biblical concept to be taken seriously for our reflection on the Gospel-Culture relationship.

Ms. Lorine Tevi, now on the staff of the W.C.C., suggested that four points raised in Otele Perelini's paper needed special attention. The first is the issue of power and powerlessness in terms of our cultural practice and the Gospel. She said, "We need to be looking at this in terms of our historical culture that we have come through and then at the powerlessness in the social organisation of our different Pacific cultures, at the Church institution itself,

and at the experience of power and powerlessness in terms of our human relationships". The second is the concern for peace with justice. Referring to the situation in Fiji and prayers for peace offered by Christians and Hindus she said, "This is great because we believe in the power of prayer. At the same time I am concerned that peace cannot come through prayer alone. There are basic root causes of injustice in the Pacific countries which need to be tackled and the churches have a role in this. Until we get at these basic issues of injustice there cannot be any peace. Reconciliation can come only when the bases of friction and misunderstanding are removed". The third is the issue of corruption. It is the role of the churches to name the devils so that they may be cast out. The fourth point is the role and involvement of women and the liberation of women in the Pacific in terms of the Pacific cultures.

Ms. Ming-Ya-Teng Tu'uholoaki reflecting on the situation in Fiji stressed the need for understanding. Based on a survey she had made she said that the relationship between the ethnic Fijians and the Fiji Indians was one of mutual mistrust, fear and a sense of insecurity. The value systems and the life styles of the two races are very different. The Fijians possessing the land and the chiefly system fighten the Indians. On the other hand the Fijians feel threatened by the controlling position Indians have in economic activity. Through the complex of lifestyles, value systems and attitudes the Indians and the Fijians have developed two entirely different cultures. Culture is not a formula, it is the whole way of life. The Gospel too is not a formula. If we just talk about the Gospel using religious, cultural or political slogans we are not touching the root of the issues. The root issue is that there are two different cultural races with their distinctive practices and lifestyles and that there is no one really critically reflecting on the situation and trying to understand each group's self-understanding and then sharing the knowledge for encouraging a better dialogue, towards a better mutual understanding.

Dr. Toa Finau wanted to share his view that the term capitalism is not found in the terminology of the Pacific communal way of living. The Pacific tradition as it was used to be told by the elders was "give until it hurts". He said, "This is part of our communal way of living and to bring the terminology of capitalism to our culture is not acceptable".

Presenting his paper on Theological Reflections on Gospel and Culture in the Pacific, Rev. Finau Lokotui explained that it was based on his observa-

tions and understanding of Tongan society and that he was using Tongan society as a model or a paradigm whereby the other societies in the Pacific can relate to one another. He also referred to the following books which had helped him in his reflection: Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, Paul Tillich's Theology of Culture and The Courage To Be, Comstock's Religion and Man, Gifford's Tongan Society and Sione Latukefu's Church and State in Tonga.

Making a general observation on the Pacific culture prior to the intervention of Christianity he spoke of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled based on the concept of divine linkage. Even though ideally both the rulers and the ruled had obligations towards each other, there was also the possibility of the 'ruled' doing more and more for the 'rulers' and the latter doing less and less for the 'ruled'. The system of ranking which developed led to a society surviving by the notion "once a commoner, always a commoner". Such a society, he said, kills the spirit of positive and creative thinking and therefore positive and creative action. In the pre-Christian era religion was the basis for the total way of life of the Pacific people. Christianity brought a new scale of values and moral standards. There was antagonism against Christian values among the supporters of the old order who felt that their status, privileges and authority were being undermined. According to Finau Lokotui this was a positive contribution towards the betterment of a people who "had suffered under the yoke of traditionalism and religiosity". The introduction of the "legal machinery" also limited the power of the privileged few. Christianity also brought political stability to the Pacific countries. But the close association between the Church and the State led to the encouragement of "loyalty" to the respective political systems and the Church steering clear off her prophetic role of speaking against social and political evils, and understanding her mission as being primarily one of being the guardian of the soul rather than the sustainer of the whole of life for the whole person. The churches of the Pacific have failed miserably in the mission of being the "conscience" of the Pacific, and instead become "an accomplice in a policy of maintaining privileges, power and wealth to a very privileged few". He concluded by making a plea for the reconstruction of the priorities of the churches in the Pacific.

Lorine Tevi commented on the prophetic role and said that it is in times of struggle and crisis the prophetic role becomes relevant. The churches in the Pacific have been so comfortable because there have been no real struggles. In Fiji there is a struggle for the first time and the people are

beginning to question their faith seriously. In this situation, for the church to play its prophetic role there is need for an analysis of the socio-political and cultural realities.

Rev. Kasek Kautil of Papua New Guinea raised the question of how far it is realistic to keep the Church and State separate in the Pacific. In Papua New Guinea the political involvement of the Church is called for by the people and the common saying is that the Church is the people and the State is the people.

Finau Lokotui responded by pointing out that in Tonga the prophetic role of Tongan religion was not very effective until Christianity came, when the traditional beliefs, customs and values were challenged and thus the prophetic role of religion came into the foreground. The Church has a prophetic role in every society and in every country, not only in Fiji. The decision making of the Government will not always be right. If the Church and the State are inseparable how then can the Church fulfil her prophetic role?

The Chairman, Sevati Tuwere wanted the concept of religion and religionless Christianity clarified. "The word for religiosity in the Pacific in general is 'lotu'. Lotu is practically everything - Sunday service, prayers, gospel, charismatic renewal, spirituality. Are we now trying to say that we must move into a "lotu-less" Pacific? Lotu has become part of our culture. The three pillars of lotu - Christianity, the land (vanua) and government - have come to be part of the fabric of most societies in the Pacific. Once you isolate one from the three the whole thing collapses. Bonhoeffer's invitation to move into a religionless Christianity was in the context of a secular society. If we want to move in that direction we need to reflect on the parable of Jesus about someone cleaning up his house of a devil and leaving the house vacant. Seven devils came and occupied the house, making the situation worse than before. Religion as we have come to see it and feel it in the Pacific had been used from of old and we continue to do it today - lotu".

Ms Esiteri Kamikamica gave further explanation about lotu bearing in mind twenty years of her involvement in the ecumenical movement. For her lotu represented Christianity in the country. Government stood for the secular life and the vanua represented culture. She spoke of the social analysis she had undertaken mainly among the women and youth and her

realisation of the importance of a wholistic approach, the leaders of the vanua, which is the land system and the chiefly system, the lotu, which is Christianity in Fiji and the leaders of the Government coming together for dialogue.

Some of the issues raised in the background papers also were commented on and discussed in the plenary sessions. The question of how leaders are made in the Melanesian culture was raised with reference to Rev. Kerry Prendeville's paper on The Gospel - A Challenge to Pacific Culture. The Melanesian participants explained that the leaders were made on the basis of what the people looked for in the leaders of the community and this applied to both leadership in the Church and in the society in general. It is this principle which underlies the Big Man concept in Melanesian culture. Regarding the tradition that for ordaining a man the words of the Bishop and the lotu were not sufficient but there should be an abundance of food including pigs to endorse what was celebrated inside the church, Fr. James Mason spoke of the holistic approach in Melanesian culture, holding spirituality and secular life as belonging together, not compartmentalising them. Rev. Fiama Rakau of Vanuatu explained that in traditional Vanuatu culture leadership is based on heredity as well as personal achievement, and one evidence of personal achievement was the killing of pigs and possession of gardens. But today an important criterion for personal achievement and status in leadership is educational qualification. The higher a person is educated, the better is his chance for leadership in the Vanuatu culture.

Several participants wanted clarification about the participation of ordained ministers in political leadership, whether it is for increase of influence and power or for witnessing to the Lordship of Christ in the political sphere through a commitment to carry the Christian values into the political life. The response from the Melanesian participants indicated that though some go into politics with a definite commitment to make a Christian impact there are many ambiguities. Apart from the ambiguity in determining what the Christian position is in a particular issue, there is also the problem of the Christian priests or pastors being only a small minority among the parliamentarians.

Another question was whether in any of the Pacific cultures there is a concept of a Big-Woman corresponding to the Melanesian concept of the Big Man. Rev. Vasi Gadiki responded saying that in Melanesia women are

always in the background. Even in the islands of Trobriand and Kavieng where the ownership of property is through matrilineal system the women do not hold any political role in society. Fr. James Mason warned against making generalisations. He pointed out that in Solomon Islands not all the islands have the same system. Some Islands followed the patriarchal system while others like his own island, Isobel, had the matrilineal system. In Isobel, because the inheritance comes through the mother, women play a big role and there are some Big Women. After the Church came in the emphasis has been on the role of men.

Referring to the background paper of Rev. James Mason on Gospel and Culture, Dr. Judo Poerwowidagdo of Indonesia raised the question of the criteria or norms by which we judge or evaluate different cultures. If love of God and love of neighbour are affirmed as being at the centre of the Gospel, do we find the same teaching in other cultures, also, love of God and love of neighbour? Where is the uniqueness of the Gospel as the standard or as the norm for evaluating or understanding other cultures?

Fr. Mason explained that he was only trying to articulate the possibility of entering into the dialogue on Gospel and culture. He did not mean to make love of God and love of neighbour as the norm for judging or evaluating other cultures. What he had in mind was that probably others had other things too. John Pobee remarked that words like uniqueness, absoluteness, centrality, are the philosopher's language implying certain judgments on others and which have consequently confused our Biblical and theological discussion. "We do not begin to put scales or values for making judgment, but we throw them into the ecumenical pot in the hope that in the mutual exchange we will be able to understand much more deeply the mystery we are trying to talk about. We shall understand the fullness of concepts like love and justice only in the context of dialogue with people of other faiths or of no faith".

Dr. David Suh of South Korea asked for clarification on two points in Dr. S. Toa Finau's background paper on Gospel - Culture Dialogue - Towards a Christian Pacific Theology. The first was on the relationship between langi the heaven and Hau the chief. Does the chief get the power and authority from langi? What is the relationship between Hau and Fonua the little people? This is the kind of question political theology asks. The second question was how the missionaries or Tongan Christians related the Tongan heaven and religion to the God of Christianity. Is there a

difference between the Tongan Langi and the Christian God? Toa Finau explained that the term Hau was applied to the bravest warrior and also to the King, similar to Sau in Fijian. According to the tradition of ancestors the King Tu'i Tonga was divine because he is a direct descendent of tangaloa, the sky gods, within the Tongan polytheistic religion. The Christian missionaries used the Tongan terminology and chose the word 'otua for God. This god lives in the sky, in the heaven, but not in the pulotu, the place where the spirits of the dead went. Otua is the God of the Bible, the God of love, justice and righteousness, the Father of Jesus Christ. In Tonga they had many gods, many 'Otuas. The Tongan religion was polytheistic. When Tongans accepted Christianity some of the leaders questioned the integrity of the Tongan religion and burned down the shrines and the totems and the Tongan religion was wiped out. But Christians continued to use the term 'Otuas for God. Toa Finau said, "When I pray in English using the word God it takes time to warm myself. I am more at home with the word 'Otuas in my inner being".

Sam Amirtham suggested that Toa Finau's attempt to develop a theology of the sea, making the love of the sea as a symbol of unreturned love was very promising. "It is a friendly sea with some dangers and yet it is a symbol of love that is unreturned love". With regard to the criteria for evaluating cultures he shared an insight from C.S. Song. Instead of the question, what is the difference between Christianity and other cultures, we need to ask how we see other cultures differently from others because we look at them from Christ's perspective. "I am not looking for difference. I am looking for discerning the Kingdom of God within the culture". He also drew attention to another important issue in analysing cultures namely the question of power. According to Toa Finau's paper the chiefs had souls, but others did not, and this is an expression of power. "The kings at one stage questioned the power of gods. But who is questioning the power of kings? For understanding culture from a Gospel point of view power is social relationships is a key issue to be explored. Who has power? Who manipulates? Who uses it for his or her or their own benefit?"

Quoting the verse in the Book of Revelation which says "the Sea will be no more", Sevati Tuwere asked, "In what way is that text a carrier of the Gospel and in what sense is it the carrier of the near eastern or Jewish culture?" The responses from several participants brought out the contextual character of the Symbolism of the sea. This is true of other symbols too. For example, dragon in the Bible symbolises evil. In the Chinese

culture dragon is a symbol of goodness. For the Hebrews the sea was a symbol of threat to life and it is understandable that in their vision of the kingdom of God that threat to life should not be there. But in the Pacific people draw their source of life from the sea. The Pacific people do not see the sea as a threat to life but as a friend. Biblical exegesis in the Pacific will be re-contextualised and the Pacific heaven must have a sea. Sister Keiti Ann brought in another dimension about the present reality of the sea in the Pacific. "The sea in the past has been a source of joy. But today, the sea has been polluted through nuclear testing and the dumping of nuclear waste. Where I come from we cannot any longer go and swim in the sea. There is no use talking about our culture in terms of the past. What is the sea for us today?"

There was also considerable discussion on the role of the vanua, the land, as the basis for Fijian or Pacific identity. The question was raised as to whether in the face of the present realities of inadequacy of land to sustain all people, migration of Pacific Islanders to other countries, turning to other occupations of industry, trade and commerce the vanua should continue to be the focal point of Pacific Culture. In the Old Testament Prophet Amos, faced with the situation where from the simple agricultural economy people had turned to trade and commerce and the accumulation of wealth was accompanied by injustice and oppression of the poor, was not asking the people to return to the past simple relationship of a land based economy but to practice justice in the new situation. In Fiji and in the Pacific today how should vanua be interpreted as essential for the Pacific Culture?

Toa Finau explained that vanua was not just the land, the soil, but included the sea, the coral and the fruit of land and sea.

Akuila Yabaki spoke of the importance of the vanua for the self understanding of the Fijian people. "I come from a village, where my position as a member of the community is tied up with a piece of land, which does not belong to me as an individual but to the extended family as the land-owning unit". He further explained that "the Church and the Vanua" or "Lotu and Vanua" are essential components of the Fijian way of life. In the Methodist Church, the main church in Fiji, the Conference is made up of pastors and lay representatives including village chiefs so that the church is very much tied up with the social structure.

Reflecting on the concept of the vanua John Pobee saw similarities to

African culture in which land was crucial for personal dignity. He regarded the emphasis on the vanua as important for the question of human dignity and for grasping the meaning of the Biblical affirmation of the human created in the image and likeness of God. In Africa too, the land, the community and the chief go together.

The questions raised in plenary session were pursued further in five groups and after considering the reports from the groups the consultation adopted a statement which expresses the Consensus the members were able to arrive at. This statement is sent to the Theological Colleges and to the Churches in the Pacific and also to the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools to be used as a guideline for further exploration of the Gospel-Culture interaction in the Pacific, for the promotion of the Church's Mission witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for Salvation.

FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTATION

(a) Positive Affirmation

The Gospel is Good News of the love of God in Jesus Christ, His life, death and resurrection, also His continuing presence in the Spirit that empowers us to usher in the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel, therefore, affirms and enriches as well as challenges and transforms human identity for the wholeness of life for all. Culture is the total way of life that gives humankind individual and collective identity. Therefore, it is dearly valued. Nevertheless, culture is dynamic. In encountering other ideologies, races and cultures, every culture undergoes changes from time to time. So one's identity is found in the presence of the other.

Pacific Culture is based on the tradition of corporate communal living in which the islanders live in a giving and sharing relationship within different forms of chiefly systems (Big Man in Melanesia, Matai in Samoa, Chief in Fiji and King in Tonga).

Several positive elements in the different island cultures such as the practice of hospitality, and corporate responsibility for one another, the principle of sharing and caring, the tradition of resolving conflict situations through processes of reconciliation have suggested the possibility of discerning the presence of Christ even before the Missionaries had brought the Gospel. The missionaries did not bring Christ to the Pacific. They came to bear witness to Christ and brought the knowledge of Christ as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

While the Gospel of Jesus Christ affirms and fulfils the positive elements in the Pacific cultures, it also brings judgment on those elements of the culture which hinder the fulfilment of God's own ultimate purpose of love at all levels of human life.

When the values of Pacific Cultures are threatened by the impact of secular ideologies or socio-political objectives the power of the Gospel is discerned as coming to fulfil and not to destroy.

The dialectical relationship between Gospel and Culture is an on-going process. It is a life-long journey. It demands constant reference to God's action in Jesus Christ and the discernment of his presence and action in the enhancement of the quality of life of humanity and the enrichment of human life in its totality.

(b) Issues for Further Exploration

The following is a list of issues for further study so that the Gospel-Culture interaction may become clearer.

1. The ceremonial as well as social practice of Kava or Yaqona drinking in several Pacific Island cultures and Betelnut chewing in Melanesia and Micronesia.
2. The development of elitism in the Pacific Islands through the uncritical accommodation of western capitalist practice within the chiefly systems.
3. The threats to the principle of Sharing-Caring outlook in the corporateness of Pacific communities: The temptation to abandon the sharing or "give all" outlook in favour of grabbing or "get all" outlook.
4. The place of women in the Church and Society in the Pacific Island Cultures.
5. Conflicts of ideologies - the opposition of the Pacific way of life to both the Soviet type of Communism and Western Capitalism.
6. A critical analysis and evaluation of the Chiefly System and Commoner relationship from the perspective of the Christian objective of an egalitarian community.
7. Critical reflection on elements of traditional culture in the Pacific which appear to be incompatible with social economic progress, such as the practice of Bride price payment in Papua New Guinea, the Kerekere System, funeral and wedding feasts, gift giving for special occasions such as weddings, funerals, ordination etc., and the extended family system.
8. Identifying the elements of Pacific Cultures which are contrary to Gospel values as well as those which the Gospel fulfils and strengthens.

(c) Recommendations to SPATS

1. SPATS should adopt a programme to promote the study of Gospel and Culture extending over a period of five to six years with Conferences, Institutes or Workshops organised regionally as well as in different Island countries. Such programmes should have the participation of theological colleges and churches.
The issues to be considered for study of the dialogue between Gospel and Culture should include both the theology of Gospel and Culture interaction and the specific aspects of Pacific Culture such as the Chiefly System, the traditional concept of Kerekere, Vanua and Lotu, men and women, family system, and Gospel critique of Pacific Culture.
2. SPATS should initiate cooperation with other third World regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America for the study programme and also seek the services of ecumenical communication agencies like the WACC.
3. The Pacific Journal of Theology should be revived so that it can provide a forum for discussion and dialogue on the Gospel-Culture issues. The Journal should use a language and idiom which will be intelligible to the ordinary congregations of the Pacific Churches.
4. SPATS should initiate more active consideration of the role of women in church and society in the Pacific by theological colleges and churches.
5. SPATS should encourage the involvement of Pacific Churches in a process of enrichment of Christian Worship with the creative and meaningful use of cultural symbols such as those in architecture, music, songs, colours, instruments and other aesthetic elements. One of the objectives of such enrichment is to enhance a person's cultural identity and the experience of God in integrating the whole of life.
6. SPATS should prepare a study booklet for promoting the study at congregational level - with some basic material relating to Gospel and Culture in the Pacific, political awareness and the status and role of women.

