

Akali Andake: Reflections on Engan Christology

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The paper deals with the question "who is Christ for Enga." The author presents a brief survey of the academic efforts in this field in PNG and suggests to use the lived faith of the people as a starting point. He looks then at the Engan prayers and songs, dreams and visions, movements and testimonies. He then compares the Enga Christ with the Jesus of history. He treats the issue of Christ and changes in Enga identity and finally of safeguards against distortions.

Introduction¹

Several years ago I met with an Engan artist to discuss how one could depict the Enga Christ in a graphic way. Together we decided upon a sand painting with the central figures being a man and woman in the traditional finery of the Enga people. He has his hands raised above his head as if calling out to people, and the woman at his side has an arm outstretched towards him. She is offering him a bunch of *lepe* (Bog Iris) leaves: a symbol of life and well-being. *Lepe* leaves also form the base from which the male figure emerges. Marks of death by crucifixion are visible in his hands and side. The woman also has a wound on her side from which liquid is running into a bamboo container,

What did the people think? The initial reaction was quite subdued. Some wanted the meaning explained to them. Resisting the temptation to do that, I used the picture as the basis for a dialogue homily one Sunday. In a short time people suggested fifteen possible meanings for the male figure and as many for the female one. Some said the male figure represents an Engan *kamongo* (Big Man). Others said it represents Christ; others, Adam, or a prophet such as Moses (with his arms raised so the people could escape across the Red Sea.) Others said it represents Kimala, a mythical folk hero. Others looked at the dynamic of the picture and said it spoke to them of Christ calling out for us to come to him. Then there was the idea that it portrayed the death and resurrection of Christ, with the marks of the passion and the figure rising out of the *lepe* leaves (being symbolic of life). This was further supported by the people's perception that the woman is Mary at the foot of the cross or Mary of Magdala at the tomb. Some offered a theological explanation: that the male figure with the female one together represented the whole of humanity and that Christ gave himself for us all. One went further, pointing out that it could represent the Church, the body of Christ. Then someone said: it represents "Us". There was a murmur of assent from the congregation as they realised that they too were represented in that picture of the Enga Christ.²

The Enga Christ is one whom Enga people can identify with. Such a personal sense of the meaning of the incarnation is a goal of evangelization and particularly of attempts at inculturation of the Gospel. But how can this happen? How can people come to respond to the question, "Who do you say I am?" in a way that appreciates the mystery of the universality of Christ while at the same time offering a uniquely Melanesian answer to that question. That is the problem addressed by this paper.

Melanesian Christology

European and Polynesian Christian missionaries came to Papua New Guinea in the last decades of the 19th century. It took over 60 years to penetrate some of the mountainous regions, and so many people have been exposed to Western thought and the Christian message only in the last generation. In recent years there have been rapid social and cultural changes. Melanesian writers such as Bernard Narakobi lament the destructive effect of many of these changes. He has called for recognition of a "Melanesian Way" and for Melanesian people to develop their own authentic philosophy, doctrines, theologies, jurisprudence, sociology, and so on.³

Many scholars and pastoral workers have taken up the challenge. In 1976 there was a symposium entitled *Christ in Melanesia* sponsored by the Melanesian Institute. Of the 18 contributors to the collected papers from the symposium, two are Melanesian: Bernard Narakobi and Joe Gaquarae. The latter says that from his observation (in the Solomon Islands) most villagers attribute qualities like power and knowledge to Jesus Christ and think of him as being like the white missionaries.⁴ Since the symposium others have sought ways to provide alternatives to philosophical categories and doctrinal presuppositions coming from the West in order to discover a Melanesian way of seeing Christ. A prominent figure is Ennio Mantovani who has been exploring the possibility of using Melanesian symbols to express Christ.⁵ Mantovani says that biblical symbolism typical of pastoralists and herders is basically theistic.⁶ A theistic religion, stressing the personal aspect of God, contrasts with what he calls a "biocosmic" religion where God is revealed in nature in an impersonal way as the source of life. Mantovani develops a theology based on the biocosmic symbol system: there is a characteristic mythology in which a being (Dema) is killed violently and from such a death comes the staple food which previously was unknown. Mantovani advocates speaking of Jesus in Melanesian terms as illustrated in the Dema myth and in celebrations such as the pig-kill. "Christ is the true Dema." Christ is the one who freely offered his life so that we might have true life. He made it possible for our communities to make present his life-giving death (in the Eucharist) whenever we feel the need for it.⁷

