



Brother Martin *Grassroots Anthropologist*

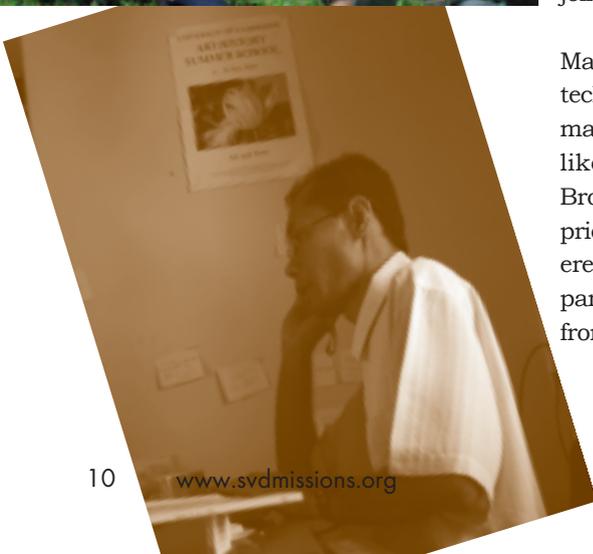
Philip Gibbs SVD



It is said that, in Papua New Guinea, each village has its own anthropologist. Although this is an exaggeration, Papua New Guinea does have a fascinating array of languages and cultures and it attracts many researchers and social scientists. Observations from the first Divine Word Missionaries, who were trained in ethnology and linguistics, provide rich sources of cultural information, not only for researchers, but also for the descendants of the people whom the early missionaries encountered.



Brother Martin Trines continues the Divine Word anthropological tradition. First-born in a family of six children, Martin grew up in a Divine Word parish in West Timor, Indonesia. It was only in the twelfth grade that he first met a Divine Word Brother. He was attracted by the way the Brother served his people as a carpenter. In his own words, Bro. Martin told me: “I was thinking about serving as a Divine Word priest and going to the seminary. When I asked about Brothers they told me, ‘A Brother is like the priest—you eat together, you work together, but you do not say Mass. See how the Brother is faithful to coming to Mass each day and in helping people?’ That was the basic reason why I joined the community as a Brother.”



Martin wondered if he would be accepted as a Brother since he had no technical skills. At that time in Indonesia, Brothers were associated with manual work and trades. Later he found out that it did not have to be like that. It was possible to be a Brother and an anthropologist. Bro. Martin has said that he does not think of himself as a Brother or a priest, but rather as a Divine Word Missionary. He told me: “I considered volunteering for the Congo, Ghana, or the Philippines, but as I prepared for perpetual vows, I read the compiled reports of missionaries from Papua New Guinea. And, after reading the works of anthropolo-



Brother Martin in the field doing work on epilepsy.



Brother Martin conducting an interview.

gists such as Mead and Malinowski, I changed and volunteered for Papua New Guinea.”

Bro. Martin came to Papua New Guinea and joined the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, where he works in cultural and anthropological research. He places a great deal of importance on fieldwork and going out to the villages. As he says, “We are not here to be philosophers.”

Bro. Martin spent three years in the Philippines studying for a master’s degree in medical anthropology at the University of the Philippines. The topic for his thesis was “Cultural Perceptions of Epilepsy.” At the moment, the principal project of the Melanesian Institute is a study of the attitudes about HIV and AIDS in evangelical churches in Papua New Guinea. Bro. Martin is also investigating the effects of marijuana use among young people, and he is studying the life of street vendors in Goroka, the local township. He feels that this research is an important task that contributes to our understanding of social issues.

In addition to Bro. Martin, there are other Brothers serving in Papua New Guinea. Some

are tradesman, such as such as carpenters and mechanics. Others work in electronics, nursing, accounting, and one is a medical doctor. Bro. Martin is happy to see some national Papua New Guineans joining the Divine Word Missionaries as Brothers. One Papua New Guinean Brother works in social ministry in a project started by the Mercy Sisters. Another serves in health administration. Yet another, Brother Philip Kenai SVD, is a teacher.

Brother Philip has an advanced diploma in religious studies and hopes to serve in Latin America after perpetual vows. He told Bro. Martin: “I like taking responsibility for what is happening in the house so it becomes a real home, even looking after the animals. We Brothers and priests live much the same life in Papua New Guinea, but I think that it is the Brothers who keep the Society functioning.”

Bro. Martin and Bro. Philip are two of the many Brothers who do more than just keep the Society functioning in Papua New Guinea. They see their mission as being professionals dedicated in their work. They serve through the skills they have developed, lead by their example, and preach through dedication to their work. ♦



Brother Philip helps prepare breakfast.