7. SPATS should initiate a programme of political education, providing adequate tools for social analysis for enabling the people in their reflection, meaningfully relating the socio-political situations to the Gospel faith.
8. SPATS should help the member Theological Colleges to include the Gospel-Culture concern in their curriculum and in the organising of syllabuses for particular courses.

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MESSAGE OF GREETINGS

by
Samuel Amirtham

Dear friends,

It is my pleasure and privilege to bring greetings and good wishes to all of you on behalf of the PTE Commission and staff, especially moderator, Dr Imasogie, and on behalf of the World Council of Churches, especially its general secretary, Dr Emilio Castro. The PTE is happy that it has been possible to enable and, in a way, cosponsor this consultaion with the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS), and I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the SPATS officers for having positively responded to our suggestions and gone on with the preparations in spite of the uncertainties associated with the present conditions in Fiji. I am so glad that so many colleagues in theological education from the schools and churches as well as representatives from other associations, in Melanesia and Asia, have come to this meeting. With you, I look forward towards a fruitful exploration of the theme and its implications for ministerial formation.

As you may know, Gospel and Culture has been indentified as one of the chief ecumenical concerns since Vancouver and there is a task force in the World Council of Churches instituting and coordinating the study of this theme. There have been a couple of ecumenical and local consultations already, and the results of our deliberations will be felt into that process. In fact, it is a very old concern in the ecumenical movement, and one of those issues which will always be contemporary and where scope can never be exhausted. It is indeed encouraging that we can look forward to the contributions of the Pacific to the contemporary ecumenical thinking on this subject, though our joint deliberations are here.

It has been a long established tradition in the PTE that when the Commission or its Executive meets, this is done in conjunction with a consultation in the region on a theme relevant and related to ministerial formation. So it is that this time we have the PTE executive committee members as ecumenical partners and through them the presence of theological educators from other parts of the world at this meeting. They are here mainly to listen, but also as dialogue partners and theological interlocutors. It is also a

symbol of our conviction that all local and regional theologies have to be in dialogue with theologies coming out of other contexts for mutual enrichment and corrections. To be ecumenical is to be rooted in one's own context and at the same time be open to and be in dialogue with the experience and insights of other contexts.

The Vancouver Assembly defined culture as follows -

Culture is what holds a community together, giving a common framework of meaning. It is preserved in language, thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes, symbols and presuppositions and is celebrated in art, music, drama, literature and the like. It constitutes the collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations still to come. (Gathered for Life, p.32)

Defined in this manner, as something to be celebrated as God's gift and human achievement, one may forget the negative elements in each culture, which are life denying rather than life affirming; elements that can be oppressive and manipulative, created by groups within every culture to keep others in subjection and bondage.

Today, the Gospel and Culture theme raises at least three fresh issues:-

- 1) how culture functions in each society;
- 2) how Gospel and Culture interact with each other in any context, and
- 3) how the receptor culture is treated when the gospel is communicated from one culture to the other.

Let me make three simple observations about how Gospel and Culture relate to each other. Firstly, Gospel and Culture are integrally related to each other. There is no gospel except through the mediation of a particular culture. Jesus Christ was a Jew; he lived in Palestine and it was through the Jewish culture - its expectations and framework of meaning - that God's kingdom and love were proclaimed. Incarnation means God's way of revealing Himself through the particularity of a culture.

Secondly, Gospel is not bound to any one particular culture. The Gospel is about the power of God salvation and this happens when it is mediated and accepted through the medium of a people's own culture. So gospel

transcends any culture, and sheds itself of some of the vital elements of one culture as it moves on to another culture.

A good paradigm is what happened when the gospel moved from the Jewish culture to the Greek culture. Law and circumcision were fundamental elements of Jewish religion and culture. Some Jewish Christians believed that Greek Christians would also have to hold on to these things as well if they were to be true to the gospel. And as we know, the first ecumenical problem to be solved by a council was just this. The resolution on this issue was :-

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden, than these necessary things." (Acts 15 : 28)

If we read of the conditions yet accepted as some ecumenical solutions, even today, we will find these were also a compromise solution. And yet it exempted the Gentile Christians of the obligation of circumcision and bondage to law. It was reaffirmed that Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian are both saved by grace through faith and not through observance to law or adherence to the culture.

Thirdly, the gospel judges, illuminates and transforms every culture. There are elements in every culture that need to be judged by the gospel. When it comes to the question of a culture being judged by the gospel, one may ask if there are gospel criteria for evaluating culture. The Riano Consultation in 1984 put it this way :-

"There are identifiable signs of the gospel wherever the fullness of life is granted to all people, especially the poor and the marginalized, and wherever love, freedom and justice are experienced in the light of the cross and resurrection. However, we doubt whether it is possible and proper to the international approach to sort out gospel criteria for evaluating cultures."

Their answer was that there are no absolute universally applicable criteria, but communities of faith must discern this from within each culture. This is an ongoing task of every Christian Community as it critically relates itself to the other cultural contact.

Let me mention just two aspects of the task of theological education in this

regard :-

1) Theological education must equip the church to express the Christian faith and communicate it authentically through the local culture. It is a sign of the 'local church come of age' to be able to shed the cultural garb in which it was brought and put on indigenous garments. The issue is one of contextualisation. To change the metaphor, C. S. Song said (at the inauguration of the new Institute to Theology and Culture in Asia recently at Kyoto, Japan, where the name was corrected to 'Programme' rather than 'Institute' and which we will soon change to Asia and Pacific) that Jesus developed a theology of eternal life through the Samaritan water and not through the Jewish water. Sadhu S. Singh of India used to say, Indian Christians should drink the gospel water through the Indian crucible. The gospel spring through the soil of every culture develops a slightly different taste. What would be the specific taste of the Pacific water of life?

2) Theological education must help the churches to develop gospel patterns of ministerial leadership in the church. The basic gospel insights about leadership is that of servanthood after the manner of Jesus who gave himself up for others. Often leadership patterns in church take models from local cultures which are contrary to the gospel pattern. "The Gentiles lord it over them. It shall not be so among you." (Matt 20:24) So in the church we have to continually critique our styles and patterns of leadership.

A related issue is the ministry of women in the church. We find in the Gospels that Jesus Christ accepted and enabled women ministering to him. He said of one woman who recognized him as the suffering Messiah through an act of anointment that her name would be remembered wherever the gospel would be preached. It was women who stood under the cross when other disciples deserted him, and it was to some of those women that the privilege was given to be the first witnesses of the resurrection. And yet this has been forgotten and distorted in the history of the church. The ministries of women are not yet fully accepted because of certain types of biblical exegesis reinforced by cultural values. The authority of Scriptures, critique of culture, shows that new ways of doing theology are all inter-related in this issue.

You may have heard that the WCC is launching an ecumenical decade of the Churches' solidarity with Women from Easter 1988. I am also glad to say that the PTE Executive has just decided to allocate its resources on a

very high priority basis to equip women for their varied ministries in the church. I hope very much that the question of women and ministry will be one of the issues that will taken up in this consultation.

This does not mean that I want to suggest any agenda for your consultation. I have only shared some of my thoughts. I look forward to listening to your explorations and to participating in the discussions with great eagerness.

May we all have a fruitful time together.

Main Theme Address

I

A CASE STUDY ON GOSPEL AND CULTURE IN THE PACIFIC

by

Finau Tu'uholoaki

Introduction

Let us take the Kingdom of heaven (God) as the particular element of the Gospel that has led to a particular form of spirituality in Fijian Christianity. The objective of this application is to discern a Fijian spirituality that involves the gospel aligning with the historical trend in Fijian history which point towards what we consider as signs of abundant life witnessed in the Gospel.

The spirituality is not invented by the believers it is rather discerned from experience. Thus the steps include a reading into aspects of Fijian tradition from the point of view of 'eschatological hope' toward fulfillment, and a definition of the Fijian Christianity which provides the parameter within which she operates and brief probe into the impact on crisis in Fiji today.

The Contact

I was visiting a village for the first time as the minister of the circuit. On arrival the village catechist took me to the spokesman who led us to the chief. The catechist presented our sevusevu (presentation of yaqona as the traditional ground where the guest notifies presence and requests permission to be. For the host, it is an act of reception and affirms your will to be). The catechist explained that I was sent by conference to be watching over the spiritual care of his clan and tribe.

The yaqona was received by the chief's spokesman who made the various traditional protocols and thanked my coming and assured cooperation from the chief and the people, and then towards the end began to sum-up by projecting into the anticipated future. It is the language used in the summation that appears as a formula in all, if not most, occasions on

receiving the traditional presentation. Having heard it in the first village, and the circuit consisted 52 preaching appointments, all 52 had their expression of my reception but the ending fell into a particular pattern. The formula is an anticipation.

The Expression (Chief's spokesman)

- | | | |
|----|---|-----------------------|
| 1. | Cabe tu na ika i takali
lit. trans. Rise of the fish in Ocean | Mana
May it be so! |
| 2. | Ruru tu na cagi ni yabaki
lit. trans. Calm be the wind of year | Mana
May it be so! |
| 3. | Sautu mada ga na vanua
lit. trans. Prosperity over the land | Mana
May it be so! |
| 4. | Tubua tu ga na sala i nai bulubulu
lit. trans. Over grown be the way to the
grave or
Sau yawa ko mate
Be afar o death | Mana
May it be so! |
| 5. | Dua tiko ga na keda i wau
lit. trans. One only be our club | Mana
May it be so! |
| 6. | Dei tikoga nai tutu vakaturaga
lit. trans. Stability to the state
Chieftainship | Mana
May it be so! |

The meaning of each expression gives you an economical, social and political aspirations of Fijian life. These six expressions are a hoped for future but finds a type of character in daily existence.

Look at expression (1) it anticipates a time when the fish will just rise from the ocean - was this a wishful thinking?

The Fijian season is marked by the surfacing of the balolo fish (sea worm). This in our calendar year is November.

There is also time marked by nuga fish. These two types of fish rise at a level

that is close to the shores, it becomes a time of plenty in terms of fish. The season gave to all the opportunity to come and gather. So Expression (1) is an anticipation and hope when fish first rose from the ocean. A time of plenty came during the reproducing season.

The Expression (2) calls for a time of calm. An island in the Pacific is aware of dry, very wet and hurricane seasons.

The Fijian calendar anticipates 3 particular divisions:

- 1) blooming of flowers outside and the fish reproducing - This is February - September.
- 2) time of harvest - March - April
- 3) preparation of beds for plantation - May to August.

That is why Expression 2 touches base because the 3 main concerns are for existence and can only be operative when calm was to be present.

Expression 3. There is a month of harvest. It is the Fijian time of joy. The land brings forward plenty. This falls on our present March and April. The expression anticipates the land will bring forth abundance.

Expression 4. It is an expression that negates 'death'. If the path to the grave is to be over grown then surely death has no place. They always had hope in a structure that will produce life. The months of the June to July are months for preparation, clearing, tilling and planting.

It is interesting to see how death is summoned to be at distance. So in their agricultural life they physically plotted out the possible harvest of the next season.

Expression 5. Let there be only one authority to which we all are accountable. And it is that authority which regulates our unity.

Expression 6. This is a crucial affirmation of chiefly role. The call on the chiefly status to be stable, unmoved (it does not mean static). The picture envisioned in these expressions is very interesting, a village, where there is abundance of food for all. There is calm; and amazingly death has no place. Everyone is bound by one authority and it is in the chief that each find their role. It is in that role that one finds identity. It is this particular 'Identity' that gives a particular form to the village.

So the Expressions are grounded in a particular frame of reference. There is a particular base from which these expressions take form and the element of transcendence is very much related to their existence.

The Gospel and Culture

The Gospel entered this fertile ground and also spoke of transcendence in terms of the Kingdom of heaven (God).

Let us begin by establishing the possible condition of the Kingdom of heaven as proclaimed in the Gospel. Two aspects of the gospel that I would invite you to ponder upon are:-

- 1) Resurrection
- 2) Kingdom of heaven

The condition is best elaborated in Revelation 21 : 1-4. Eschatological hope was marked by vision that anticipated a time when:

.....He (God) will wipe away every tear from the eyes and death shall be no more, neither will there be anymore crying, mourning, pain and no more sorrow.

Acts 4 : 32-35. In presenting the power of the resurrection we see a striking feature on vs. 34. There was not a needy person among them..... (The reason being) vs. 32 that no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common.

Revelation 22 : 5. God's Lordship becomes the stabilizing power forever. In the Fijian text the word for Lord in this verse is Turaga which is also the term for chief or Lordship. It carries more the over tone of centrality. Once the centre is affirmed, it is from there that the rest take strength and stability. It is in this simple form that the gospel planted its seed in Fijian culture. No doubt there was transformation of extreme practices. But in the basic expectation of life, already present in the Fijian culture, with the elements of eschatological hope, there was an enabler for the gospel..

The pattern of life of the gospel was generally communal in nature, so the value system of the gospel and Fijian culture had their common points. The difficulty still lay on the issue of Lordship. It should be understandable as

to why the chiefs, especially Cakobau took so much pain in subordinating himself to this new Lord witnesses in Jesus of Nazareth. It would be safe to say that once Cakobau was converted he did not simply get baptized, but the gospel got married with chieftainship. The gospel challenged; so conversion took place; it also confirmed a pattern of life. There seems to be a clear correlation between the elements in the gospel and the expectations built into the six expressions with Fijian cultural setting.

It is out of this contextualizing of the gospel that two forms of spirituality takes birth.

- 1) A spirituality that is centred on a transcendence that is unrelated to this present world. This is the centralizing of this new chief who is the Lord from the beyond.
- 2) A spirituality that pertains to commonality and the emphasis is on 'giving' which is a strong element in the culture and a gospel emphasis.

This is the distinctive feature of Fijian Christianity. It has structured its mission on this particular basis.

The Fijian Christianity and the new Communities

It appears that with the coming in of 'visitors'; attempt was continually made to maintain the uniqueness of Fijian Christianity. At times an attitude of triumphalism resulted from these two distinctive modes of Fijian Christianity. The emphasis continues to be transcendence and the element of 'giving all'. However a new pattern of life has also knocked on Fijian Christianity. It is a pattern styled after 'getting more'. And the interesting feature is the accommodation of this new form into the old expressions. Nowadays we hear what could be a 7th form of expression.

The Expression

Levu tu mada ga na nomudou silini
Plenty to be your money

Antiphonal Response of Hope

Mana
May it be so!

This expression shows the mode of time. The hope is for money and plenty.

In terms of expression and hope it is pretty valid. However in terms of pattern of life, and the Christian and cultural emphasis of giving in the Fijian context this hope may never be realized.

The gospels's emphasis on culture to be giving has even planted a seed of negativeness in any form 'getting more'. So much is the emphasis on the negative impact of modernism that the 'gospel' has emphasized the need to return to her simplicity. The world comes to Fiji and emphasizes hold on to what is yours? I interpret this in terms of faith that affirms transcendence, chief who is Lord of all and a pattern of life 'in giving' so there is enough for all. However the attempt to do this is within a context that is structured with a 'getting more' style of life. The gospel has attempted now to proclaim a 'giving all' structure but live herself in a 'getting more' establishment. We have now developed two types of spirituality:

- 1) the positive of 'giving all'
- 2) the positive of 'getting more'

The problem that we face in Fiji today is a spiritual problem. The intensity of the problem has been aggravated by the Christian church not being able to identify the gospels he proclaimed. At one time she identified the gospel in 'giving' with the value of which pertained to a particular context and people. Now almost over night she has moved to another extreme.

The crisis in Fiji no doubt raises a number of issues, and for many it will be difficult to accept the possibility that the Holy Spirit is at work in our situation now. It is challenging a spirituality that is accountable to the Lordship who was witnessed in the Jesus of Nazareth and relevant to Fiji. Its validity is not whether our spirituality is like Australia, New Zealand, America, Africa, Europe or Asia. Their spirituality complements our differences and in our similarity we affirm each other. The validity of Fijian spirituality is accountability to the Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel has already found ground in the Fijian context and applicable within our given cultural context here and now. Do you recognize the Lord within our context or do you find it hard, because you are too busy denouncing particular actions?

Main Theme Address
II
**GOSPEL AND CULTURE: BIBLICAL
PERSPECTIVES**

by

Otele S. Perelini

The theme of Gospel and Culture is by no means a new phenomenon. It existed right from the beginning of Creation, when man tried to grapple with the many questions of his existence, the meaning and purpose of his life in the light of his belief and faith in the divine. From the beginning of Creation, God dealt with His people, His eternal purpose of the salvation of mankind through His chosen people Israel, brought His message of salvation within the whole context of humanity and culture.

In the Old Testament, we read of God's dealing with a specific people - the Hebrews. His saving acts were expressed through the culture of the Hebrews and also those through whom the Hebrews came into contact with. In the New Testament, the theme Gospel and Culture has been there right from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Incarnation is indeed God coming to mankind; therefore it is about God coming to culture. Jesus of Nazareth was born into a Jewish family, culturally and religiously he was a Jew. The Christian church also that emerged after his resurrection began to interact with its environment, bringing Christian faith and the Gospel into constant contact with culture.

Hence, Gospel and Culture is a relationship which is as old as God's dealing with mankind. It is as old as the Church itself. Since the Gospel is about God's coming to mankind, it is therefore about God's coming to culture, for there is no existence outside culture. Any attempt to understand and interpret this divine message inevitably requires an understanding of these human cultures. According to Dr Paul A. Crow, ¹ "One way to interpret the twenty centuries of Church history is to perceive this history as the interaction between Gospel and Culture". Pope John Paul II once said, "the Churches dialogue with cultures of our time is a task in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake ... the future of man depends on culture". ² It is as H.R. Niebuhr once said, "the enduring

problem".³ The contemporary relevance of this issue - and its urgency for the Church has arisen, said the 1983 Assembly of the World Council of Churches, because of three timely developments:

- (i) we are coming to a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of culture and of its authentic plurality;
- (ii) we have a better understanding of the ways in which the Gospel has interacted with cultures; and
- (iii) we have a clearer sensitivity and honesty about the problems, yes even the evils, caused during the western missionary era when other "receptor cultures" were ignored or replaced with Western Culture.⁴

Thus the importance of the Gospel in relation to Culture should by no means be undermined. It should be an issue of crucial importance for the Pacific Churches. Small our island nations may be, insignificant they are when compared to the world powers and also to the highly technological countries of the first world, the Gospel of God's salvation the Bible speaks of, must still be related and interpreted in the light of the Pacific cultural realities. Small these communities may be, yet they are so different in many ways. The bringing therefore of the concept of the Gospel in relation to culture expresses the conviction that every culture should have its own access to the Gospel. This relationship should be clearly manifested in the many aspects of our indigenous cultures.