Mantovani's approach is valuable in that it goes beyond a translation model of inculturation. He begins with the cultural and philosophical context and attempts a dialogue between that context and Christian revelation using culture as the language of God's self-revelation. However one of the limitations of his method is the changing culture. The contemporary experience of many Melanesians is a complex of traditional values and those of the modern (secular) world. Also there is the danger of reducing the topic to what can be expressed in the language of anthropology or comparative religions. His language may be as much the language of comparative religion as it is the language of the people.⁸

Lived Faith Experience

The lived faith experience of people must be an essential element in any Melanesian christology. The difficulty is finding a way to speak about that experience that does not reduce it to foreign categories. Obviously it requires a first-hand life experience which would normally only be possible for Melanesians themselves. But those with a Western education usually show a bewilderment about where to begin and how to proceed. They live in two worlds and there is a discontinuity in the ways they have been taught to express their ideas and the sense of faith they encounter in the community. A solution is to enquire about the faith expression of the community which includes those with less formal education. Faith is expressed publically in prayers and song, dreams and visions, movements and testimonies. What sort of hermeneutic is revealed in the way people interpret the Christian tradition in this context? In what follows I will illustrate how Enga people demonstrate considerable creativity and innovation through the use of metaphor and images which are drawn from their traditional and contemporary contexts.

Prayer and Song

The way Christians pray provides insights into their understanding of Christ. Engan Christians tend to be relatively informal and uninhibited during times of communal prayer. Sometimes in spontaneous prayer people use translations of common Christian prayers. But often they use terms that show considerable creativity.⁹ I will focus on prayers in the Catholic community.

The most common term for Christ in Catholic prayers in the Wabag Diocese is *kamongo* the Engan term for a Big Man.¹⁰ The Engan Big Man is one influential in the pig exchange, a skilled orator and negotiator. He is a man "with a name" (important), a "man with talk" (convincing) or a "large man" (powerful). When the term *kamongo* came to be used by Christians it was used metaphorically. Christ was not a Big Man in a human sense, but there were admired qualities in the meaning of the term which could be used in bringing an innovation to the cultural meaning. If God/

Christ is *kamongo* then Christ is important, Christ speaks convincingly, Christ is powerful. With the use of a term from the local language one might ask whether there has been a transfer of meaning from the cultural context not unlike what appears to have happened in the first century when Gentile Christians used the term *kyrios* which had its own field of secular meaning. Has the close association of the Engan *kamongo* with material wealth and prestige affected the Engan understanding of Christ as *kamongo*? How does this fit with the poverty of Christ's self-gift? The Engan *kamongo* is also associated with both peace-making and success in warfare. How is this to be reconciled with Jesus as reconciler and prince of peace? There is an interesting twist to the question of transfer of meaning since the Christian use of the term is now affecting its use in everyday language. Recently a traditional Big Man near Yampu politely asked that people should not refer to him as *kamongo* because that is now the name given to God.

The term *kamongo* is often used in a general sense for God and elaborated upon to produce a rich litany of meaning. Thus one hears expressions such as:

Kamongo emba etete yale paka (Lord, great and all powerful)

Kamongo emba tata pitakanya takange (Lord, Father of everything)

Kamongo emba etete pupu lapae (Lord, strong and brave)

Kamongo emba saka katao katenge (Lord of life)

Kamongo embame tata pitaka kandenge (Lord who sees everything)

Kamongo emba etete tii pipae (Lord of light)

Kamongo emba lenge tapae (Lord, conscious of all things)

Kamongo emba etete paka pipae (Lord, who is to be feared)

Kamongo is not the only term of direct address to Christ in Enga. One hears terms such as *Akali andake Jisasa* (Big Man Jesus), *Yangoe Jisasa* (Brother Jesus [from a male perspective]), and *Pakae Jisasa* (Beloved brother Jesus [from a woman]). Lawrence Kambao describes various metaphors that are applied to Jesus.⁴¹ Christ is the new *topoli* (healer), the sacred *akaipu wai* (special plant), the *sandalu isingi akali* (custodian of the sacred), *wane* (favoured son [of our sister Mary]), and *akali lakungi* (friend/lover). Sometimes animal titles are used symbolically. Christ is the *tambuaka* (the exceptional pig), the *lai* parrot (that looks after people and brings good fortune), the *kambi* eagle (that saves people, especially children) or the *laima* cassowary (strongest of all the birds of the forest). These are a few example of the rich litany of titles and expressions used to refer to Christ in Engan prayers and songs.

Terms such as *wane* (son), *pakae* (brother) and *akali lakungi* (friend) are terms having considerable emotional content. One hears songs such as:

Ee kamongonya ikiningi doko sangalinya bui katenge sui doko tange nyetoale sui

(God's son has a star on his chest that is good for me to get [marry].)¹²

Ee kamongonya ikiningi doko lomenya koko palenge.

Ee doko tange nyeto lao epo.

(The Son of God lives inside a protected sacred place.

I came so I could get [marry] him.)¹³

One sees in such songs a strong desire to come close to Christ expressed in very human terms, from a woman's viewpoint. Where the term *kamongo* brings out the masculine features of Christ in terms of power, influence and prestige, these terms of endearment reveal a mystical dimension in Engan prayer and song, a feature that warrants further study.

Apart from titles, it is worth studying the role attributed to Christ in people's prayers. Often God/Christ is seen as having a protective role in terms similar to that of traditional deities. The following is a translation of part of a prayer at the end of a Sunday Mass at Porgera:

"... You yourself look after us but we forget about you.

We fall into rivers. Demons tempt us. Tree branches fall and kill us.

But God, you look after us and we are able to get well.

... Now it is Sunday and we think of you
and receive Christ's body and we rejoice.

The body of Jesus comes to me.

We don't see his face.

We don't look after you, but you look after us.

We praise your name, you are one but you have three names,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen."

When the prayer leader prays, "We don't see his face. We don't look after you, but you look after us," he is following a thought pattern traditionally applied to the deity represented by the sun. A common saying is, "The sun is watching you." Those crossing a dangerous vine bridge might mentally commend their safety to the sun. Hence the earlier part of the prayer listing various physical and moral dangers from which to be protected. The prayer is addressed to "God", yet there is a sense of participation in the sacrament, which is Jesus' special manner of being present. So the invisible Jesus ("We don't see his face") is the presence of the powerful and protective power of God.

Another image of the protective power of God is revealed in a prayer on a Sunday during a period of tribal fighting. The elderly leader prays,

“ . . . If we do wrong, don't take us down from your shoulder.
Even if we are heavy, don't take us down.
Carefully carry us.
God you are our Lord for ever and ever.”¹⁴

The image is that of a child being carried on it's father's shoulder. The leader prays not to be taken from God's shoulder because the fight is still on and it wouldn't be safe to come down. This is a good example of inculturation where the image of the personal love/care of God is combined with the basic concern for safety (life) that is characteristic of the traditional (cosmic) religious point of view. Salvation in this case is not in some transphenomenal beyond, but life in the face of death here and now. This awareness of the loving care of God is made possible by Jesus who, Engans say, “opened our eyes and our ears when we were in darkness.” Jesus has shown us the Father. When Jesus died “it was like God cutting off his finger” (an Engan custom to express sorrow, and here used to express God's compassion).

Dreams and Visions

Dreams and visions have always played a significant role in Engan life. Traditionally the young men in the *sangai* initiation rites spent long hours recounting and interpreting their dreams. Most often the dreams were seen as having a predictive value as to who would win the next tribal fight and who or how many would die. A recent book on Engan women's lives and traditions does not dwell on the significance of dreams for women.¹⁵ However my own enquiries lead me to believe that dreams were important for women, particularly in their predictive value for fortune in domestic life. For example, dreams may help a woman know what clan she will marry into or how many children she will have and whether they will be boys or girls. Dreaming of a loved one lying down might mean that the person is ill and in need of help.

Dreams and visions are an integral part of contemporary Engan Christian faith experience. The following is the account of a dream by a woman at Yampu.

“I was wandering in an unknown place and a religious sister came towards me. She asked me to come to her house. Her house was a nice big one. The sister gave me a sewing machine to take with me so that I could mend torn clothes for her. I took the sewing machine and started sewing torn clothes in her house.”