The theme Gospel and Culture requires a re-examination of what we mean by Gospel and Culture. I find Dr Green's definition quite appropriate for my purpose in this paper. For Gospel, we should read "the freedom of God to restore the identity of the human person" and for culture "the way in which a person as an individual and social being strives for and expresses one's identity".⁵ If Gospel as an initiative, an offering of God, is freedom of God for the identity of the human person, then culture responding to that divine initiative, reflects the Gospel if it reflects the freedom of God for human identity.

In the Old Testament, we read of God freeing his people from bondage in Egypt. Here we confront God's saving act of His people from a culture that oppresses, dominates, exploits and enslaves. In the story of the Exodus, we witness the existence of two peoples with two totally different cultures. We see the Egyptians as the dominant one - the ruling and powerful culture over

the enslaved Hebrews. The Hebrews were forced to serve as slaves under the oppressive rule of the Egyptians. In this situation, God emerged as the liberator of the Hebrews and he brought about the confrontation between Yahweh and Pharaoh, a confrontation that eventually led to the liberation of the Hebrew people. God's act of liberation, freed the oppressed to restore their own identity as a people. The object of God's concern here was with the enslaved, the despised, the powerless, the outcasts and those whose freedom to fully develop their own personal identity and culture was being denied.

The social system in Egypt followed a strict bureaucracy within which the functions of the various classes were rigorously regulated. The Pharaoh, his civil servants, the army, and the priests together made the ruling class. As slaves the Hebrews suffered under their rule. Their freedom to develop themselves fully as a people, or express themselves culturally as a unit was limited. Then they cried out in their oppression, and God heard and delivered them from their oppressor. Yahweh upheld their aspirations and delivered them from to develop their own identity freely as individuals and as a people. Yahweh abhorred domination and exploitation of the weak by the strong, but allowed freedom of people's development the fullness in the light of their faith and belief in God. Each human being was created in the divine image of God, a blessing from God almighty which every individual should strive to fulfil. Any force that hinders a full development of individuals or peoples into the divine image of God puts itself over and against God.

Since the contact period between Pacific islanders and Europeans, both cultures have co-existed throughout island communities. The Pacific has benefitted tremendously from this contact. Much of western ideas and value systems have been moulded in, or even replaced indigenous systems. Western culture asserted itself very strongly to be the dominant one. Today, despite popular move of self-determination within individual Pacific communities, yet, dominant western influences are still very strongly felt. Relationship between the Pacific and western powers today, is governed by suspicion, fear and insecurity. Not only that Pacific peoples have to learn to deal with powerful socio-economic influences but also with the overwhelming military considerations of nations that have interests in the Pacific. Certain Pacific nations have been persuaded that their security lies in arms, nuclear power and military strength.⁶ With dominant, aggressive and inconsiderate policies of foreign powers, the Pacific shores have been

the target of much unwanted and controversial activities dictated by super-powers: -e.g: nuclear testing, disposal of nuclear wastes and other industrial wastes, consistent exploitation of our sea resources. Small nations without many resources other than healthy and happy people, its clean and unpolluted environment - land sea and air, which guarantee good quality life of its indigenous population for infinity years - a gift and a blessing from God to the Pacific people is now being threatened. This is indeed oppression and exploitation. The resources for better living of Pacific islanders are gradually being destroyed and exploited because of the selfish and thoughtless ends of the strong.

God's Gospel of salvation involves liberation from domination, and a freedom to develop oneself to fullness. God calls humanity to freedom and to fullness of life within its own identity and culture. The imposition of super powers' military philosophy and ideals to be tested within our own inheritance, irrespective of the indigenous people desire and aspiration violate not only human rights but God's own moral principles. It reflects clearly oppression and domination of the weak by the strong.

In some Pacific nations, aspirations towards self-government and independence are being withheld and denied. Policies of consistent dependency economically and also culturally advocated by colonial powers stunt growth and progress to self identity of communities as people - a cultural entity with all its values and systems.

The confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal was much more than simply a conflict of religious beliefs and affiliations. It was a conflict between an egalitarian culture resulting from the worship of Yahweh and a hierarchical structure of Baal's cult. Baalism consisted of a whole hierarchy of gods, of whom Baal (lord) was the most important in the pantheon.⁷ The Old Testament frequently speaks of the Baal of a given place, or refers to Baalism in the plural, suggesting the existence of local deities, distinct from one another, "lords" of the various locales. The cult of Baal was characterised by gross sensuality and licentiousness, as well as human sacrifices. It became a great threat to the religions and cultural unity of Israel. Bright says that if Israel had embraced the religion of Baal it would have been the end of the nation.⁸ The confrontation between Yahwism and Baalism, which came to a climax on Mt Carmel, led not only to the defeat and overthrow of the religion of Baalism in Israel, but also the defeat of its autocratic and hierarchical culture, characterised by inequality and injustice.

Amos the prophet of eighth century BC Israel, strongly condemned widespread corruption in the Northern Kingdom. Inequality had developed, and injustice became the rule of the day. The wealthy and those in power took advantage of the poor. They dealt deceitfully with false balances, and bought the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sold the refuse of the wheat. (Amos 8:5-6) The book of Hosea reflects the same message: "there is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bonds, and murder follows murder". (Hosea 4: 1-2) Over a hundred years later, Jeremiah referred to the same corruption in the following words "... because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain, from prophet to priest every one deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, "Peace, peace" when there is no peace". (Jeremiah 8: 10- 11)

In the teachings of the prophets, injustice, exploitation, covetousness and greed are severely condemned. In eighth century Israel, a culture emerged where the rich and the ruling minority controlled the life of the masses. They controlled the resources of the community, and exploited even what little the poor had. By virtue of their advantageous situation, they created a culture (sub-culture) that continued to maintain their status quo in their strict hierarchical system. Yahwism was in constant conflict with Baalism, which was indeed a conflict of values between a more egalitarian culture based on justice, love and righteousness and the unethical and hierarchical Baalism - a conflict between a culture where resources were evenly distributed for the welfare of all, and one which only a limited minority enjoyed the benefits. The Pacific Island communities and cultures reflect much the same evils condemned by the prophets. Island cultures are very much influenced by new economic values and principles. We learn that in order to be successful capitalists, we should be aggressive individuals, shrewd with our clients, and should aim at maximum profits and gains. These new values not only contradict old traditional aspirations of sharing and communal responsibility, but are responsible also for the emergence of a minority social class of elite who rules and controls the island economic community. Traditional Samoan concept of wealth is not based on how much you have accumulated, but on how much you have shared out. This old traditional criteria of measuring one's wealth contradicts the new measure of economic success based upon the competitiveness and shrewdness to acquire more and more.

Traditional authority, which includes also the privilege of ownership of land and property, are in the hands of the few chiefs - matais, royalty, ratus etc. With the emergence of new economic systems - capitalism, such traditional hierarchy are in a privileged position to fully utilise and exploit the situation to their advantage. As a result, there has developed, within most Pacific Island communities, a rich ruling minority who controls and enjoys a large share of the national resources. In the name of tradition and culture, they maintain their privileged status, creating a large gap between them and the ordinary man.

Against such ruling minority the prophetic message of eighth century prophets clearly apply. What God desires from individuals and from communities in justice, righteousness and honest dealings with each other. Amos 5:24: "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like ever flowing streams". God desires a society and a culture, where equality reigns, where God's resources of the land, air and sea utilised and shared for the common good of all - a society where individual rights and freedom are fully respected - an egalitarian community under God's rule.

Dr Moon 9 identified the oppressed Hebrews in the Old Testament with the ochlos in the New Testament. The ochlos were the poor, the lowly and the outcasts of the society in contrast with the ruling class of Jerusalem. In the Gospels, Jesus associated himself with this group. He showed much compassion towards them (Mk 6:34). He went to them, ate and drank with them, and even praised some of them because of their humility and sincerity of heart (Luke 18 : 10-14). They suffered various forms of oppression, alienation and exploitation by the ruling class of the time. Many of them were victims of their own social systems and traditional values.

The religious leaders were the dominant group, who enforced conformity to their cultural and religious restrictions and responsibilities. Failure to fulfil these responsibilities and duties would lead to alienation from the community. In the light of contemporary Judaism, we see God's Gospel of Salvation being confined and imprisoned with Jewish cultural traditions and rituals. In such situations, we see culture exerting itself over against the Gospel and in isolation from the real aspirations of the people.

Jesus' teaching in the Gospels seemed anti-culture and anti-religion. He was always in conflict with the religious leaders of his time on many issues: the Sabbath, the Law, Jewish traditions of rites and rituals etc. He

denounced the religious leaders and became a friend of tax-collectors and sinners. He even praised the Good Samaritan over against the priest and the levite who were more concerned with religious duty and traditional cleanliness than the performing of an act of love. Jesus constantly accused the religious leaders of hypocrisy and deceit. In these instances, Jesus was neither anti-religious nor anti-culture - he was only condemning false religion and false culture. Jesus was against religion and culture that oppressed, exploited and alienated people. A religion which denied man of the freedom of the Gospel of Salvation is false religion. A culture that stands in the way towards full development of human aspiration and identity is false culture. Jesus laid emphasis on the good and the welfare of the human being. Any religion and culture that undermines the value of the human person is considered by Jesus to be false. Jesus condemned a culture that put its traditions, its laws and rituals over and above the good and welfare of people.

Jesus emphasised human value and the sacredness of human life. Every human being as God's creature, has value, spiritual dignity, rights, interests and aspirations that should be respected. He stood for the infinite value and the sacred rights of human personality. Such a lofty view of human worth and sacredness of life, would consequently allow room for freedom of expression of identity, and development of human talents to their fullest. A culture that is ruled by such principles would indeed be real culture. For Jesus himself, every human being deserves dignity, respect and freedom of development.

In the light of Jesus' teaching, each culture comes under judgement. Some would see Jesus and his Gospel as the fulfilment of all cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of true society. ⑩ In each Pacific Island culture there are numerous violations of the dignity and sacredness of human personality and individual rights because of long standing cultural traditions and taboos. In politics, many of the islanders are denied of their right to decide on many issues that directly affect their own environment and destiny. In some Pacific nations only a small minority have the right to vote and to govern. This system is rooted in long standing cultural tradition. Women in the Pacific are denied much freedom of expression and self development of talents because of traditional and cultural restrictions. Over and against the Gospel, Cultural taboos and restriction have exerted themselves. It would be somewhat dangerous if culture elevates itself over and above the Gospel. Culture should always be under the constant judge-

FOOTNOTES

1. "One Gospel, One Church Amid Many Cultures" in The Ecumenical Review Vol. 39 April 1987, p.154.
2. ed. Joseph Gremillion : The Church and Culture since Vatican II the Experience of North and Latin America; University of Indiana Press 1985, p.26.
3. H.R. Hiebuhr : Christ and Culture, Harper & Row 1951, p.1.
4. David Gill, ed. Gathered for Life : Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the W.C.C., Vancouver, Canada 24 July - 10 August 1983, p.32.
5. Dr A. Greense : "The Freedom of God and the Identity of the Human Person" in the Ecumenical Review, Vol. 39, April, 1987.
6. Suliana Siwatibau : "A Theology for Justice and Peace in the Pacific" in The Gospel is not Western : ed: S.W. Trompf. - Maryknoll, New York, 1987.
7. Art : Baalism ... Encyclopedia of Britannica Vol. II, p.942.
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9. Cyris Hee Suk Moon : "culture in the Bible and the Culture of the Minjung" in the Ecumenical Review, Vol. 39, p.180ff.
10. H.R. Niebuhr : op. cit. p.42.

Main Theme Address

III

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON GOSPEL AND CULTURE IN THE PACIFIC

by

Finau Lokotui

In this presentation, I wish to employ an existential understanding of religion. Such an understanding defines the concept of religion as being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern. This means that religious faith is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, and God is the content of the concern. Religion as such, implies that the unconditional character of the concern refers to every moment of our life, to every sapce and every realm. That is, there should be no distinction between the sacred and the secular for they are understood to be within each other.

The understanding of religion as ultimate concern also implies that religion is the meaning-giving substance of culture and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses and actualises itself. In short, religion is the substance (or essence) of culture, culture is the form (expressions) of religion. Such an understanding prevents the establishment of a dualism of religion and culture, for every religious act is culturally formed.

Christianity claims that the God who is manifested in Jesus Christ is the true God, the true subject of our ultimate and unconditional concern. Such a claim points to God's fullest manifestation, Jesus Christ, as the bringer of a new reality within and under the conditions of humanity's predicament. But Jesus is also subject to those human conditions yet he overcame them through His unity with God and expressed in His sacrificial submission as the Christ. The Christian message then is the message of salvation as it demands the transformation and the absorption of the human reality into the new reality brought about by the Christ of God. The message of salvation is good news when it expresses a new hope for the somewhat hopeless plight of the human reality, resulting in the movement from a situation of estrangement to a situation of fulfilment. It is good news insofar as a transformation is made. It is good news insofar as fulfilment is actualised. It is good news insofar as God-in-Christ was, is and will be the cause for the

transformation and the fulfilment. It is my conviction that this is the heart of the Christian message of the gospel of new life offered by Christ and realised in Christ. This, I believe, is what religion via the Christian tradition should seek to express in culture. Its expression in culture would only be a genuine and honest response to the demand of the Gospel "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." The reflection offered in this paper are made in the light of the above understanding, namely that Gospel and Culture are inseparable and we cannot have one without the other.

It is necessary to start with a basic question: to what extent have the Pacific churches and the theological schools "ventured" into their task as the vehicle and agent of God's redemption (the heart of the gospel) to the peoples of the Pacific? This question is asked in the light of the conviction that Christianity (and Gospel is what Christianity stands for), came as a fulfilment to the total way of life (culture) of the Pacific peoples - the political, social, economic and the religious.

The Gospel is not mere good news; it is the good news. The content of the gospel is life: yet it is not mere life but the life. Such a life is embodied in the offering of God's life for humanity, which was fully expressed and manifested in Jesus Christ. From the perspective of Christianity, Godliness, as expression of receiving and partaking of God's life, is fully realised in a Christ-like life. The very nature, therefore, of the Gospel demanded that what it stands for, namely, God's life as embodied in Christ, should be concretely expressed in one's culture and environment. This implies that the basic demand of the Gospel is to transform culture (the totality of the human situation) so as to ascertain a movement from expressing a mere life to actualising the life. The Gospel creates a new atmosphere: culture acquires a new expression. Such a relation between Gospel and Culture, I believe, should be maintained and promoted by the churches of the Pacific. I am convinced that any understanding of their relation contrary to the above claim needs revision, at least, or total abandonment for the best. If the Gospel is not fully realised in a concrete context, it falls into the temptation of idealism. If culture expresses a different gospel (or text) it is swallowed up by the sin of apostasy.

To grasp a fuller understanding of the above claim pertaining to the relation of Gospel and Culture, it is imperative to make a general survey of the Pacific prior to the intervention of Christianity. It is my wish that such an undertaking will seek to satisfy twofold purposes:

- (i) To highlight the urgency to re-orient the direction in which the Pre-Christian Pacific is heading. In essence, it will seek to point out the need for 'transformation' and the urgency to recognise the value of the human factor of God's creation, the people of the Pacific in particular.
- (ii) to validate the claim that the intervention of Christianity was a response to the need mentioned above. It will seek to shed light on the claim that Christianity was concerned with implementing God's concern for the transformation of the Pacific society. In so doing, it will seek to create a new atmosphere, new environment, a new context, befitting a new essence, a new text, the gospel of life.

A general analysis of the policy of the Pacific societies revealed that rulership was based on the concept of divine linkage. As such, rulers were believed to have inherited certain characteristics of 'sacredness' and 'reverence'. Such an understanding inferred certain implications on the way of life of the Pacific peoples. It creates attitudes of respect, reverence and fear. Such attitudes were expressed in a deep sense of obligation, loyalty and gratitude. At its best, the traditional policy of the Pacific societies was a two-way process, where both the rulers and the ruled observed certain obligations towards each other. At its worst, it could have ended as a one-way process whereby the 'ruled' were doing more and more for their 'rulers' while they, in turn enjoyed these privileges and doing less and less for the 'ruled'. There were certain implications of this one-sided relationship. It led to the creation of doubt pertaining to the distribution of power and its maintenance. It seems that the unwise delegation of power was effected to determine the "survival of the fittest". When trust was being let down, breakdown in relationships was inevitable. The result was political instability. A political re-orientation was therefore needed.

Pacific societies were generally marked by a system of ranking. It implies that one is identified by one's existence and accessibility to a social system determined by rank rather than by achievement. It was observed that the higher one was in the social system, the demand calls for nothing less than the affirmative. That is saying that human worth and dignity seemed to be acquired as one is able to climb the social ladder of rank and status. It seems to me that such a society survives by the notion that "once a commoner, always a commoner". Such a society kills the spirit of positive and creative thinking. Consequently, it will also kill the spirit of positive and creative

action. This is the kind of society that the Pacific adhered to and to which Christianity came into.

It is my observation that religion in the Pacific in the pre-Christian era was the basis for the total way of life of the people. The observation was made in the conviction that the political and the social life of any society expressed the religious beliefs and attitudes of that society. Religion as such is a human phenomenon - something that men and women do - which can be observed and carefully described.

There are certain characteristics of Pacific religions prior to the intervention Christianity. The dictates and demands of religious belief and practice reached out into every aspect of life. Most religions in the Pacific believed it was a religions duty to be submissive. Such submissiveness was expressed in the presentativesof the best that one had to the gods or and his representatives as a token of gratitude and as a means of seeking divine favour thereby dwelling in superstition. Submissiveness was further expressed in the observances of taboos, thereby creating a distinction between the sacred and the secular. Further still, submissiveness was expressed in the performance of sacrifices thereby creating a false notion of deliverance from the worries and dangers of the human experience.

This was the situation which Christianity came to face. The realities of the political, social and religious life of the Pacific demanded transformation thus laying the foundation that Christianity came as a blessing. It was a blessing in the sense that it takes into consideration the significance of the human condition. The time had come for the human factor to be elevated from the realm of things into the realm of personhood.

The proclamation of Christianity to the Pacific should be realised as a challenging and difficult task. It was observed that Christianity aimed basically at saving the Pacific from heathenism. The messengers of the good news were, at first frustrated by the strong opposition that they faced, the inadequacy of their preparation, and the lack of constructive and creative imagination. The nature of opposition was further observed as basically a reaction against anything new. Such an attitude seemed to have sprung from a desire to preserve their existing "status quo", as reflected in the struggle by most Pacific societies to safeguard the old values and standards which were believed to be more relevant to their "then existing needs".

The message of Christianity created fear amongst the Pacific societies. This fear was based on the assumption that as Christianity presented a strange scale of values and moral standards, it also threatened to annihilate most of their treasured customs and traditions. In reality, the Pacific people were not prepared to trade their old values with those of Christianity.

As reflected in most Pacific societies, those in favour of tradition and what it stands for, were anxious to keep the fear among the less privileged sector of society alive! It was obvious from the intrusion of Christianity that it meant the decline and, possibly, the disappearance of the traditional power, honour, and privileges that the very few in society had enjoyed for centuries. This was a significant loss and as might be expected, the old order was prepared to fight to retain its position. The truth of the matter was that it was those higher up in the social ladder who had most to lose from the encroaching influence of Christianity. Herein lies the basis for their antagonism.

The antagonism from supporters of the old order towards Christianity was aimed at its teachings. Christianity taught, among others, that all of humanity were equal in the sight of God, that everyone was a sinner by nature, that no one, chief or otherwise, had any right to appropriate to oneself any property belonging to another and that, in order to get to heaven, everyone, irrespective of rank, had to submit to certain moral discipline. These teachings were unpopular within the old order since it tended to undermine their status, privileges and authority. It is my contention that this was the first positive contribution of Christianity towards the betterment of a people that have suffered under the yoke of traditionalism and religiosity. Yet, there is more to it than simply saying these truths. They need to materialise in the lives of the people. One need not be reminded that Christianity advanced upon a Pacific society that was hierarchically structured, politically, socially and religiously.

The increasing impact of mission efforts and their growing experience in dealing with people saw the breakthrough of Christianity in most Pacific societies. This was aggravated by the introduction of formal education, for it helped people to understand the reality of their plight. Schools also helped to combat some of the superstitious beliefs of the people and facilittate the understanding of the new concepts that Christianity had to introduce. The setting up of schools were referred to in most Pacific societies as the setting up of "mental light houses" in societies that had survived in the dark. Its

establishment was also concerned with mental development, resulting in the redemption of mis-informed and misled mentality. One could also infer that the introduction of "formal education" came as a means to promote the total development (and subsequently the transformation) of the people. This is implying that the mind is equally as important as the soul, for it had been proved that intellectual development created insight into ways and means necessary for dealing with the complexities of life.

The body, too, is worthy of attention. This was observed when the messengers of Christianity were successful in some of their "medications". This was certainly instrumental in advancing the cause of Christianity as reflected in the setting up of dispensaries in some Pacific societies. In retrospect, one may imply that a healthy environment is best suited for a full realisation and promotion of the total human situation. Once again, whether consciously or unconsciously, the physical plight of most Pacific societies were being attended to in the name of Christianity. One may ask as to whether it is a coincidence with the demand of St Paul that the "body is the temple of God".

The emergence of the Pacific from a fragmented society to acquiring a centralised government in one form or another, also implies changing requirements. This was seen in the introduction of the "legal machinery" into most Pacific societies. This was significant for two reasons:

- 1) The legal machinery limited the power of the privileged few, thereby raising, to some extent, the social, economical, religious and political status of the under-privileged.
- 2) It demanded the abolition of the practice of "recognised" (habitual) slavery, thereby emancipating the underprivileged from the arbitrary powers of the privileged. This was observed in most Pacific societies as the declaration of rights.

So far, the discussion was aimed at portraying the 'integrating' contribution made by the intervention of Christianity over the Pacific societies. This was realised when the state of affairs of the Pacific peoples had improved in a positive direction since the intervention of Christianity. Essentially, it was to show that the essence of Christianity was to promote the total salvation (and transformation) of the people of God, in general, and the Pacific people, in particular.

One cannot deny that the Pacific is presently undergoing a process of

CHANGE in all aspects of its life. Change is an indication of growth and life. That which does not change is not growing and is, therefore, not living. When a new life is born, in order for that life to reach maturity and fulfilment, it must pass through stages of development, thence to maturity. Life without change would be stagnant, boring and senseless. Such a life would be better off in a museum.

The peoples of the Pacific must face the reality that one's "ways of life" must be practiced according to existing life situations. In the past, they were practiced according to the needs and demands of society and the environment in which people lived. Today, environment does change so must the needs and life situations. We are living in the Twentieth century and it demands certain kinds of needs, understanding and way of life. This implies that to idealise the past, and everything associated with it, is folly.

This is not denying that the present had its roots in the past. The genuineness of this claim is obvious. But to live in the twentieth century and still maintain the viewpoint of a century or two ago is incomprehensible. The past offered the present interesting and treasured memories. But one must adapt oneself to the needs of the present existing realities in order to have a sense of 'direction'. The deciding factor then between that which is living and that which is dead is "change", for one cannot simply preserve that which is living.

So far, we have witnessed the growth of the Pacific Churches from missions to being autonomous and self-governing. It was in fact a response to the demanding reality of change. Yet one had to ask a very basic question - "Had the churches of the Pacific responded adequately to the reality of change, with regard to her theological and missiological concerns?" In other words, how far had the Pacific Church indulged herself in her role as conveying the redemptive message of God-in-Christ? Is the Church still faithful to her role as the bringer of life and fulfilment to a people that desperately needs it? An attempt will be made to reflect on these questions and hopefully offer some recommendations.

It had been observed that before Christianity came most of the Pacific countries were politically unstable. The rule of the chiefs was "authoritarian" and "absolute". Thus it is possible to assert that Christianity brought political stability to most of the Pacific countries. At the same time, Christianity further encouraged "loyalty" to respective political systems.

As a consequence, most of the Pacific churches had become very much a state church. There are certain implications of this relationship:

1. The close association between state and Church effectively steers the church's course off her prophetic role to speak against social and political evils.
2. The relationship also defined and limited the role of the church to be primarily the guardian of the soul rather than the sustainer of the whole of life for the whole person.

This unfortunate relationship between state and Church has led the Churches of the Pacific to fail miserably in her mission and role - to be the "conscience" of the Pacific. One may also infer that the Church had not responded adequately to the persisting political and social issues of the day. Perhaps it would be more honest to say that the Church "chose not to be involved" in politics. In retrospect, the Church could be rightly described as an accomplice in a policy of maintaining privileges, power and wealth to a very privileged few. The slogan "not what you are but who you are" seems to be a genuine inference to the situation in the Pacific.

In view of the above understanding, it is only fair to say that in order for the church to be effective in the Pacific, she had to be an autonomous institution. She had to divorce herself from the influence and hypnotising power of the state in order to be 'concretely involved' in the political issues of the day. Only as such can the Pacific Churches be instruments of change in a society which is oppressive. Only as such can the Pacific Church be faithful to her call to be a "light" unto the nations. Only as such can the Pacific churches be genuine in her 'redemptive' role.

It was observed earlier that politics was closely related with the social life of the Pacific peoples. It was therefore inevitable that Pacific societies were also influenced by Christianity. Christianity then became the foundation for a new understanding of the social life in its totality. Perhaps the greatest influence of Christianity on the social life of the people was the observance of respect for "human dignity". Yet one could ask the question: "Has the church done enough to better the social conditions of the people?"

Unfortunately it is my contention that the Pacific church had failed to live up to her call to be the "Good Samaritan", the one to bear the griefs and carry the sorrows of the stricken and the afflicted. Perhaps one could make a

legitimate claim that the Pacific church had "inherited" the mentality prevalent among the traditional priests and, to some extent, the missionaries. This is reflected in the observation that ministers have acquired the privileges of middle-class citizens, thereby divorcing themselves from concrete involvement in the fight for social equality. Instead of attempting to tear down the social barriers, the church chose to prolong it. Subsequently, the church survives and thrives on "conservatism". As such, the church had failed to realise and take note of the grievances of the people.

The Church today, in the name of Christianity, demanded unquestioned honesty and loyalty from its members. In the name of Christianity, the Church seeks to terrify the people instead of seeking to unravel the worth of humanity. The Church ceased to be the servant. Instead, she chose to be the master. The Church, as an institution, had become the centre of the church's life instead of the reality of the human condition. Perhaps Paul Tillich was right in claiming that the social conditions of an era can be a real hindrance to the spiritual welfare of humanity. It is therefore imperative for the church to "conscientise" the people, to make them aware of the Gospel truth that no one is subjected to a social system that belittles or takes for granted human dignity and human worth. The Church, in order to be faithful to her mission of promoting fulfilment, had to challenge and overcome new horizons that are yet to be challenged and overcome. Only as such would the church be honest and genuine to her role as the vehicle of God's redemption for all of humanity, at all levels of life.

It was observed earlier that the Pacific sense of religiosity was very natural. But it seems to me that it was a wrong sense of religiosity. One cannot deny the fact that it offered meanings and purpose for the lives of the Pacific peoples. However, it was sufficient and suitable to their own situations and circumstances at a particular time in history. The reality and demand of the Gospel imply a movement away from this misleading notion of religion to face realistically the human condition.

The claim voiced by Bonhoeffer, which calls for a "worldly interpretation" of Christianity, appears to me as a befitting substitute for the Pacific sense of religiosity. Bonhoeffer stirred our minds with his affirmation that the world has "come of age" and grown "beyond religion" so that we must present a "religionless christianity". This concern seems strange but Bonhoeffer sees religion from a different perspective. He sees religion as dividing life and the world into two spheres of life, sacred and secular, or

holy and profane. Religion sees certain men and women, professions, acts and books as sacred and the rest of life profane. Men, women and actions dedicated to the sacred are of higher value than those dedicated to the profane. Life to the religious man and woman is the scene of tension and conflict between the demands of the sacred and the profane. The more religious one becomes the more time and energy one gives to the sacred realm and the less one spends on the profane.

When Bonhoeffer called for a religionless Christianity, he was convinced that humanity had outgrown religion. That is, religion had disappeared because humankind had "come of age". Thus Jesus offers men and women the opposite of what religious men and women expect. The religious man and woman assumes that by turning one's back on the world and by giving more time and energy to the sacred, one will be rewarded with happiness and the absence of suffering. But Bonhoeffer is convinced (so am I) that the biblical God calls humanity to plunge into the godless world and share the sufferings of God. God had put "us" into the world and while "we" are here, it is with "this world" that we are to be concerned.

The call for a religionless christianity was an attempt to attack the idea that there are any spheres of life that do not belong to Christ. Christ cannot be shut up in the sacred society of the church. The Bible sees the human being as a totality and it is the human as a whole who is claimed by God. Thus the place of the church, as Bonhoeffer sees it, is not on the borders of life but at the centre of the village and society.

The church in the Pacific is therefore in need of reconstructing its priorities and its mission. It seems to me that the church of the Pacific had been dwelling for too long on the Tertullian's concept of what has Jerusalem to do with Athens! In retrospect, the Pacific church has a lot to do with the Athens of the Pacific societies. Moreover, the Pacific church seems to be very comfortable (and survives) with Cyprian's notion of "no salvation outside the church". In this way, they manipulate and project the people from the realities of their needs.

The Pacific churches were entrusted with a task, namely to be a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord". The way of the Lord implies that Christ demanded the transformation (other prefer the redemption and liberation) of Humanity in their totality. The best that the Pacific churches could do in appreciation of the sacrifice of the past is to make some

progress towards the completion and fulfilment of a dream. It was a dream that one day "justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream".

Let me conclude by relating an observation made by Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy saw humanity as a herd of cattle inside a fenced enclosure. Outside the fence are green pastures with plenty for the cattle to eat, while inside the fence there is not enough grass for the cattle. Consequently, the cattle are trampling underfoot what little grass there is and goring each other to death in their struggle for existence. The owner of the herd came and when he saw the pitiable condition of the herd, he was filled with compassion for them, and he thought of what he could do to improve their condition. So he called his friends together and asked them to assist him in cutting the grass from the outside and throwing it over the fence to the cattle. And they called that charity.

Then, because the calves were dying off and not growing into serviceable cattle, the owner arranged that they should each have a pint of milk for breakfast. Because they were dying off in the cold night, he put up beautiful, well-drained and well-ventilated cow sheds for the cattle. Because they were goring each other in their struggle for existence, he put corks on the horns of the cattle so that the wounds they gave each other might not be so serious. Then he reserved a part of the enclosure for the old bulls and the old cows over seventy years of age. In fact, he did everything he could to improve the condition of the cattle.

And when they asked him why he did not do the obvious thing - break down the fences and let the cattle out, he answered: "If I let the cattle out, I should no longer be able to milk them!"

How would you relate this observation to the reality demanded by the Gospel "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"? May God be honoured in this undertaking and glory be unto Him forever!

THE GOSPEL'S CHALLENGE TO PACIFIC CULTURES

by

Kerry F. Prenderville

This paper presents two aspects of the Gospel's challenge to Pacific cultures: a challenge to the kinship system, the basis of Pacifican communities, and a challenge to Christian priesthood and leadership within the Churches of the Pacific.

Introduction

Some years ago in the Solomon Islands I was giving a course to catechists and looking at some of the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Ghari people of Guadalcanal. The object of the course was to give a positive, yet critical approach to traditional religious beliefs as one of the many foundations of the Christian faith, and to show how God was already present among the various cultural forms of the Solomon Island people long before the missionaries arrived on their shores. At one stage of the discussion an older catechist stood up and asked about his ancestors who had died before the Gospel had been preached - where were they - were they in heaven or hell? Before I could react to the old man's query, he categorically proclaimed that if his ancestors weren't in heaven, then he didn't want to go there either!

How does a missionary react, not just to the question, but to the cultural and religious realities and concerns of the old man himself? He had cut through all the theological speculation and went straight to the point: was it possible for his ancestors to obtain the same salvation he himself was hoping for as a Christian? He obviously thought they could. Apart from the question of soteriology - which would be a theology course in itself - the old man endorsed the value Solomon Islanders place on their kinship systems, and the importance of maintaining their relationships with the ancestors. The kinship system is not just for the living, but is extended also to the dead.

On another occasion, several village communities along the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal were preparing for the ordination ceremonies of a young Ghari man to the priesthood in the Church of Melanesia. There were some heated discussions about the collection of food and pigs from the villages for distribution to all the guests after the ordination. Some of the speakers were reluctant to place too heavy a demand on their people for pigs, and it seemed as if there could be a shortage, which in turn would reflect upon the generosity of the district and be a cause of shame. One speaker stood up and explained the importance of the occasion and how the whole district had the obligation to show this in the distribution of food and pigs after the ceremony. He argued vehemently that the words of the bishop and the lotu were not sufficient to ordain a man, but an ordination also required an abundance of food and pigs for distribution to endorse what was celebrated inside the church. A heated discussion followed about the effectiveness of ordination. In the minds of some people, the sacramental ordination and conferral of ministry by the bishop were of lesser importance than the recognition and installation of a "big-man" in the lotu. In the generosity and abundance of their gifts of food to the visitors, the people of the district were also "ordaining" one of their own to the status of priest and "big-man".

It is not just in the rites and ceremonies of ordination, but also in the models and images of priesthood and Christian leadership in the Pacific that the Gospel offers a serious challenge to the leaders, pastors, and priests of the Christian communities.

This paper will offer a brief response to these two examples in the light of the dynamic tension which exists between Gospel and culture.

1. The Gospel Challenge to Kinship

One of the striking features of Pacifican societies is their close dependence and relationship to kinship based communities. Many anthropologists look upon the kinship system of a particular society as the key to understanding the cultural matrix of that society.¹ Through the terminology and behavioural patterns within a kin group, social relationships are expressed and ideological values are seen in practice. A kinship system illustrates many of the cultural ideals and concepts a people have of how life should be lived, and expresses an identity and a social security among members of that society.

Throughout the history of salvation, and particularly in the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity - the Divine Love Story - God has unveiled his salvific love for all people in anthropological and kinship terms. In the New Testament we observe the development of this revelation and salvific love through the person of Christ as a relationship to Father to Son, the incarnation and inculturation of the Word into human realities of history, family, and a particular socio-political group of people. Christ became human by becoming a member of a kinship group.

In the synoptics there is an interesting twist to Christ's kin-based relationships; (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; and Luke 8:19-21.) An enigmatic scene is recounted when Christ's mother and some of his relatives came looking for him and found him occupied with a group of people. Word is passed on that he is wanted, but his response takes us by surprise; "Who is my mother and who is my brother?" Christ goes beyond the conventional interpretation of these kinship terms of "mother" and "brother", and offers a new dimension which is a challenge to every kinship system in any culture, but particularly to the kinship based societies of the Pacific.

For the exegete there is a very straight forward interpretation to the underlying meaning of Christ's response, but for the ordinary Christian in the Pacific, caught up in the everyday relationships of their own people, Christ's message is not so simple to understand and apply. "Who is my mother and my brother?" takes on a similar challenge as is presented to every culture in the parable of the good Samaritan and the question of responding to the challenge "Who is my neighbour?" In both instances the Christian is called to venture out beyond the security of his or her own ethnic or cultural group.

The cultural foundations of a kinship system are limited to biological bonds of consanguinity and descent, affinity through marriage, and socio-legal bonds of adoption. However, in the context of the account related in synoptics, Christ goes beyond the conventional understanding of kinship terminology. In accepting the message of the Gospel, the Word of God, one assumes a further relationship, with all the obligations and responsibilities similar to those in a kinship system, but outside the cultural categories one is familiar with. Those who have accepted the Word of God, have established a new relationship with Christ and His Father, and at the same time have established a new relationship with other men and women which goes beyond the categories of blood and marriage, and transcends all

boundaries of language, culture and race.

The terminology of father-son, mother-daughter, brother-sister have a wide interpretation in many Pacific societies that go beyond the limited terms of reference contained in the English language. A Pacific Islander can refer to many people in his or her kinship group as "father", "mother", "brother", and "sister". The terms refer to a clearly defined relationship of how one should act and behave towards those who are called "brother", "sister", "mother" and "father" outside the immediate family.

When we apply these terms to the Gospel code of kinship in our reference to all other people as our "brothers and sisters in Christ", we are then obliged to act as brothers and sisters to people, especially those outside our cultural and ethnic categories of kinship. As the history of Christianity has shown, this is indeed very difficult. Most Christians prefer to restrict the kinship code to those inside their own culture. In Mark's account he highlights the dichotomy of "those outside" one's kin group who also want to talk with the Lord. Too often the cultural and social restriction imposed on entering into relationships with those "outside" one's kin group, restrict the effectiveness of God's Word and the life of the Christian community. This restriction of the practice of the Gospel message is still felt by many members of Christian communities in Polynesian and Melanesia.

While the response of the old catechist brings out some of the important values contained within a kinship system, it also challenges the Christian to go beyond them. While kinship may be the key to understanding a cultural code of behaviour and social values, it can also limit the praxis of faith where the Christian community is but one element in the fabric of a multi-cultural society. The Pacific is very quickly becoming a community of communities, and the Gospel challenge to the kinship systems is often a very real one.