After praying about it over a long period she interpreted the dream to mean that like the sewing machine that sews torn clothes, she should mend those people

who are torn in spirit. After the dream recurred several times she started a group to pray with sick and troubled people and they meet for this purpose each week.

Some say that when Christ appears in dreams he is often dressed in a cassock and may have the appearance of a respected priest whom they know. This is illustrated in the following dream.

"I was in my garden and a priest flying a helicopter landed in my garden. The European priest asked me to take a lift with him and we flew to a town. It was a beautiful town even better than Mount Hagen or Port Moresby. I saw the view of the city from inside the helicopter."

The dreamer interpreted this in terms of Christ being pleased with her and allowing her to catch a glimpse of his "city".

Such dreams are highly significant for people, especially if the same dream recurs. A person will then pray about it and perhaps discuss it with others in the community. Again this is an area where elements from the psychological posture towards the mysteries of life found in traditional cosmic religiosity emerge in Christian forms to play a role in people's lived faith experience.

Visions too figure in the life of the Christian communities. During a period of prayer and fasting Elias Eta of Pompubus had a vision of a house with twelve doors.¹⁶ Consequently he built a replica as a house for prayer in his community. Later the same Elias received a vision of three "sticks": one, resembling the emblem of the Legion of Mary, for banishing evil spirits; another, in the shape of a cross, for building community; the third, resembling a shepherd's staff, for preaching the good news. This vision later had a considerable influence on Movements in his parish.

Some who engage in a ministry of healing are helped through visions to discern people's needs. In one of the prayer groups near Par the leader often has visions of the Holy Family touching those who are sick and in need of prayer. Christ usually appears as a priest in a cassock. The leader is not in a trance or an altered state, but appears to receive the visions as a normal occurrence. Other prayer leaders are directed to pray over the sick people. With prayer like this, in time, many are healed and come to be active members of their church community.

I do not want to over emphasise phenomena such as dreams and visions. However they do influence Christian people today and have contributed to the emergence of influential Movements and so must be taken seriously by anyone with an interest in the Engan religious experience.

Movements

Religious Movements are not a new phenomenon in Enga. For example Meggitt and Gibbs have both documented a pre-Christian millenarian movement that in the 1940's swept through the West of what is now Enga Province.¹⁷ This was at least ten years before any Christian missionaries came to the area. In the last two decades there have been a series of Christian or neo-Christian revival movements.¹⁸ In the Catholic Church the charismatic renewal movement grew considerably in the late 1970's and the early 1980's and still has some influence.

Recently the "God Triwan" movement has been capturing people's imagination throughout the Province. I will describe this movement briefly as an example of movements among Engan Christians today. The movement arose in 1989 led by an Engan catechist, Matthew Ima. He was concerned that the vision of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan that the Church be *a community filled with joy sharing the fulness of life with the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit*, was not being realised sufficiently. He recalls, "Mi bin ting olsem Jisas i no stap insait long mi na mi stap olsem wanpela tinpis".¹⁹ Matthew and his community prayed about this for three years until in 1989 at a prayer meeting he began to experience the pain of Christ on the cross and felt a power outside of him moving him to make the sign of the cross. By holding a crucifix Matthew found his fear subsided. Then the crucifix in his hand began to move of its own accord leading him around to bless the community. The people experienced a relief of their fear and a new desire to be faithful to prayer and the sacraments. Heartened by the words to Moses, "I will send you to Pharoah that you may bring forth my people out of Egypt... the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you" (Ex 3:10-15), Matthew and his supporters have gone out bringing the message that "God Triwan" wants people to be free from the power of darkness to come into God's light.

How does a movement such as this contribute to our understanding of Christ in Enga? While the name of the movement refers to the Trinity, the focus throughout is on Christ crucified. They place great importance on passages of Scripture such as 1 Cor 2:2 "The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ." and Gal 6:14 "The only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." Their prayer and song reflect their conviction that it is the power of Christ crucified that takes away sin and opens the way to living in the light.