2. The Gospel Challenge to Ministry and Priesthood

In this section I refer mainly to the Catholic priesthood and my own experiences in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Over the last few years a lot of material has been published on the subject of leadership in Melanesia, looking at traditional models and comparing them to emerging roles of leadership within the wider context of the political and economic sectors of society.² As far as I am aware, has not been done with regard to the priesthood and ministers of religion. (comparing models of leadership

within the Melanesian Churches.)

Leadership roles differ radically in ideology and institution between the traditional structures of Melanesian and Polynesian societies.³ With few exceptions, Melanesian leadership is based on personal qualities of achievement and success, by which an individual achieves social status and prestige. By contrast, hereditary patterns of leadership through kings, chiefs and nobles, and other positions of rank by birth are commonly found throughout Polynesia and Micronesia.

The common form of leadership in Melanesia described as the "Big-man" model of leadership is often a literal translation of the title given to a leader: wane baita for the Kwaio of Malaita, Solomon Islands; tinoni loki for the Ghari of Guadalcanal. In societies which are relatively small and diverse, each socio-linguistic group consists of relatively small kinship based communities in which there is no permanent political office. Leaders emerge largely through the exercise of their own ability and charisma to maintain a group of followers. In some areas, particularly among the island and coastal communities, there is increasing evidence to associate the success of a Big-man with possession of supernatural power or mana as an important factor in his success as a leader. In these areas it is not uncommon to find a close dependence of leadership roles on traditional magico-religious knowledge and practice.

The Melanesian pattern of leadership is very informal and personal in character when compared to other forms of leadership in the Pacific. The leader is not elected or formally installed in office. His power to coerce his followers in economic production and social behaviour is limited and indirect. He does not possess absolute authority and therefore his position can always be challenged. His position is not a permanent one and depends largely upon his own ability to accumulate wealth for distribution among his followers, as well as his own personal ability to promote the common good and prestige of his community.

So by conversely presenting this paradigm of leadership in Melanesia it could be said that whoever is seen as wealthy and generous with prestige and status, who is concerned for promoting the welfare of the community, and has control of spiritual and temporal power; such a person can be understood in Melanesia as being a **Big-man**. Such was the role and status given to many missionaries in the early days of evangelization in Melanesia. This

image was endorsed by many roles and activities early missionaries acquired who became builders, plantation managers, doctors, mechanics, politicians and administrators. This image of priest as **Big-man** has also been endorsed by many quasi-cultural rituals added to ordination ceremonies of indigenous priests. This image of priest as **Big-man** is unfortunately an image Melanesian priests and pastors have inherited.

Another interesting phenomenon of priesthood and leadership has also emerged in Melanesia, which is not so obvious in Polynesia. Priesthood and ordained ministries are seen as platforms from which a religious leader can extend the parameters of his influence and leadership into the realms of politics and parliament. Some of the more notable examples of priesthood and politics in Melanesia would be: Rev. John Momis, a diocesan priest from Bougainville and one of the longest serving politicians in Papua New Guinea's parliament, who has also been Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of the Melanesia Alliance Party, and Deputy Chairman for the Constitutional Planning Committee prior to Independence in 1975. Alexis Sarei, the elected Premier of Bougainville had also been a diocesan priest from Bougainville.

Rev. Cherubim Dambui, a priest from the Diocese of Wewak, was elected Premier of the West Sepik Province. The first Chief Ombudsman for Papua New Guinea, Ignatius Kilage, had also been a diocesan priest, the first to be ordained from the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Fred Reihl, who was at one stage Papua New Guinea's High Commissioner for the United Kingdom with accredited status to the Vatican was a priest belonging to the religious congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. In the Solomon Islands, Kamilo Teke, the first priest ordained from the island of Guadalcanal left his ministry and was elected to parliament and served as a Cabinet minister and Deputy Prime Minister. In Vanuatu, Rev. Gerard Leymang a diocesan priest from Port Vila Diocese, was also an elected parliamentarian and Leader of the Opposition. At the moment, Rev. Walter Lini of the Church of Melanesia is the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, and four of his cabinet ministers are also ordained ministers of religion.

While there are many factors involved in this correlation of religious leadership and political office in Melanesia, it could be argued that the Churches in their formation programmes for priesthood have uncritically assumed a Melanesian model of leadership in the formation of their clergy.

It is possible that Melanesian Christianity has accepted a relative and surface model of **Big-manship**, - adapting only some of the external cultural forms of Melanesian leadership, without seriously considering the functions of Melanesian leaders within their communities.

However, when we look at the Gospels we can also see some confusion and tension between Christ's preaching of the Kingdom, and the way in which this message was received and understood, particularly in the political-religious arena. Even for the apostles, the Kingdom of God was often understood as referring to the socio-political realm of the deliverance of Israel from the colonial power of Rome, and the re-establishment of an independent State of Israel. The apostles also misinterpreted their role as leaders and ministers in the coming and proclamation of the Kingdom.

In Chapter 10 of St. Matthew's Gospel, Christ calls together those whom he had chosen and instructed them on how they were to conduct themselves in their ministry and work. From this instruction the following points are particularly relevant in constructing a Gospel model of Christian leadership in Melanesian where the Gospel ideal radically challenges some of the assumed cultural norms of **Big-manship**.

1. When the candidates are called by name Christ gave them spiritual power over the world of the spirits, so they are not just operating with a mandate for the social and political institutions of society.
2. They are sent first of all to their own people to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, missionaries in their own culture to establish the values and standards of God's salvific presence.
3. They are to minister to those who are alienated from within the community by any one of a number of possible causes; physical, social, cultural, political, racial or economic. They are instructed to seek out those who are prevented from sharing in the fulness of life within the community, and to restore them as free and liberated persons.
4. They are not to become mere wage-earners, relying on a salary and economic returns for their ministry to the community. Instead they are to become dependent upon the community for their support in the things necessary to maintain a living. They are not to rely on material things and supports to prop up and compensate for their ministry. Their support is from their personal faith and personal commitment to Christ and his message.

5. They must be prepared to suffer many hardships and misunderstandings, even persecutions and indignities from their own people. Their own kinspeople will turn against them because of the message they preach. Their presence in the community will always be a threat and challenge to accepted social and cultural behaviour and values if the community. The basis of their relationship among their own people will change because of the message they represent and announce.
6. They should never use pressure or force on the members of the community to accept the message they bring. It is an invitation they freely offer. If they **AND** Christ's message are not accepted they should move on.
7. They will remain ordinary people even though they have an extraordinary mission. When they were chosen on this mission they were no different from the rest of the community members. Therefore they must always identify with the ordinary people of the place, and there should be no change in their social status because they have now become messengers of the Kingdom of God.
8. In assuming this role they have to make a radical choice in their social life and personal interests. In effect, this may demand they have to declare their primary allegiance to Christ, over and above the social and political interests of family, clan and community; in short, in conflict with their cultural programming.
9. They should not be concerned too much about defending the message they bring. It is not their own personal mission. It is the message of Christ, and he has guaranteed the continued presence and assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit which brings results and success, not the efforts alone of the human agencies.

Even after Christ had explained the terms of reference he was handing on to his apostles, there still remained in the minds of some of them, the need for a certain recompense in human terms, a **quid pro quo** for what they were about to undertake. It was the mother of Zebedee's sons who prompted Christ to make even more explicit the terms of reference for the future leaders of the Christian community:

You know that among the Gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men [**Big-men**] make their authority felt. Among you this is

not to happen. No: anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
[Matt. 20:24-28]

This does not mean that the traditional model of Melanesian leadership has nothing to offer the leader of the Christian community for today. One of the primary functions of the leader at both the clan and the village level was to provide for, and maintain an integral common good, an integrated welfare for the whole community. A **Big-man**, a leader who was not committed and concerned for the welfare of the whole community in all aspects of life did not remain long in that position. Generosity and service among all the members of his community were of high priority for the **Big-man**.

If one was to look at the functions of traditional Melanesian leadership (and also for Polynesia and Micronesia) rather than the abuses of this position, **Big-man** leadership would offer many positive elements for consideration in a programme of ministry formation for the pastor and the priest. In adopting models from within a culture, the cultural norms must always be challenged by the Gospel and authentic Christian values if the message of Christ is to be brought into the present realities of Pacifican communities. In a most pragmatic way - in the manner they carry out their ministries - Pacific Island pastors and priests themselves confront one of the greatest challenges today in the task of inculturating the Gospel message into their cultures and communities. It is therefore on this most radical expression of service and discipleship from the New Testament that a paradigm for Christian leadership and ministry in Melanesia and the whole Pacific must be developed. In a sense, the Pacific Island pastors, priests, catechists and lay-ministers are going to be the greatest challenge to the Gospel message among their own people.

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Background Papers
II

GOSPEL - CULTURE DIALOGUE TOWARDS A
PACIFIC THEOLOGY

By Samiuela Toa Finau

A Prologue

The Tongo (Mangrove) tree draws its life from three basic sources of life commonly shared by all the Island Communities of the Pacific region; namely, the sky, the land and the sea, and the immediate environment. Its life is environmentally identified with smelly mirky water and mud. Beside the Pacific Theological College there is a small forest of Tongo. You will have to personally enter the forest to really experience the seemingly purposeless and chaotic nature of the hosting ground; you will notice the cluttered seedlings poking their heads out above the muddy water; you would have to reach out to that branch when one of your feet does not find a landing quick enough as it sinks in to the swampy ground; you would feel its leaves; you would notice its roots piercing down towards the mud below; and finally you would find the required fallen tree with many branches now dry enough to make an 'UMU (the Tongan equivalent of a Fijian LOVO, the ground oven). You take your pick, enough for you to carry back home, then you start your 'frog-walk' back out where you went in. Your 'frog-walk' at this time will be much harder because of the weight of your load upon your shoulders. The hint here is to look for firm foot-marks and step on those foot-marks, and hopefully you would be able to make your way safely out of the swampy Tongo Forest.

Definitely it is not a place for tourists, neither for sightseers. Only the surrounding community would recognise the contrasting usefulness of the Tongo forest to its hosting environment. Contrasting to its seemingly purposeless and chaotic nature is the multiple life-supports it provides to the human community. The Tongo forest is a source of oxygen; it provides a wind-break; it provides wood for housebuilding, fencing, shelter-building,

firewood. Its bark provides the rare type of dye for decorating wood-work, tapa and ornaments etc. Its swampy ground provides a sanctuary for fish to breed and grow; for crabs; for eels.

Today, most of the Tongo forests in the Islands are under threat from extension of villages, extension of land for buildings, development projects, pollution from industrial wastes, and sheer unnecessary destruction of the Tongo.

It is appropriate for me at this point to admit that I am not at this gathering as a theologian. I am here as a keen student of Pastoral Theology; presently engaging in the ongoing struggle of the College in its participation in our common search for a Christian Pacific Theology. My particular role in our corporate effort in the College is within the Arts of Ministry courses that I am presently teaching [namely, Pastoral Care: Pacific Context; Clinical Pastoral Education: Pacific Context; Marriage and Family Life; Cultural and Pastoral Counselling: Pacific Context and Ministry Today: Pacific Context] and is to struggle together with the students in critically evaluating our respective cultures (eg. in one of the classes there are twelve different countries of the Pacific represented) and try to pinpoint the "strengths" (ie. those aspects of culture which enhance our respective cultural way of life) and "weaknesses" (ie. those aspects of culture which do not enhance our respective cultural way of life) and try to react to those aspects from our own cultural contexts. At this stage we are still struggling to find out how such courses should best be conducted to become a realistic learning experience for us all so that we may be able to make a useful contribution to our respective churches and peoples. Our resources need building up.

Thus the nature of this position paper will be an Awareness Enhancement Exercise only. And I am thinking and speaking here as a Tongan, a PTC community member. I do not claim that I am Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. I may be qualified to speak for one perspective only of the Polynesian culture, but definitely I am not qualified to speak for either Melanesia or Micronesia. I am fully aware of my cultural limitations. And I beg my fellow Polynesians to bear with me. And to our friends from Melanedia and Micronesia please allow me to share my thoughts with you. Hopefully there are some 'land-marks' on the line where we share some common cultural roots. And to our distinguished guests from the PTE Committee, and our friends from abroad, please be patient with me as I try to find my way through the 'Tongo forest'!

Because of the delicate nature of the search for a Christian Pacific theology I have chosen not to propose any Tongan concept or concepts, item or items, that are peculiar only to Tonga or to Polynesia, and not to Melanesia and Micronesia. I believe that we should take our search to go beyond what is local to what could be regional, Pacific-wide, which makes our task more difficult. Now the only small flickering light that I see, points me to go back into the past to the world of my Tongan ancestors. Taking a journey to my past is rather a 'swampy task', but I think it is worth taking the risk. May be the most needed 'seedlings' for our search could be found there.

I wonder what were the basic things that our Pacific ancestors had in common? What gave them the will to live? What gave them the 'life-pulse' required for survival? What were the primordial sources of life they had in common?

Those are important questions, because the answers to those questions will help us to really reach back to our respective cultural roots. It is my hope that this awareness enhancement exercise will somehow offer a 'land-mark' or 'land-marks' to the theologians here present who are our guides in our search.

To achieve the project aim of this position paper, I have chosen to exclude the Christian Bible and Theology from my presentation. In the time and space that are mine, I prefer to concentrate on a brief reflection on the past of our Tongan ancestors and their world to get into the origin of our cultural heritage, to the roots of the Tongan way of life, and to give it a good hearing. Many Tongans are Christians today, many are only nominal Christians, and many identify themselves with the Christian church. But generally speaking all Tongans are still somehow keeping intact the 'cultural-umbilical-cord' which links their lives with the primordial sources of life that were the means of survival for our ancestors.

The Awareness Enhancement Exercise

[This section of the paper is based entirely on the following authorities:

John Martin, M.D.: "An account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean, compiled and arranged from the Extensive Communications of Mr William Mariner. Vol. II, 1827.

Edward W Gifford: "Tongan Society", Kraus Reprint Co., 1971
 "Tongan Myths and Tales", Kraus Reprint Co. 1971.
 A.H. Wood, MA, BD: "History and Geography of Tonga", Reprinted Border Morning Mail, Wodonga, Vic. 1972.

As an Island villager, I will now proceed to share with you what I believe to be our Tongan cultural roots:

Cultural "Wombs of Life"

The expression 'wombs of life' is my own. They are referred here to the pre-existent order that was assumed to be there in the beginning, from which all latter existence and life came into being. Those were the primordial sources of life as they were to our Tongan ancestors in the past and they are still observed today as such.

Interestingly so, both the Tongan cosmogony and the Tongan creation myths agreed that there was a pre-existent order of life. Edward W Gifford referred to this in his discussion of the Tongan cosmogony, as he stated:

Tongan cosmogony, unlike some other Polynesian cosmogonies, does not tell of a void in the beginning, but instead tacitly assumes the pre-existence of the sky, the sea, and the land of Puluotu (the home of the souls of the departed chiefs) 1

Intertwined with the Tongan cosmogony and the conflicting creation myths was the Tongan religion. This cosmogonical-triad seems to me to be the cultural infra-structure of our Tongan ancient society. This ancient social structure complex seems to me, to be the prototype of our modern social and cultural hierarchical system.

Now I shall reflect on what I have called the 'wombs of life' of the ancient Tongan society. Why have I chosen this expression? There are two reasons. Firstly, it is my Tongan-English interpretation of the English phrase "the primordial sources of life", and secondly, it reflects my own frustration in trying to get into the depth of the Tongan culture, or perhaps it is a reflection of my own Tongan-ness.

Footnote

- (1) Edward W Gifford, "Tongan Myths and Tales", p. 14.

1. KO E LANGI (THE SKY) Ko e Ngaahi 'Otua (the gods) moe Lotu (religion)

Taking a mental journey back into our Tongan past is like 'frog-walking' in the Tongo forest. When you speak of the sky, it includes the gods and it includes religion. The sky was assumed to be the abode of the high gods, the Tangaloas. Other high gods were assumed to live in the underworld, the Mauis, and another high god, Hikule'o, was assumed to live in Pulotu. Pulotu was assumed to be the Tongan Paradise of the ancient society assumed to be situated at the western ocean beyond where the sun set. In this ancient Tongan religion our ancestors assumed that all chiefs were immortal, and when they died their souls went to Pulotu, the kau tu'a (commoners) did not have any soul. Respectfulness to chiefs was a religious duty. Sacrifices were offered in times of need. These were done at the house of the priest, and he would pray to the spirits in Pulotu to intervene. The people assumed that the spirits in Pulotu were powerful, and that brought fear among them.

Besides those high gods there were also the gods of the wind, the ocean, the fertility gods of the harvest. There were provincial gods, tribal gods or family gods. Animism and totemism were also widely practised. In events of great distress, such as war, or something that might have brought some disasters to the life of a chief, or threatening national disaster, human sacrifices were made. Later a finger was cut off instead of destroying a life. These were part of religion.

By the end of the 18th century, some chiefs started to doubt the Tongan religion and all that was attached to it. They questioned the powers of the gods. One of those chiefs was Taufa'ahau who became King of all Tonga and made it as one kingdom under his rule (1845-1893)

2. KO E TAHI (THE SEA) (The 'Otua; the low inhabited lands)

According to the Tongan cosmogony and the variants of creation myths, as the one we have seen above, the sea was an integral part of the pre-existent

order. One of the chief notions, which was a religious notion, assumed that the inhabited land, not the assumed land of Pulotu referred to above, was pulled out of the sea with a fish-hook by one of the Mauis. This mass of land consisted of the Island of Tongatapu (the greatest capital Island of the Tongan kingdom); the low islands of the Ha'apai group; the low Islands of the Vava'u group; and the two furthest northern Islands of Niua Toputapu and Niua Fo'ou (note: Niua Fo'ou is a volcanic island). Beside this ancient reference to the sea in ancient Tonga, there are no references about how our ancestors viewed the sea? What were their notions of the sea?

I shall take the risk of trying to read the minds of our ancestors, going back to my own childhood experiences as a village boy in the village of Tongoleleka in the Island of Lifuka, Ha'apai. In fact, Ha'apai is figuratively called "KO E FO'I 'ONE'ONE" (a grain of sand, because of the smallness of the islands. Her people are also called "KO E TAU-TAHI" (mariners). Thus 'the people of the sand'; 'the people of the sea'.

Our ancestors assumed that the sea was an integral part of their land. They were indivisible. They were one. Their sense of the nature-given right to ownership of the land was the same with the sea. They had a sense of belongingness to both. Their means for survival were found in both. They believed that the sea was the mother of the land. The sea was a friend. The sea at times was a threat, but rarely regarded to be an enemy. Their love of the sea was an unreturned love. No matter how they called the sea as their home, or personified the sea their love songs, it did not love them in return. They loved the sea at their own risk.