What is particularly interesting is the way Movement members explain the moving cross which has become a distinguishing feature of the movement. There is a customary Engan form of divination called *pepe miningi* used for finding out what has caused death. A diviner holds a stick or a spear decorated with *kola* grass over

the body of the deceased and asks, "What caused you to die? Was it X? Was it Y? When the cause or the person responsible for the death is nominated the stick begins to move or shake. The explanation given is that the spirit of the dead person "sits" on the stick or spear and causes it to move as an answer to the question from the diviner. In the God Triwan movement the leader or his assistants hold the cross and it moves, sometimes quite violently ("Kruse em yet i muv na i no isi, klostu haus i bruk!")²⁰ They say that it is the power of the Spirit of Jesus which causes the cross to move and in so doing it is revealed what caused Jesus' death (our sin). Not only is it seen as a reminder of why Jesus died but they go further and say that Jesus who is not dead but alive wants to warn us about what is causing us to be "dead." Jesus reveals, heals and saves. So in practice the shaking crucifix in the hand of the prophet is a stimulus for individuals and the whole community to admit their sinfulness and to resolve to turn away from sin towards the light.

This is an interesting example of inculturation. In Enga shaking is usually seen as a sign of power.²¹ It was present in the pre-Christian millenarian movement, the charismatic movement and now the shaking cross is a phenomenon central to the God Triwan movement signifying the power of the Spirit of Christ to reveal sin and to free people from it.

There is an important liberative dimension in movements such as the God Triwan movement. The emphasis is not simply on the cross but the liberating power of the cross. Movement members often refer back to the account of Moses freeing his people from their slavery in Egypt. This is a point as old as the scriptures, so what is special about the Enga use of it? Their special contribution is in the way they see the liberation in terms of their contemporary life experience. Sources of oppression common to people in many Third World nations such as the colonial experience or large-scale land alienation have not influenced the Enga people to any great extent. Their colonial experience was brief and relatively benign and there has been little land alienation except in Porgera in the far West of the Province. However many today feel a "heaviness" connected with violence and tribal fighting which continues unabated despite efforts by both the government and the Churches to stop it.²² To the people, religion is not something compartmentalised, separate from politics, economics or sociocultural matters. They see it as having to do with life and life in its fullness. So Christ is concerned not simply with our spirit or with freeing people personally, but particularly with helping to change the heaviness that people feel so that they can be truly free to experience the fullness of life. This is an example of Christ's liberating power seen in very practical social terms. Moreover this view of religion being relevant to people's daily concerns about suffering, sickness and death is characteristic of the underlying cosmic religiosity which continues to play an important role in people's lives and which adds richness to their Christian faith. Jesus Christ is not some figure who lived a long time ago, but the one who

wants to work *pepe miningi*: to reveal the cause of sin and death now, so that his people may have life.²³

The Enga Christ and the Jesus of History

The Enga use two expressions about the historicity of discourse. *Tindi pii* is talk about ahistorical (mythical) events. *Atome pii* is about events which people can remember or have witnessed. How do people talk about the event of Jesus Christ? I suspect that for many, the news of Jesus Christ is connected with the coming of the Church, and the story of Jesus is seen in an ahistorical sense. But Christians cannot ignore the uniqueness of the Christian revelation in a historical Jesus who entered into history in a particular place and time. If the Christ of faith is divorced from history, then there may be an over-emphasis on the second coming and the intervention of Christ at the end of history. Such millenarian thinking with its pessimistic view of the present and the images of Christ as judge on the last day is quite common among Papua New Guinean Christians. But what about the historical Jesus who shared human struggles and experienced temptation, tragedy and death? Where is the historical Jesus who not only forgave sin but shared the lot of sinners? The history of christology is the story of attempts to strike a balance between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus in a way that people of each time and place can comprehend. Christology in Melanesia is no exception.

There are ample resources in Enga for integrating the divine and the human in Christ. People tend to have a holistic worldview, which, though distinguishing the sacred and secular, does not divide them. So the issue of the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus is not such a problem because the tendency is to bring the two together. Also, coupled with their faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ there is a strong belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit there is power to interpret present events not in terms of doom and the second coming, but in the hope that stems from the first. The Spirit alive and active in the community is very much a testimony to the truth of the good news of Jesus.

This raises the question of how the Enga people feel themselves participating in the Paschal mystery of Christ. It is generally agreed that in Papua New Guinea the continuation, protection, sustenance and celebration of *life* is a central value. But life is not to be taken in isolation, but in contrast to death. It could be that we need to give more attention to symbols of death in Melanesia in order to understand better the life-death relationship. Elements such as water, blood, or certain birds or animals may be seen as symbols of life in rituals and healing magic. What about these same elements as symbols of death outside of a ritual context? In Enga most major river crossings were dangerous. Even today "nogut yu pundan long wara," (Take care that you don't drown) is a common expression. Blood encountered "out

of place" is always a source of fear or anxiety.²⁴ Birds may be signs of life in their habits and their plumage, but their calls are often interpreted as omens of death. Ghosts are possibly the most significant symbols of death. Spirits of the recent dead, angry at being deprived of their familiar life and still mindful of grievances against the living are most likely to cause trouble.²⁵ In many cases being bitten by a ghost is the most common cause of sickness and death. Many Christians have a dichotomous belief: they believe in the power of Christ, and at the same time they are deathly afraid of ghosts.²⁶ I think that a deeper understanding of symbols of life and death in Melanesia will open ways for Christians to appreciate the full significance of the Paschal Mystery of life and death. This will come about as dichotomous beliefs come to be seen as part of that tension in which faith gives hope and the power to seek life in the face of death.

Less symbolic and all the more real are the frequent experiences of life and death today. Some become obsessed with politics as a source of life and well-being, yet with it there are often the dehumanizing consequences of intimidation, dependence and broken promises. There is also the frequent experience of sickness and fear (of shame, violent death, etc.) or plain boredom so that life revolves around card games or court cases. Perhaps it is necessary for Christians to put more emphasis on the meaning of Holy Saturday. Jesus died, was buried, and descended to the dead. Most high school students when asked what was the greatest thing that Jesus Christ did, replied: "He died for my sins."²⁷ I sensed that many of the responses reflected the joy of Easter. But what about Jesus who died and was buried—the human Jesus who became sin for us and emptied himself to the point of death? That is more the experience of the absence of Christ than the promise of life in the glorious cross decked with flowers and held aloft on Palm or Easter Sunday. Possibly the greatest challenge for Engan Christians is to discern the place of Christ within modern developments. Is the cry of Jesus on the cross echoed in the cries of those who suffer today? Does love and service mean risking political crucifixion before there is a way of speaking about the hope that gives life?

Christ the Challenge to a New Identity

Does faith in Christ challenge the Enga people to a new identity? In the past Engans defined themselves in relation to their own extended family group and to the environment.²⁸ Today the situation is changing. The invasion of their world by outsiders and foreign products has disrupted many aspects of the traditional universe. Alcoholism, poverty and the breakdown of family and clan structures are increasing. While efforts at inculturation must appreciate traditional values, there is more to take into account as people become marginalized and teenagers finish school with dashed dreams. They can't go back, but where is the hope for the future? There

emerges the tragedy of the non-person so common throughout the world. What does faith in Christ say to this?

Ultimately Engans will discover their identity as followers of Christ in community, and this is surely one of the greatest contributions the Church can make in a changing world.

While retaining a continuity with the pre-Christian identity, genuine Christian communities will be challenged by the kerygma to draw upon their cultural resources, to transcend their own limits, to die to what is opposed to the ultimate good of humanity, and to become a culture of life in the face of death. The struggle to achieve this and to find a new identity in Christ will be an on-going process, not in spite of the socio-cultural reality but within and through it.

Safeguards against Distortion

What guarantee is there against distorted interpretations of Christ as people develop expressions of faith that are meaningful and relevant in their changing socio-political context? The quest for the Engan face of Christ is a risky business. Yet is it not more of a risk to hand on a colonial Christ or a dead past?²⁹ The few examples I have given indicate how Christians in Enga Province can be creative and innovative in expressing their belief. However such innovation cannot be arbitrary or uncritical.

What critical criteria are appropriate for a society with an oral tradition which does not place great value on analytical critique or historical consciousness? A help might be the example of the early Church discerning the truth in prayer, community life, and service. While not without its difficulties, this became a self-regulating model for discovering the truth of Christ in the Churches. Faith in action reveals the truth. "Doing the truth" (Jn 3:21) is not simply moral practice inspired by faith, but is the very genesis of faith.

I think that this mutual interweaving of truth and action will be the place for mutual verification, provided there is openness to the Spirit working in the *sensus fidelium*, and there is the humility to realize that to be truly Christian there must always be continuity with the Church of the apostles and with the body of Christ's Church throughout the world today. Continuity makes Tradition possible, but in the changing circumstances of today, truth is found not only in continuity but also within discontinuity.