Our ancestors were well-known in the region for their navigational skills. The sea carried them to lands near and far, in peace and war, and in claim of ownership over foreign lands. The sea and sea-beds provided them with a seeming unexhausted source of good health food; fish of all sizes and all kinds; turtles; shell-fish varieties; sea weeds; crabs. The sea water provided them with the required salt for the preservation of fish; mixed with coconut for special Tongan delicacies; preservation of wood for building houses and fencing; and the processing of the Kie (pandanus) for the finest mat, the Kie Tonga.

The white beaches which were a cushion for the land, and all their life-enhancing natural luxuries were a second home to them; for spear-fishing; net fishing; line fishing; sports; picnics and relaxation; breathing in the fresh

air of the sea breeze; being embraced by the combined symphony of echoes from the breakers on the reefs and the surf on the sands. The sea to our ancestors was good. They always answered the call of the sea.

3. KO E FONUA (THE LAND)
Ko e Tu'i (King) = Hau = Ruler = Pule'anga (Government)
Hou'eiki (Chiefs)
Ko e Lotu, moe Tangata (Man, people, society, community)

The high islands of Tonga, namely the volcanic island of Kao, the volcanic island of Tofua, in the Ha'apai Group, and the Island of 'Eua on the eastern side of Tongatapu, were according to one variant of our Tongan creation myths, the end results of chips thrown down from the sky by the stonemason god, Tangaloa Tufunga.

All inhabited lands, high and low were assumed to be the creation and gifts of the gods to the Tu'i Tonga, Hou'eiki moe kakai (people). The first Tu'i Tonga, later regarded as the Hau, was mythologically assumed to be a direct descendant of the Tangaloas, Tangaloa 'Etimatupua'a, who came down from the sky on a Toa tree and married a woman in Tongatapu whose name was Va'epopua, and she bore him a son who was named 'Aho'eitu. (2)

The Tu'i Tonga, was the Hau, and all things assumed to be Tongan by our ancestors were subjected to him. All the lands were his lands. The lands and the fruits of the lands. The sea and all that was in the sea of Tonga were his. The chiefs and the people as a whole were his. On the other hand, the King was subject to his chiefs and his people. A king, was king because of chiefs and people. A chief was a chief because there were people. They were of reciprocal relationships. This was clearly illustrated by the annual national religious ceremonies of the 'Inasi (harvest festival) and the Polopolo (first fruits) which all communities of the ancient Tongan society offered to the Hau. And a good Hau would share the 'Inasi with his people.

- (2) Modern historians put the date of the first Tu'i Tonga to be about the year 950 AD. The line of the Tu'i Tonga declined in the year 1450. A new emerged in Tonga, the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua line, in 1470; and the Tu'i Kanokupolu emerged in the year 1610. Our present King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV is a direct descendant of this line, the Kanokupolu Line.

On the negative side, there were chiefs, and even kings who abused their power; and the same for some of the people who failed to play their part in communal duties.

The origin of the man of the inhabited land is not certain. The two conflicting creation myths seem to be the most quoted by the informers of our sources above were, firstly, the first man came from Pulotu at the command of one of the Tangaloas. Secondly, that the first man was created out of the inhabited land by the divine intervention of Tangaloa Atulongo. Both creation myths linked man to the land.

What Are The Impacts Of Our Ancestral And Cultral Past on the Mind Of A Tongan Person In the Eighties: In the Twentieth Century?

The following is a part of my struggle to respond generally to the question above.

I am now coming out of my 'ancestral-cultural Tongo forest'. The main impression that stays in my mind is the awareness that the Tongo tree draws its life from two of the basic sources of life in the Pacific: the sea and the land. The Tongo tree is a 'meeting point'.

The modern Tongan person could be likened to a Tongo tree, in the sense that he (she) is the meeting point of our ancestral culture and our modern culture. The Tongan person is a meeting point. On one hand, the modern person, whether young or old, educated or uneducated, of high rank or of low rank, well off or not well off, has consciously or unconsciously internalised some basic strands of our ancient culture. This internalisation is an ongoing process of learning.

This ongoing process of cultural-learning is accommodated through the oral traditions, the observation of the tapu system, respect to persons, poetry, songs and dances, celebrations, acts of reconciliation, mutual support and encouragement, giving and receiving, the teaching of the new lotu etc. I would like to identify this process as 'the traditional process of culturalisation'. The human context of this process is the social structure of the supportive network of our communal way of life, within the 'Api (nuclear family), the extended family, the chiefly system, the King and the royal household; the village community, church life and national life.

On the other hand, the modern Tongan man is being 'enveloped' by the 'waves of modern developments'. The pace of this process is so rapid that it overruns the 'traditional process of culturalisation'. And so drastically, it cannot wait. It seems to ignore the human element in its path.

This 'modern process of culturalisation' is accommodated through observation, information, awareness of new personal needs, exposure to social problems, and the adoption of a new life style. Some of the end results of this process, to mention a few, is the emerging of a new social elite, the academic elite both in secular and theological education, religious skepticism, urbanisation, constant exposure to new life-styles, exposure to new political philosophies. More emphasis is put on the importance of the monetary economy, and the emerging of a new godlessness, a lean towards individualism. The human context of this process is the same social structure of the supportive network of our communal way of life referred to above.

Many modern Tongans are determined to retain the 'strengths' elements of our Tongan ancient culture and adapt the 'strengths' elements of our modern Tongan culture. This should be a part of the 'modern process of culturalisation'.

If this 'modern process of culturalisation' is to be a success, it should be related to the Tongan concept of the FONUUA. The traditional significance of this concept, I believe, is still valued by many Tongans. The concept of the Fonua embraces the totality of the life of the Tongan society, of what has been retained from the past, and what has been adopted from the present. What is the 'human face' of the Fonua? To my mind, at least for the time being, it is THE HUMAN COMMUNITY, ie. the human face of the Tongan culture!

Who are the guardians of the Fonua? The grassroot people (Ko e kau kaiefu 'o e fonua - the 'people of the dust') who brave the dust of the land to give support to the life of the 'Api, Lotu and Tonga.

An Epilogue: The Village Well.

Villages had wells long, long before the Tongan Water Board introduced the new Water Scheme to the villages in the 60s. The water then was soft, good for bathing and washing, even drinking and cooking. Now water taps are seen in the village compound of individual families. The water is hard and

salty; not pleasant to bath in, and not good enough for washing, let alone drinking. Often the water pump is not running because the villagers cannot afford the fuel. Very often the water supply is cut off because the last month's bill was not paid. The well has been neglected and the well pit is gathering the rubbish. Now, there is no money to pay the bill, no tap water and no well water.

When there is fuel for the pump and when the bill is paid the water will come ... hard and salty as ever. Or is it better to reopen the well in addition to the tap?

GOSPEL AND CULTURE

by
James Mason

The Gospel, commonly known as the good news concerns the mighty acts of God in and through the life of Jesus Christ. It is a universal message, for all people, in all places and in all times. Jesus in His great commission said:

"Go, then, to all peoples every where and make them my disciples....." (Mtt. 28:19)

This suggests to show the inclusive intention of Jesus.

In Acts. of the Apostles Jesus' followers are to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". And so, the missionary movement has been the expression of this task which Jesus has mentioned to His disciples. So men and women in the last nineteen hundred years have become missionaries, evangelists, teachers etc sharing with others the gospel of peace, love, salvation and redemption.

Recognizing the great commission, the missionary movements were convinced that the gospel cannot be stored. For the gospel has to be rooted in the lives of the people and expressed in their discipleship. The gospel is dynamic and must find its identity in an environment, in a place where it is allowed to be nourished, fed, and grow - otherwise it will die.

In recognising that the gospel is universal - for all peoples - and at the sametime that it is particular - expressed in local situations and in their lives of individuals - we are taking note of something that has to be understood if we are to appreciate the missionary movement. For at the heart of christianity there is the expression of unity:

"There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and in all". (Ep. 4:5-6)

Unity is at the heart of the gospel and is what Jesus himself desired of His followers.

"I pray that they may all be one, Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that sent me". (Jn. 17:21)

We are of course aware that the ideal of unity is far from real in practice. While the gospel is universal - in the particular situations where the gospel has taken root it has been expressed in different ways. The Gospel came into the Pacific in very different containers. The missions as we know them today each came as bearers of the gospel - but they brought it in their own containers. Each of these missions was influenced by its own history, its own traditions ways of worship, and organisation, its understanding of ministry and theology. These differences are to be seen today in the different churches which have grown from this mission work. The universal gospel has taken different shape and form in the particular expression it has been given by these churches.

Bishop Patteson a great leader of the Melanesian mission hoped that it would be possible to avoid denominationalism and competition in Melanesia. He said:

"I think that we ought carefully to discriminate between what is essential to christianity, and what is the national form in which it has been presented to us, and which our characteristic habit of mind and mode of thought may require. We must not aim at making Melanesians English or Scotch christians, but christians generally". 1

Although the gospel is one and what Bishop Patteson said was to be the norm, the ways in which the gospel has been expressed, the way in which it has been taken root are many. The source of life for all christians is the same God, the same Spirit. And so the image which St. Paul gives to the Church at Corinth is one which helps us in our present division and confusion:

"Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body even though it is made up of different parts". (1Cor. 12:12)

As Christians, if we believe that we share the same gospel, the same Spirit then we have to take seriously the implications of this in our search for unity. What divides us is the particular expression of the gospel to which we have become accustomed.

The belief that we are all members of Christ's body is a recognition of unity in diversity. It is this understanding that has resulted in the co-operation rather than the competition between churches. The Pacific Council of Churches, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, the W.C.C. are ecumenical expressions of this theological concern to try and implement the prayer of Jesus "that we all might be one". The "Ecumenical" itself points us towards this.

How then so the gospel to be taken to particular situations and shared with people to whom it is new - good news for the first time? What is the starting point of evangelism? I want to explore with you two different models of missionary action. The first is 'the confrontation or challenging' approach. The second is the 'accommodation or acceptance' approach.

1. Confrontation and challenge

Christian teaching came into conflict with local religious practice. At this point there could be no compromise. In Christianity there is no room for the worship of other gods. This is of the fundamental teachings of the church which cannot be disputed. Throughout the church history Christians have been willing to die for this belief. One of the most famous examples of this was Polycarp who when faced with the possibility of death by being torn apart by wild beasts or being burnt alive made this reply:

"For eighty-six years I have been His servant, and He has never done me wrong: how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" 2.

The universal gospel comes face to face with particular culture and religious beliefs and practices which it cannot tolerate to accept if it is to be true to itself. So missionaries have sometimes taken an aggressive challenging approach to these customs.

When the gospel came to the Pacific it also challenged and confronted peoples' beliefs and practices. People burnt their traditional gods as a way

of showing that they no longer in them and their power. People had previously controlled their behaviour. In Fiji opposite the island of Bau, the sacred grove of banyan tree was cut down as a sign that the people no longer believed that Spiritual forces were present there which could harm them. Wherever the gospel has gone it has confronted people with new standards, new beliefs, new practices.

The same has been true in the Pacific. Headhunting, cannibalism were both practices which made sense in traditional society. But the gospel of love - the good news of peace - challenged both of these practices as totally unacceptable. But the question that is yet to be answered is: 'What are these principles and how far do they go in challenging a people's culture?'

Culture, history, traditions and language are among the most important features to give people their identity. Take these away from a people and you take away from them that which gives meaning to their life. The attitude of churches and missionaries towards the societies they have gone to have varied considerably. Some have encouraged the holding on to as much as possible from traditional society while others have gone to great lengths to attack people's way of life as pagan, heathen, primitive and then wanted them to adopt their way of life. The gospel however, is to be expressed in a people's culture and way of life. It is not to be used as a whipping rod to put down people's identity. Surely, certain things must change but if we take our bearings from the gospel itself, I think we find that the gospel is tolerant of and accepting of much if not most of a people's way of life.

As they particularise the gospel in their situation they give it their own distinctive identity and character.

2. Accommodation and Acceptance

One of the New Testament examples of this method was that of St. Paul when he visited Athens, recorded in Acts 17:22-23:

"Paul stood up in front of the city Council and said, 'I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, "To unknown God". That you worship then, even though you do not know it, is what now I proclaim to you'."

Paul takes his starting point for sharing the gospel with these people from their own situation and experience. He does not rubbish their altar and tell them to pull it down. Paul uses it as a point of contact between the gospel and his hearers. In this approach we have an example of accommodation - that is helping the gospel find a home within situation, the belief of people, not as something foreign, but as something which they have some insight and understanding of already.

In a similar way, Bishop Patteson of the Melanesian mission wrote that Melanesian:

"ought to retain what so ever may be retained of national peculiarity in conjunction with the new teaching and new life. We must not place unnecessary difficulties in the way of their reception of christianity. On this principle, I think all regulations introduced by a missionary which forbid any practices not capable of being shown to be morally wrong, altogether indefensible". 3

Bishop Patteson was in favour of retaining everything good in Melanesian culture. Christianity was therefore to be rooted in the particular experience of local people. It was not to be brought in as a foreign import without relevance to peoples' life experience.

But how do we determine those things which should be held on and what parts should be discarded. Bishop Patteson also suggested that only those things which could be "shown to be morally wrong" should be confronted. The difficulty here is that the church in its different denominational and even individual expressions has never fully agreed on what is meant by "morally wrong". There is no problem with the big questions such as the ones I have mentioned : headhunting cannibalism, and murder. But the gospel has so often been manipulated to suit people's convenience. The terrible practice of slavery was justified by people from arguments taken from the Bible. The racial injustice in South Africa called apartheid has similarly been supported by people from the Bible.

So where can we turn to in order to find a foundation on which we can assess the way in which the gospel is to be shaped in the particular situations in which we live? I suggest that the proper starting point is the gospel itself - the good news that Jesus Himself proclaimed and taught and embodied in his life. When the teacher of the law came to Jesus he summarized the law

in this way:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind" and "love your neighbour as yourself". (LK. 10:27)

Love of God and love of neighbour are at the centre of the Gospel. They are, I believe, the universal principles on which we can build the particular expression of the gospel in every culture and situation. As we ask the questions:

"What does it mean to love God in this context?" - "What does it mean to love our neighbour in this situation?" We are then able to begin searching out the meaning and the practice of the gospel for our ourselves, our situation, our people, our culture.

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians taught what it means to be a christian. He wrote:

"We are allowed to do anything", so they say. That is true, but not everything is good. "We allowed to do anything" - but not everything is helpful. No-one should be looking to his own interests, but to the interests of others. (1Cor. 10:23-24)

While rejoicing in the freedom which a christian has, Paul is concerned that it should be exercised with restraint for the sake of the weaker brethren.

"Just as I do"; he says, "I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, that they might be saved. Imitate me then, just as I imitate Christ". (1Cor. 10:33, 11:1)

If we seek to imitate Christ we taking the universal gospel - the supreme example of good news - and giving it a body and flesh in our own situation and circumstances. B. Narakobi, a PNG. Lawyer has written that:

Christ came to fulfil the law of Moses. I have no doubt that He had been born into Melanesia, He would have come to fulfil and make more perfect the Melanesian religious experience. 4

B. Narakobi concludes that:

Melanesian experience is not, of course, always right. But it has almost always been held to be wrong. Time is long overdue for some of our religious experience to be given its proper dignity, as it has been given to the religious experience of all the great religions of the world. 5

These principles provide a framework for understanding the relationship between the gospel and culture. The gospel on one hand confronts every culture and every individual with new demands while at the same time it needs to find a home within the religious experience of the people otherwise it withers and dies. As Joe Gaquare has written:

In Melanesia the church is to be Melanesian but at the sametime christian. Indigenisation does not tolerate those who rubbish local cultures as if they are all bad. It appreciates the good elements as God's gifts and tries all it can to work through them and reach the hearts of men with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. 6

In the past, missionaries have often been regarded as destroying culture - rubbing out local customs and imposing their own values and way of life on people. But there were missionaries who have valued highly much of the local way and encouraged people to hold on to this and to develop it in the light of the gospel.

Today in shaping the christian witness in the Pacific is certainly not foreign missionaries who are to be followed. It is as people read the universal gospel in their own particular situation that they shape a response that is authentic and real in their own situation and experience of life. This is reflected in the words of alan Tippet - himself a missionary with a deep respect for other cultures. He said:

The universal human problems - finding one's way in the darkness, comforting the bereaved, encouraging the discouraged, preserving the family, solving the personal disageements - will all have their particular formations in any culture different from our own. No religion can be indigenous unless it comes to grips with these universal problems in their culture-bound forms. When

the laughing and crying, the feasting and mourning, the instructing and singing are truly culturally patterned, (expressed in and through the local culture) - here the gospel at work in an experience of Incarnation. 7

Religion is what gives meaning to life. The universal gospel which is above all cultures must be expressed within each particular situation if that gospel is to make sense at the level of meaning and experience for people. It must be experienced in love - in peace - in faith - in hope - in joy. As we express the gospel in our life - in our situation in ways that give purpose and meaning to life, then we are experiencing God in the way He desires for us all:

"I have come in order that you might have life, life in all its fullness". (Jn.10:10).

1. Yonge, Patteson. Vol. 2. p.151
2. Tim Dowley, ed., A Lion handbook, The History of Christianity, ANZEA, 1977 p.81.
3. Yonge, Patteson, Vol. 2, p.591
4. B. Narakobi, "What is Religious experience for a Melanesian?" Point 1977, p.11.
5. Ibid., p.12.
6. Joe Gaquare, "Indigenisation as Incarnation", Point 1977, p. 184.
7. Whiteman, Melanesians and Missionaries, p.415.

Background and Paper
IV
WHOLENESS OF LIFE

(PERSPECTIVE FROM LIFE IN THE ISLAND)

by

Fiama Rakau

1 Introduction

In Vanuatu, people are classified into living three kinds of life. Custom life, christian life and modern life. Custom life is said to be the life that people were living, before christianity came to Vanuatu. Then came the colonial powers which brought modern life or town life.

People are identified as living the custom way of life, or either the christian or modern life. The way that christianity was introduced brought negative view on the other two. Christian and life with Christ is good, but custom and modern life is bad and evil.

Today, missionaries and colonial powers are blamed for this. Because of what they did, many good customs and cultural values were abandoned. There was exploitation, suppression of local culture and imposition of cultural imperialism.

Missionaries and colonial powers were not the only guilty ones. The local people too neglected many of their own customs and cultural values. There is need to see and affirm the positive aspects.

Since Independence in 1980, Vanuatu became a Republic. The Independence was not only a liberation from colonialism, but a transition period for the nation and for the church. The gospel message was not gospel alone, but gospel that is received and expressed by the local people in the local soil. Culture found expression in a free nation by the people. The church and the government express the need to preserve culture. The struggle for indigenisation, localization, contextualisation, development and identity came to the surface.