If one measures orthodoxy by Chalcedonian formulas, Melanesian interpretations may not be "orthodox". But perhaps we need a view of contextualized orthodoxy broader than a universalized idea of truth which is then "inculturated" in a particular Church. Doctrine is valid and true in the socio-historical context in which it was formulated, but requires interpretation if it is to be truthful in a different context.

Conclusion

In this paper I have illustrated how Engan Christians are beginning to tell the story of Jesus together with their own, using prayer and song, dreams and visions, movements and testimonies. Their response is innovative and creative. This process of interpretation and reinterpretation is not unique: it can be seen even in the books of the New Testament. Hellenistic Jews appropriated aspects of the message that were compatible with their own tradition and ignored elements which were incompatible with their way of thinking. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Jewish elements in the life of Jesus became increasingly problematic and had to be explained to Gentile recipients of the Gospel.³⁰ The trend has continued as each age of history has sought to depict Jesus in accordance with its own character.³¹ I have shown how this is happening in the contemporary lived faith experience of Enga people. As in the early Church, Christians in Melanesia are searching for ways to express their faith in Christ that are meaningful today yet true to the life and preaching of Jesus. The task of the theologian is to encourage people to reflect critically on their faith experience. I have tried to show how raising issues such as faith and history, the place of the Paschal Mystery, identity, and criteria for truth, can help deepen and refine the uniquely Melanesian answer to the question: "Who do you say I am?"

I have only touched on these questions. Ultimately one must relate these findings to a theology of revelation. If one takes a dynamic view of God's self-communication in history then can we understand the testimony of the Christian communities as God continuing the dialogue with God's people in our time? Can we understand the many elements from Melanesian culture which enrich their understanding of Christ to be moments of grace in which God has revealed God's love to people even before they heard the explicit proclamation of the good news? Can we see the signs of the times, for example through the God Triwan movement, as part of saving revelation taking place now through the power of the Spirit? These are theological issues which go beyond phenomenological questions to ask how Christian truth can be discovered in the interaction between the experience of the Apostolic community (as found in Scripture) and the present faith experience of the Christian community in Melanesia.

Endnotes

- ¹ I wish to thank the many people who helped provide source material for this study, especially, Joseph Lakane, Aki Tumu, and Catherine Nongkas MSC.
- ² When the painting was taken from the old church and initially not given a place in the new church building at Par, some of the young people got quite upset and formed a plan to break in and steal the painting from where it was held so as to

- hang it in the church themselves. It was only with great difficulty that they were persuaded to wait and to try more diplomatic channels.
- ³ Bernard Narakobi, "In Defence of the Melanesian Way," *Post Courier*, July 27, 1977, p.18.
 - ⁴ Joe Gaquare, "Indigenisation as Incarnation. The Concept of a Melanesian Christ," *Christ in Melanesia, Point*, 1977, p.149.
 - ⁵ Ennio Mantovani, "God's Word and the Ancestors' Response," *Christ the Life of Papua New Guinea. Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute*, No.1, ed. E. Mantovani and M. MacDonald. (Goroka: Melanesian Institute, 1982), p.7.
 - ⁶ Ennio Mantovani, "Christ our Life," *Christ the Life of Papua New Guinea*, p.45.
 - ⁷ Ennio Mantovani, "Christ our Life," p.45.
 - ⁸ There have been other valuable contributions that seek Melanesian ways of expressing the mystery of Christ. Most come from sympathetic non-Melanesians. For example: John Strelan, "Our Common Ancestor," *Catalyst* 5.2, (1975) pp.33-39; Mary MacDonald, "Christ our Healer," *Christ the Life of Papua New Guinea* pp.46-58; James Knight, "Towards a Grassroots Theology among the Numai," *Catalyst* 16.2 (1986) pp. 100-126; Douglas Young, "The Symbol of Jesus in Enga," *Catalyst* 14.2 (1984) pp.131-143. There are also attempts to articulate Melanesian philosophical categories, for example: Esau Tuza, "A Melanesian Cosmological Process," *Catalyst* 8.4 (1978) pp.244-262. Also, Leonardo Mercado, "Melanesian Philosophy," *Catalyst* 18.2 (1988) pp.107-129.
 - ⁹ Of course prayers have unique characteristics in the various denominations. Prayers I recorded in a Lutheran church often begin: "Lord God Yahweh all powerful," or "Jesus, you who were, are, and will be." In a nearby One Way church prayers customarily begin simply with the name of Jesus or Jesus Christ or "Thank you, Jesus."
 - ¹⁰ It is also the title of the coat of arms of the Catholic Diocese of Wabag: *Jisasa Kataisa Kamongo* (Lord Jesus Christ).
 - ¹¹ Lawrence Kambao in "Enga Christology." Unpublished manuscript.
 - ¹² Similar references to the star are made by supporters of politicians during political campaigns.
 - ¹³ The *lome* is a walled-off place in the forest, set aside for sacred activities. The Christian women singing the song are also referring to the tabernacle in the church.

- ¹⁴ ... "Naimame koeyama kandeno ongo embame naima soo yakenala nayape. Kende pitamopapi patapata lao mee soo katape. Gote emba naimanya kamongo katao katengeaka." (Petrus Lupaina, Yampu, 1992)
- ¹⁵ Alome Kyakas and Polly Wiessner, *From Inside the Woman's House* (Buranda, Queensland: Robert Brown and Associates, 1992.)
- ¹⁶ Douglas Young, "Itakone's Children: The persistence of a life-giving myth." Unpublished manuscript, p.2.
- ¹⁷ M.J. Meggitt, "The Sun and the Shakers," *Oceania* 44 (1973) pp.1-37, 109-126. (1973). Philip Gibbs, "The Cult from Lyeimi and the Ipili," *Oceania* 48 (1977) pp. 1-25.
- ¹⁸ These are well documented in the 3 volume *Point* series on *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today*.
- ¹⁹ "I felt that Jesus was not within me and I was like an empty fish can."
- ²⁰ "The cross shook strongly of its own accord; it almost destroyed the house!"
- ²¹ The power might be seen in a positive sense or the shaking may also be seen as a struggle with an evil power.
- ²² Sometimes this is expressed in songs, for example: "*Hele poo leamo papi ikitae sio, pilyo apa pito lao sio.*" ("The power of hell is crushing me and I am hard pressed to survive, but see, what I have waited for I have now received.")
- ²³ A further issue worth considering is whether the movement provides a channel for initiative and decision-making within what is still a foreign dominated Church. There is an evident move from dependence towards independence. For example, times of ceremonies and meetings are decided by prophets within the movement. Later the parish priest may be informed of their decision and that his presence is required (whether it suits him or not).
- ²⁴ The first presumption on seeing blood is that is it a sign of violence having occurred or else women's blood (dangerous for men), unless it is seen to be the result of a simple injury such as a cut foot.
- ²⁵ M. MacDonald, *Symbols of Life; An Interpretation of Magic*. Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute, No. 2 (Goroka, Melanesian Institute, 1985) p.5. Enga priest Fr Lawrence Kambao feels that ghosts are more symbols of life (resurrection) than death (personal communication).
- ²⁶ B.H. Turner, "Confronting the Gods," *Catalyst* 6.4 (1963) pp.227-248.
- ²⁷ This has been my experience and it is also reflected in a survey conducted by Sr. Mona Marie at Notre Dame High School, Mount Hagen.

- ²⁸ In an interesting paper, Paul Brennan says that the Enga define themselves in opposition to many aspects of their environment. He says, "Religion for the Central Enga was defined as man's attempt to maintain putative relationships with non-empirical beings and forces. The necessity to control ones oppositions, ie., to keep life in a state of repair, to preserve it from failure and decline, to sustain it against hostility or danger, has been shown to be a major concern of These people... The saintly Enga is one who has been able to keep these people requirements in balance, not erring on the side of obsessive concern with the natural world - at the expense of the other, but cautiously and deliberately satisfying the requirements of all claims upon him." (*Let Sleeping Snakes Lie. A Study of Enga Traditional Religious Belief and Ritual. The Australian Association for the Study of Religions Belief and Ritual. The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1977, p.52.*)
- ²⁹ Claude Geffre, *The Risk of Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p.1.
- ³⁰ Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965), p.86.
- ³¹ This is illustrated well in Jaroslav Pelikan's book, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Cultures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.2.