As it often happens in life, there is confusion. "Which life should people follow, custom, christian or modern life?" "Can a person be a christian, and at the sametime follow his local way of life?" The confusion brought competition to the people. For example, if a person is found drinking too much 'kava' (local drink) he would be blamed for returning to his old way of life, that is, 'custom life' or heathen life. The faithful christian witnesses would then try to convert him. Churches, groups and individuals are competitive in this manner and lame each other on sheep stealing.

This confusion of life is a need, which is the motive for the discussion of the topic chosen. 'Wholeness of life', that is, instead of looking at a particular aspect of life, must be seen as whole. The life of God, the life of Man, the life of Body and Soul, Church and State, life here and life to come, is life created by God, and related to each. Spiritual life is exercised here and now by bodily life.

I have divided the paper into following sections:

1. The Christian way of life. Looking at the concept of getting, living and passing on life.
2. Custom and modern life. Bringing out elements of life-affirming and life-denying in them, with short description of two issues.
3. Christian, custom, modern life (Wholeness of Life). Life in relation to Christ as the logos and incarnate life. The source of life.

2. Christian Life

(a) Receiving Life

'Christian Life' is a common term used to describe the life of people who accepted christianity. Those who act by faith in receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, receive this life.

Since christianity is a "brought religion" to Vanuatu by missionaries, 'Christian Life' has a historical starting point, it spread from Island to Island. The missionaries proclaimed the gospel. People were converted to Christ, joined the church and became disciples of Christ, who went from island to island proclaiming the gospel.

'Christian Life' then is narrowed down to people and their relationships to Christ. People had to believe in Jesus Christ, and leave their heathen way of life (custom life). The 'Christian Life' was seen as a life in opposition to custom life. William Gunn, an early missionary to one of the islands, wrote this, "The spell of immemorial superstition, entwined with old tradition and the glamour of ancestral story, wrought into the imagination, the feeling, and the very fibre of thought gave powerful sanction to social customs and religious rites alike strange and terrible". Traditions, social customs were seen as strange and terrible.

From this early development of missionary preaching, 'Christian Life' is seen to be exclusive of custom life. One cannot be a christian and at the same time be a custom man. Further still, we have other problems, such as exclusive salvation (We have Christ because we received Him, and you don't have Christ because you did not open the doors of your hearts for him to come in). Those who have would by means of personal evangelism, on their best either demand or persuade others to receive Christ.

Today Vanuatu is confronted with a new situation. As a people, unique in its context and the search for identity, culture is important and need to be preserved. As a christian nation, with its national motto, "In God We Stand", and involve in ecumenism, the themes of "Jesus Christ the Life of the World" and "Gospel and Culture", calls for radical change, from the traditional way of thinking.

It is no longer a Christ for the souls of men, but a Saviour of the World.

Jesus Christ is not only a Saviour of individuals, but the Saviour of Vanuatu, the Saviour of the Pacific, the Saviour of the World.

Who is Jesus Christ to the people of Vanuatu today? What is Christian Life? How do we receive this life, and pass it on? How do we live as Christians in Vanuatu and in the world today?

These are important questions, which the people of Vanuatu need to address themselves to today. People are not just following

traditions, but reinterpret the same gospel in a different time and situation.

As an attempt to answer these questions, I would like to make the following observations. Christians believe that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:17). The salvation of Christ should be seen operative in all these different levels - the level of the individual, the level of the church, the level of the community or island and the level of the cosmos or universe (see Diagram A).

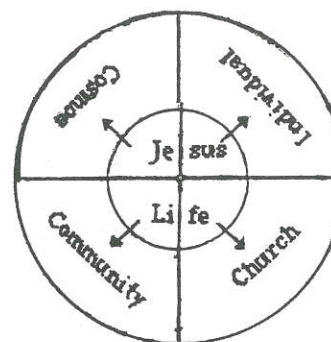


Diagram A

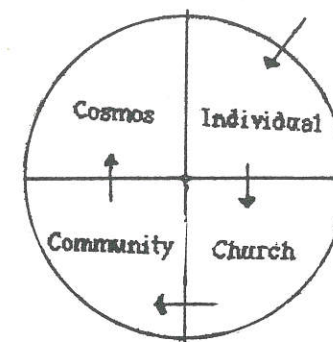


Diagram B

Diagram B shows the position that life is understood in the Vanuatu context. Life comes from outside. Individuals must accept this life by faith. By doing so they become a community of believers, called the church. The church has a mission, to evangelise the community and the world, in order to pass on the life of Christ to others and the world.

(b)

Living Life

'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me' (John 15:4).

To be fruitful in life, is to abide in Christ and his words. Failing to abide, is failing to bear fruit. To be with Christ, to walk with him, to carry out his commands, and to be under his Lordship,

demands sacrifice, self-denial discipleship. Christian life is expressed by people and churches in different ways. For Christians in Vanuatu, "Christian Life" is seen with an open and narrow view. For some Christian life is seen in a wider perspective than a narrow view held by some religious groups and sects. That is, Christian life is that which takes place within the church. The wider or open view is that Christian life is expressed both in the church and in the world.

The diagram below illustrates these views. The inner circle represents the narrow or closed view, and the wider circle represents the wider view of living and expressing the Christian life. The diagram also shows both the individual and corporate elements of expressing this life.



Christian life cannot be confined to the activities of the church alone. It touches every area of humanity. It is a life of involvement in creation, encounter with people, the rich, the poor, oppressed, sick, to do away with death-power which is at work in humanity.

(c) Passing of Life

God alone is the giver of life through Jesus Christ. God gave life

to humanity and to creation. God imparted in humanity his very breath. "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." (Gen 2:7)

By disobedience, sin entered humanity and spoiled the whole of creation. Sin is death fighting against life. Life was spoilt and man's relationship to God was spoilt too. Man escaped and hid from the face of God, but God out of his love and grace, continued to come to man. In Jesus Christ, God came to restore this life. "I come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Jesus lived an earthly life and demonstrated that life which is in him, by showing life power over against death power (healing the sick, raising the dead, open the eyes of the blind, making the death to hear, casting out evil spirits and so on) showing the new life of the Kingdom, which is now present in him. His miracles were life-power working against death-power. Death power wanted to destroy life-giving power by crucifixion, but death-power could not hold and control life giving power. Jesus rose from the dead, won death power and the stings of it, establish the church and commanded his disciples to be the bearers and witness to this life giving power.

And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation". (Mark 16:15) In the Matthew version, the disciples were not only commanded to preach the gospel, but to "Make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age." (Matthew. 28:19-20)

Responding to this command is mission. Mission is a response and an obedient to the command of the risen Lord. To go and preach the gospel, to make disciples, to baptise, to teach and bear witness to him. Before embarking in this mission. Jesus said to them, "It is written that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His Name to all the nations beginning from Jerusa-

lem. You are witness of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of my father upon you, but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 22:46-49)

The disciples were commanded to do certain things in the mission, but were also given a promise of his presence and power. Jesus last words on earth before his ascension was about the purpose and source of this power. The Holy Spirit is the source and power, but the purpose of this promise power is 'witnessing'.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) Power is for witnessing to the other, not just about one's faith, but about the death, resurrection and person of Christ. That the other be challenged by Christ and believe that he is saviour and Lord. Paul says, "But we preach Christ crucified to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness." (1 Cor. 1:24) Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

3. Custom and Modern Life

'Custom life' and 'modern life' are common terminologies in Vanuatu. 'Custom life' is the local people's way of life. Our way of life. Our way of philosophy. Vanuatu is an oral tradition. Its philosophy of life is not recorded in books for many generations, until the present time. It is expressed and transmitted in daily encounters, in language communication, arts, music, songs, ceremonies, rituals, weddings and marriages, and man's total involvement in life.

Our culture claims nature for itself. The islands, land, rocks mountains, trees, animals, sea sand beach, edible fruits, plants and forests. Culture turns nature or claims nature to be our identity, status, values and norms. This way of life which is called 'custom life', is a life of dependency in nature, of land, sea, animals, insects, spirits, gods, family and communal relationships.

From a Vanuatu point of view, culture is a word hard to describe

in written form, but if a person is asked, "What is culture?", the response would be, look at the dance; listen to the custom songs; see how people live; observe what people do, did, individually and collectively.

'Modern life' in the other hand is urban or town life. Life brought by colonisation. With its philosophy of life, of central administrative governing power, to govern, control and develop the country as a whole. It is a controlling power over all other institutions, by means of constitutions, and laws. It relies on scientific knowledge, technology, economy and education.

From the present situation, the so called 'custom life', operates within the structures of the new modern life. In other words, the local identity is governed and preserved by a foreigner identity. The canoe which is full of goods and possession is put into the speed boat with the people, and the voyage to the future is directed by a new captain. In the canoe concept, all people in the canoe do the paddling, and depend on each other as they paddle along the rough seas. The speed boat concept all people depend on one captain who knows the way and the mechanics of the engine.

Dependency is on one person. This transition and change calls for evaluation and awareness of the good and the bad side of things. Questions are to be raised of what elements, present in custom and modern life that are life-denying, to be thrown away, and what elements are life-affirming, which need to be fostered, preserved and our attention drawn to. The list shows below what I see to be life-denying and life affirming elements in custom and modern life

(a) Life Denying	(b) Life Affirming
Evil Sorcery)	Community life and its structures
Causes of sickness)	Marriage/Family/Home Relationships
and death)	Leadership (chiefs)
Pay back, fighting)	Arts and crafts
Poison)	Language, rules, rituals
Nakaimas (use of)	
evil powers))	

Disputes)	Clevers, medicine, freedom
Use native medicine (spoils of life)	Giving and sharing
Fighting) Custom	Respect, dance, songs
Wife beating)	Stories, myths, symbols
Woman domination)	Agriculture
Stealing)	Education, healing
Misuse of power)	Sports and games
Jealousy)	local technology
Poor standards of living)	Land, sea, creation
Drunkenness)	Government - one people one nation
Fighting)	Church
Injustice)	Leadership
Oppression)	Constitution and Law
Prostitution)	Education (better schools)
Abortion)	Hospitals, Clinics
Divorce/Separation)	Sports
Unemployment)	Communication
Individualism) Modern	National consciousness
Classes of People)	Unity
Stealing)	Freedom
Rape)	Development
Unhealthy conditions)	Business/Economy
Pollution, nuclear)	Appropriate technology
testing)	Ecumenism
Dependency)	Overseas Relations

(b) Community Life

The communal life of the people of Vanuatu is an important element in culture. People are drawn and live together in communities. Each island community live together with some common identities. Either of relationships, clan, tribe, or historical events. People are not living in isolation, but as people living, caring, giving and committed to each other. There is a strong sense of belonging and security. This sense of belonging emphasises the importance of the extended family, which from a modern economical point of view, is measured to be unfavourable. But this is an unfair judgement, without clear consideration of the relationship

roles within the communities, one island to another island, one nation to other nations.

Other important elements in communal life are, living, giving, caring and sharing together.

These examples illustrate the communal spirit of sharing and living together. 'A fisherman who went out fishing, shares the fish. A group of men who went out hunting for wild pigs or bullocks, if they have a good catch the meat is distributed to the people. A gardener who has more than enough crops, vegetables, or fruits, some are harvested, or collected and shared among the people. A person who has big coconut plantations, can be asked to allow his plantations so that the community, or family, or individual can cut copra to make some money. A person who has no land, is offered a piece of land to make a garden or build a house. Ones heavy work such as brushing or planting a new garden, shelling out copra, or preparing a feast, members of the community give a helping hand. Any celebration are communal celebrations. For example, in a wedding ceremony among the people of Futuna, the host of the wedding would come on the wedding day with raw and cooked food, mats, baskets and different gifts, to celebrate together. This communal celebration contributes to the well being and stability of marriage and family life.

Leadership in the community is exercised by the chiefs, to ensure that life is good and work is carried out. To apply discipline and punish those who not keep the community norms and standards.

Culturally, there is no formal education, but education, wisdom and understanding are present. Education takes place in participation, imitation, observation and involvement. It is education by experience. It starts from the home from parents, and later in the community in participation in arts, songs, rituals, work and so on, one accumulates knowledge and understanding, which assist in human life, and in relation to the world around.

Though the communal life is important, it is facing great challenges today. There are social and economic challenges. The struggle for gain and profit leads to competitive spirit and indi-

vidualism. It robs the people from the communal spirit of sharing, caring and giving to one another. From the extreme it leads people to egoism existalism. Existence is in danger of no longer living with and for the other, but for self. This new change is coming like an hijacker, carrying the people to where they do not want to go.

Urbanization is a community killer and a best promoter of individualism. People who travel to live in the town, do not live in community, in the true sense of the word from a cultural point of view, but live as a community of individuals. People living in the same area in good houses, with little knowledge or no knowledge at all, of who the next person or family is. There is no sharing.

Dogs become 'watchdogs' by the doors, and people who wander around are remind 'beware of dogs', which scare people to walk to a neighbours house and yard. It is a community in isolation. The peoples' meeting places are either the church, clubs, sports grounds or social gatherings - for different events and celebrations. The christian community in the town is in this basket, so a christian community in the town has a different connotation from a christian community from a village and island setting. The unique communal life rural setting in urban situation is a scattered community, who live far apart from each other, but come together or drawn together by the gospel. Thus the christian community in the town is shown by their common worship, celebrations, fundraising, meetings, fellowship, choirs, social nights and their participation in mission, evangelistic work and witnessing.

There are people who are drawn together by this communal spirit in the town. Due to this communal spirit, when people travel to live in town, they want to live together, so they purchase a piece of land and live as a community. These urban communities maintain their island identity, but with new situation, it requires adaptation, and even new problems to deal with. The problem of overcrowding, temporary shelters, unhealthy and no recreational area, education for children, cost of living and economic demands, create new problems.

Unless the Vanuatu government sees the importance of communal life and plays its part in the urban area to preserve the community-

this important aspect of cultural life will undergo changes that will reduce it, to a concept that is good for discussion, but in reality, we are moving away from it. If Vanuatu is to avoid many of the social ills and evils which are now plaguing the world, then Vanuatu has a duty to embark on an examination of many of the alien attitudes and practices that at present exist in our countries. Vanuatu has a duty to establish and in some instances re-establish, values and practices that are best suited to the need and ideals of the people of Vanuatu. One of which is communal life.

The question of indigenisation today is a challenging one. For many people, indigenisation means localisation. To replace the white man. But there is need to go beyond this. Indigenisation for me means to be ourselves. To be ni-Vanuatu. To understand who we are, we need to see first the skin we wear.

Who are we in the church? Are we Calvinists or are we ni-Vanuatu. Who are we in the government? Are we British or French? Who are we in our celebrations? etc.

The colonial hangovers and missionary hangovers are great, we are wearing many skins. It will take sometime for us to wear our own skin, or skin ourselves.

Just look at the Independence Celebration and see the hangovers. We are more Europeanised and Westernised than Europeans are Vanuatuised. We have more European minds, than Europeans have Vanuatu minds. We have more European attitudes in us than Europeans have Vanuatu attitudes in them.

The question of identification is important in indigenisation. We do not just indigenise practices of the church etc., but we must be indigenous people ourselves. We must make our white brothers become black brothers. Black not in the sense of skin, but our way of life - of living together, sharing together, eating together, dancing together. Celebrating together, not living our own profit, but for the other and for the good of the community, island and nation.

A white man should be able to eat with a black man in his dirty small

shelter house, and a black man must be able to open homes to the whites. They should be both the indigenous people.

At a Pacific Conference speech, a ni-Vanuatu woman participant made this statement, which very much supports my ideas, she said, "Our national institutions must be geared and tuned to servicing an nurturing a social, political and economic order that is in keeping with the expectations and needs of the people and not one hampered with the preconceived notions of a society that basically has little in common with that which prevails in the region." Other contributions to the affirmation of community life is made by Bernard Narokobi who is a Papuan New Guinea lawyer. When speaking about Pacific identity and solidarity, he said, "One of the greatest gifts to our people is that we have small, self-managing communities, but we have abused that gift by bitterness, conflicts and quarrels. But even if we do go astray in abusing these gifts, we must not lose hope. For us to live is for us to hope. We must hope for the world we must build. We are members of the new world, and we must take courage to build.

(c) **Nuclear Testing**

Nuclear-testing in the Pacific is a life-denying element both to humanity and nature. Nuclear testing is an issue of great concern to the Pacific people and it is a global concern. The Pacific reactions shown in national and group demonstrations, statements, meetings, education for awareness in the effects of nuclear arms, and protests such as the Green Peace movement in New Zealand, all showed the greatest disappointments on the nuclear issue. The common Pacific slogan today against nuclear arms is, "If it is safe, why not dump and test it in Japan, France and U.S.A.

Despite the Pacific struggle, France continued to test its bombs in the Pacific Ocean, at Mururoa Atoll and both the super-powers have continuous nuclear activity in the Pacific. From a Pacific Conference of Churches report to its member churches it was reported that, "Nuclear testing continues in French Polynesia in spite of the clearly and repeatedly stated wishes of the Pacific peoples. The French have reportedly tested nearly 80 nuclear

devices at Mururoa." Further statistical reports showed that, "With the United States and the U.S.S.R. included, there are at least 133 nuclear power stations in operation in seven countries on the Pacific rim. The nuclear power stations produce dangerous amounts of radioactive wastes." "The United States has between 8,000 and 12,000 nuclear weapons stored or deployed in the Pacific, compared with 7,000 in Europe. Fifteen hundred tactical nuclear include aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and hunter killer submarines. At present there are 528 strategic nuclear weapons aboard seven to eleven Polaris-Poseidon submarines. The home base for this in the Pacific is Hawaii.

As far as the U.S.S.R. is concerned, it is revealed that, "There are roughly 105 Soviet submarines located in the Pacific and of these, approximately 40 are nuclear powered. (The others are diesel powered) They also have 60 surface ships that have nuclear capability. All these ships have their home port at Vladivostok. At this time, they are based mainly in the Northern Pacific because of their short range delivery systems. In addition to their weapons systems, the Soviets are doing nuclear testing within 400 miles of the Cook Islands."

This information which was known in the Ponape Conference on Nuclear-Free Pacific, brought fear and disturbed the peace enjoyed by the Islanders of the Pacific. Far worse still, it poisoned the air, land and sea, the survival resource for the Pacific people.

Both the governments and churches in the Pacific are not silent about the issue of nuclear. The Pacific Conference of Churches in her statements against nuclear weapons, made the following statements: "The Pacific Conference of Churches condemns the testing of nuclear bombs and nuclear waste in the Pacific, and the movement of nuclear weapon ships through the Pacific waters.

This stand is based on four principles:

1. Human life is God's gift. It must be respected as such.
2. Every person has a right to live. Nuclear radiation endangers this right
3. Every person has a right to have peace. The presence of nuclear

4. weapons, creates fear, not peace.
Inventions should be encouraged to help people to live with dignity and freedom, but not to enslave them.

These principles affirm the wholeness of life. The affirmation that human life is God's gift and that it must be respected, set the priority right in the struggle against nuclear testing. It gives the right motives to act. The struggle is first of all a concern about the greatest gift of God for man. The totality of life, for the Pacific people is life that cannot be lived apart from the land, sea and air, and all that lives in them. This is our Pacific life and environment that nuclear testing is destroying. Nuclear is anti-life. It destroys humanity and turns creation to pollution. Man can no longer say, we are free from pollution, for the polluted air we breathe covers the face of the earth.

Showing solidarity with the Pacific people, against the anti-life nuclear problems, the World Council of Churches passed the following resolutions:

"We give thanks to God for the witness of the Pacific churches, and express our solidarity with the pastoral and prophetic roles which the churches of the Pacific and the Pacific Conference of Churches have been playing, with regard to a number of urgent problems affecting the present and future Pacific societies. The continued nuclear weapons testing in French Polynesia, the effects of radiation on the health and environment of present and future generations in the Marshal Islands. Dumping of nuclear waste by outside powers. Military, notably naval, manoeuvres undertaken by the great powers, which include nuclear weapons carrying submarines and which reinforce the militarization of the region."

"The Assembly urged the member churches of the Pacific to strengthen their support for and solidarity with Christians and churches of the Pacific in their struggle for a nuclear free Pacific."

4. Christian Custom, Modern Life (Wholeness of Life)

So far, I have tried to describe briefly different aspects of life, from the different points of view is seen and divided into the

spiritual (Christian life) and secular (custom and modern life). With brief descriptions of elements of life-denying and life-affirming in them.

In this section I am looking at them again, and their relationships. They relate and function with each other. It is totally difficult to separate life. One cannot live his Christian life without his physical life, and vice-versa. Neither can humanity exist without life in creation and life of God, and his agents, except the life of the evil powers, which is anti-life.

(a) Life Before the Fall

Life before the fall was life created by God, given to humanity and creation. It was good and fullness of life, enjoyed by humanity to the fullest. It was life of fellowship peace, and friendship. It is a life of freedom, and man exercised dominionship over all created creatures. Man had communion with God without shame and fear.

(b) Life After the Fall

This is life that has been spoilt by sin. Through the lie of the devil, man disobeyed God. Man sinned and brought upon himself separation, struggle, shame, and loss of atmosphere (garden) where man expressed and lived in full life. This is spoilt life, because sin which brought death-power, invited death-power to work alongside life-power. The whole creation was pervaded, all polluted by sin, and life became a mixture of good and evil. Relationships were spoilt, life in creation became enemy and harmful to each other. The powerful take advantage over the weak, over the work of men, animals, insects, fish and reptiles. Before the fall, it is uncertain whether stranger life feed on weaker life, or it was the consequences and effect of sin which spoilt creation, and brought it rebellious against the will of God. Life lost its proper place and humanity began to hide and accuse each other. Nakedness was discovered, and the need for 'covering' took the life of trees and animals. Man had to 'sweat' for survival. Man discovered himself not only to be naked and in need of covering, but discovered the colour of his skin, to be white, brown and black.

At first, God holds the key of wisdom and understanding, because He alone knew what was good and best for man, and provided for all his needs. But man wanted to be wise like God. In so doing man brought upon himself the continuous needs for survival. Sweat to eat, take life of animals for 'covering', and a place to hide. These became the basic human needs, and man's struggle to meet them was continuous.

If Genesis account is reliable, then it can be rightly said, that custom, culture and modernization originate from this source.

Man's search to meet his basic needs. In the Willowbank report (consultation on Gospel and culture held in 1979 at Bermuda) seeking for a Biblical basic of culture, it was said, "God created mankind, male and female, in his own likeness by endowing them with distinctive human faculties - rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual. He also told them to have children to fill the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1: 26-28) These divine commands are the origin of human culture. For basic to culture are our control of nature (that is, of our environment) and our development of forms of social organization."

Science and technology, man's search for 'covering', a place to hide, and sweating to eat. From caves to the building of huts, from huts to the building of town and cities, from primitive to modern technologies, life is a struggle.

Due to fear, humanity has gone to the extreme 'in the seek to hide' and covering, by developing arms and nuclear weapons. Humanity departed from God's environment and found himself in a different atmosphere, where sin continued to be the destructive force among the human race. Making life a body life, with limits and death.

(c) **Life After Christ**

God's incarnation is 'God's where are you', to humanity. In story of the salvation history, God never leaves his people alone. He intervened in human history for the salvation of humanity, in many ways, but has finally come in human form through his Son

Jesus Christ. This is the incarnate live.

Jesus Christ is not a philosophical truth. The Gospel is not a philosophical concept. God did not approach man in concepts alone. Incarnation was the means.

Jesus Christ is an incarnate truth. Jesus Christ became visible and tangible. He became a person, not just a strange person, but as one of us. He was just like a ni-Vanuatu. He is a ni-Vanuatu. He can walk to the village, He visits a woman in the community whose child was sick and healed her. He was at a wedding, He walked to the sea and found the fishermen and called them to follow Him. He walks to people's home; He tells stories to teach great men; little children were attracted by Him.

Wholeness of life is life given by Christ, dependable on Christ, and each other. That is, life in creation, and life of man came from Christ. He was the logos through whom all things came into being, and the incarnate life through whom all things are held together. Man has his life from him, and depend on other lives in creation. In the words of Gregorios, he said, "Human life is related to other life and matter - not only in its independence on them, but also in its incorporation of them within itself. Bodily life of humans incorporates within itself the bodily lives of vegetables and animal Kingdoms and is integrally related to them."

"This is the struggle of human life, to preserve and keep free from pollution, animal life, sea life, insects life, land life, air life, and all of life in creation, because from their life we exist in bodily life, and from Christ's life, we exist beyond the bodily life, to another dimension of life, which is life after death, but experienced and lived here not in bodily life through faith in Christ. The life to come depends on the life we live now.

(d) **Life After Death**

"I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28) No judgement, but a pass from death to life (John 5:24)
Life after death is not strange to the people of Vanuatu. There is

a strong belief in life after death. But the different understanding is that, the life to come has been brought into the present through Christ. This new reality is here now. "And the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us."
(1John 1:2)

Christ's life is our eternal life. As son of man, we have tasted this life here and now, but as Son of God he has gone before us and that we will join to live with Him forever. Ion Bria said, "Christ is the eternal future of humankind. The life in Christ is always escatological, it is the future of the world." "I live now not with my own life, but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life that I now live in this body, I live in faith; faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake." (Gal. 2:20)

We await the coming of Christ with hope and celebration of the Lord's Supper - as the body of Christ present her and now for the life of the world, and see death with hope of a resurrection, life, an entrance to be with the Lord in the eternal Kingdom.

The most comforting words for the life we live at the present, are the words of Paul to the Romans,

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, no height, nor death, nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Life comes from God, and is in the hands of God. The destiny of life is in the hands of God. We know this by God's revelation and faith, not by science.

THE LAND OF BOURU

Understanding the Kingdom of God as Self-Realizing Eschatology

by
Maroti Rimon

Every other nation has its own preconceptions of its perfect kingdom far removed from the corrupt world and from human influences. The nation of Tungaru (Republic of Kiribati) is no exception for it has a very elaborate tradition regarding a future kingdom.

(i) Background Notes On The Land Of Bouru

The different traditions in the islands all witness to the Land of Bouru as the kingdom of the spirits. Nakaa left the earth to establish his kingdom, the Land of Bouru which is free from death, illness and all the suffering of mankind present on earth. The Land of Bouru is free from what the people on the earth suffer. Only spirits which are not subject to mortality belong to the Land of Bouru.

Who is the Nakaa? The association of the name Nakaa with Na Areau in the song which was sung by Nakaa himself while he travelled his route to a place where he could establish his kingdom somehow further reveals his identity. "Of the same age: the time to Nakaa the Father; And the age of Na Areau is gone."¹ The fact of the closeness of the names Na Areau and Nakaa is of major interest in the context given by the song. Nakaa and Na Areau are two different names but represent roles of the same entity. Na Areau is known as the creator god responsible for the revelation and ordering of everything created. Nakaa is seen more as the "Guardian of Bouru".² This Bouru is basically a technology name for the paradise which Nakaa established. For purposes of

convenience we understand this concept whenever the kingdom of Nakaa is mentioned.

Bouru is known by different names in Kiribati depending on which part of the nation you are from. Whether it is called Mane beyond the horizon, or Matennang (Dying of the Clouds) or simply Meang (North), the meanings are the same. Tradition provides a clear step-by-step procedure of how one travels (his soul) to Bouru. One very basic understanding is that Bouru is strictly for the spirits. Under no circumstances could a living being enter Bouru in his corrupt human form. At death, man is separated from his soul which for three days is said to remain close to the dead body. The dead body is said to be burning which explains the hesitation of the soul to reenter it. The soul must then begin its long journey to its final destination, the land of Bouru. Careful precautions are essential for the soul in order to reach the place. There are important ancestral places to be visited which includes the place of Tabakea, which serves as the first hallmark of being on the right track towards the land of Bouru. Then there is the pace of Nei Tituabine, who giving clear directions to Bouru will advise the soul to turn north and continue its journey until it arrives at the northerly island of Nakin. The soul will continue its journey on the waters when it is met by Nei Karamakuna, the daughter of Nakaa. She searches for the marks of the tattooing of the needles and upon finding them, scratches off the mark with her long fingernails, swallows them and gives permission to the soul to pass on from the land of the dead, Manra, to the land of the living, Bouru. The practice of searching and scratching off and swallowing the tattoo marks on the souls by Nei Karamakuna serves her as her food; this makes her feel kind and she welcomes the new soul into the land of Bouru by giving spiritual sight to the soul in order for the soul to see its way into the paradise. For the souls upon which there is no tattoo marks, Nei Karamakuna would eat the pupils of the souls's eyes, making it forever blind and unable to find its way into the joyous Bouru.

The soul would then continue the final leg of its journey into the heart of the land of Bouru where the Guardian Nakaa sits at its gate. Nakaa continues to make nets with his back facing the path leading to the gate of his paradise. The soul's entry into the land

rests entirely upon its being examined and its being declared to have the right to enter by the Guardian, and to join the rest of the souls which have made their own journeys before it. There is a very big welcome consisting of feasting as well as dancing in honour of the newly arrived soul, and this continues forever for this is truly the nature of the land of Bouru.

(ii) Theological Reflections On The Land Of Bouru

Christianity was accepted successfully and integrated well into the Kiribati society. Conversion took place within the life of the people, the people took into Christianity their own life. The people held on to their inherited treasures, namely, the cultures, teachings and beliefs of their ancestors. This makes an I-Kiribat a man of two hearts: one adheres to the Christian teaching, while at the same time he remains faithful to what had always been a part of him. Many a time he returns to his old beliefs when situations in life became difficult. In nearly every difficult situation, he remains puzzled, finding it hard to know what to believe and how to act.

Christian teaching could easily fall into mere subject matter which would easily be accepted without questioning or effort to understand its major concerns when it is introduced into a culture of different heritage. The Christian faith faces the obstacle of being a part of a culture brought by the missionaries, and as such we see advantages as well as disadvantages to it. The missionaries intended to evangelize a society which was in "complete darkness",³ educate the natives in ways known and regarded as Christian norms at the time. This reflects the notion of the superior and inferior relationship between the two cultures. Ancestral worship was banned, sacred shrines were destroyed, and many important beliefs were completely forced out of the people without adequate explanations as to why they should be abandoned in order to make room for Christianity.

The Christian kingdom of God is in many ways similar to the land of Bouru, the kingdom of Nakaa. Because of the similarity people do commonly relapse into their old beliefs because they find no marked differences but duplications. Or to some, Christianity is accepted on a very superficial level and not given an adequate

priority in their lives.

We cannot fail to notice certain similar as well as dis-similar elements between the two kingdoms from which we can anticipate further dialogue between the two so as to compliment each other. We could be general in our discussion, but for the sake of this paper it would be best to restrict ourselves to self-realizing eschatological kingdom of God and what are the contributing factors the concept of Bouru could offer towards this.

The Land of Bouru - The Spiritual Kingdom

Nakaa, the guardian of Bouru, in his disappointment at the contents of the heavenly basket meant to be the gifts to mankind, left saying to himself, "I am going away as far as possible" The initiative of Nakaa to enter on a journey that would take him to a place not known to man, a place that man cannot reach, is being conveyed by the phrase 'as far as possible'. The Kiribati equivalent is raroa kinokino which (i) portrays a place so far away that man's imaginative ability would not even allow him to just have a glimpse of it, and (ii) means the utter darkness that no human visual ability would be able to survey. We are reminded of Nei Karamakuna's giving spiritual sight to the soul of the dead in order for it to see its way into the land of Bouru.

The story is a myth, but as a myth it holds many important elements in the displaying of the people's indigenous religious beliefs which moulded and gave meaning to every aspect of their existence. Sir Arthur Grimble in his book A Pattern of Islands describes his disappointment at what he saw which was believed to be the sacred ground of Nakaa,

"There was nothing in that empty waste to distinguish it from fifty other such promontories in the Gilbert group. It was merely a blazing acre or two of coral rock shaken by bellowing surf and strident with the shrieks of swarming sea-birds" 4

Grimble failed to understand what lies behind a place known as sacred, which kept him from coming to terms with the way an I-Kiribati deals with matters considered to be sacred. For one thing, the place which Grimble describes above was simply a last stepping stone before one come into the land of Bouru, and secondly but most important of all, the land of Bouru was not a physical entity, nor geographical. The land of Bouru is spiritual, and

man's communication with it is only possible through the realm of spirit. Grimble explains his disappointment at the reaction he received when he tries to raise the issue of Bouru, "they would not talk to me about the pace where Nakaa sat, they simply dropped their eyes and remove themselves into abysses of reserve". 5 I would understand the reactions of the people in terms of their sacred views. The land of Bouru is not discussed, nor visited, unlike the idea that we often get from pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where a great number of people save long enough to enable them to go on the trip, even discussing it in great detail as to how they should get themselves there.

J.D. Crossan refers to the word behind the kingdom of God, for whereas the English translation tends to give an impression of a place, the original Semetic term for the kingdom gives a rather different emphasis. The emphasis is not on a place, but on the act of God's ruling as a king. 6 Evident in the language of Bouru is the way in which the world of the spirits is organized in such a way that the will of the finder is faithfully observed.

(iii) Evidence In Nakaa's Kingdom As An Understanding Of God's Eschatological Kingdom

"Whether its subsequent span would be long or short, men would henceforth be living in a new age, in which the kingdom of God, His grace and His judgement, stood revealed". 7

Joachim Jeremias added his "eschatology that is in the process of realization" 8 to Dodd's realized eschatology. James M. Robinson further strengthened Jeremias' stand by offering that "the message of Jesus consist basically in a pronouncement to the present in view of the imminent eschatological future". 9

The kingdom eschatology has developed into an eschatology which belongs to the future, yet it is also here in the present in the teachings of Jesus. It continues to be future in that fulfilment is still to be brought. The kingdom remains as issue of the future, but its futuristic concept does not in any way exclude its present orientation. The kingdom of God is the kingly rule of God which begins now, and continues to look towards a final fulfilment.

Rosemary Grimble in her collective work of the materials collected by her father after a long period of work in Kiribati, Migrations, Myth, and Magic

From the Gilbert Islands, stated the bo-maki ceremony. The ceremony was an old ceremony performed by any close relative of the deceased over his or her dead body. The aim of the ceremony is to "straighten the path of the soul to the land of ghost" 10 The land of ghost is nothing other than the land of Bouru. Whether the soul of the deceased reached the eternal home of Bouru rested on how the bo-maki was performed by the living relatives. This is to say that the performance of the soul at Bouru begins at the time the ceremony carried out. The straightening of the path of the soul to the land of ghost clearly indicates a view that the future and present status are totally inseparable. The future begins right at the moment the bo-maki is performed, which opens it up for the participation of the relatives of the deceased. The participation symbolises two important points: which (i) the temporal reality of the life before death, and (ii) the forward looking to the life in the land of Bouru. As an I-Kiribati looks towards his life at Bouru, he anticipates for that as only the mean of life in fulfilment.

The kingdom of God is familiar ground to the belief of an I-Kiribat and his land of Bouru. The swift take over of Christianity in the lives of the Kiribat people is one which has long been commented upon. This took place not because of the inferior complexities of a traditional Kiribati belief. It was because of what an I-Kiribati saw in Christianity which made the faith accepted. The kingdom of God does not only fulfil the conception, it offers a new dimension to an important event prior to the fulfilment of the land of Bouru - the return of the clan of Matang.

The clan of Matang was believed to have been expelled from the land of Tungaru. The people of the clan of Matang are said to be a people of fair skins. Their return would be a return to the mother land, a sign which is taken as the fulfilment of the land of Bouru.

When Christianity was first introduced to the shores of Kiribati, the people who brought it were with fair skins. We are told that despite various oppositions faced by the missionaries, Christianity became well accepted by the people. What made the people receptive to Christianity? The return of the clan of Matang at the time Christianity was introduced was very much alive. The return of the clan of Matang was believed to be a return of blood brothers and sisters who would make the land of Bouru a reality.

Indeed the land of Bouru was made a reality, and the clan of Matang did return, but not as expected. Christianity fulfils the role of the clan of

Matang, and the Kingdom of God takes over the land of Bouru in a far more effective reality. Unlike the land of Bouru which is specifically for the people of Kiribati, the Kingdom of God is universally for all. Unlike the land of Bouru whose reality can only be realized at death, the Kingdom of God is now present but remains to look into the future for its final fulfilment.

NOTES

1. Ernest Sebatier: *Astride the Equator* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977). pp. 34-35.
2. Rosemary Grimble: *Migration, Myth and Magic from the Gibert Islands* (London: Routhedge Keagan Paul, 1972). p.88
3. Te Baba n Amerika (Beru, Kiribat). p.18
4. Arthur Grimble: *A Pattern of Islands* (London: John Murray, 1969) p.150
5. *ibid*, p. 148.
6. J.D. Crossan: *In Parables* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p.23.
7. C.H. Dodd: *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner, 1963), pp. 85-86.
8. Joachim Jeremias: *The Parables* (Second ed; New York: Scribner 1972), p. 24
9. Crossan, p. 24.

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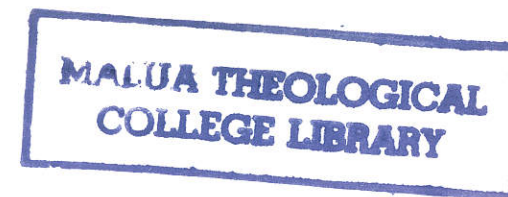
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