Theo Ahrens 2006, Gerard Bus 1976, and Ennio Montovani 2002.
Courtesy of Philip Gibbs and the Melanesian Institute.

# CULTURE AND FAITH: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MELANESIAN INSTITUTE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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The Melanesian Institute (MI) in Papua New Guinea (PNG) was established in 1970. Its four principal tasks are: first, to carry out relevant anthropological and socioeconomic research; second, to organize cultural and pastoral orientation courses for new missionaries and missionaries longer in the field; third, to help implement socioeconomic development schemes and church pastoral experiments; and fourth, to publish a magazine for information and discussion (Janssen 1995:44). At various points during the past 38 years, over 40 talented men and women have been appointed to the faculty of the Institute, a number of these being well qualified in anthropology. These anthropologists had done research in PNG and elsewhere prior to coming to the Institute. The topics taught at the courses run by the Institute were for missionaries working in various parts of PNG, so the material presented by the staff tended towards a survey of the findings of researchers over the whole of PNG. To offset this generalist tendency, faculty members were encouraged to spend three months of every year doing first-hand research.

The Institute was first established by three Catholic missionary congregations in the period immediately following the Second Vatican Council. Though the Council had responded to ideas that were already circulating, it did help open an era of renewal and change with the methods of Catholic missionaries and members of other Churches with whom they had close contact. In dealing with faith and culture, terms like local church, indigenization, inculturation, and contextualization became commonplace.[1]

An underlying theme in this paper is how the missionaries, and in particular the anthropologists at the Institute, using the publications of the Institute, namely *Catalyst*, *Point,* and *Occasional Papers*, interpreted the relationship between culture and faith in their efforts to develop an applied anthropology for mission work in PNG. Though the staff at the Institute have published widely, this paper will focus only on what has been published through the MI.

## PRECURSORS

French Catholic (Marist) missionaries first landed on Woodlark (Murua) Island in 1847. However, the effects of malaria on the missionaries and influenza on the indigenes soon brought an end to the project. Italian Catholic missionaries replaced the Marists in 1852, but they did not fare any better and the surviving missionaries left in 1855. The next group of missionaries, the London Missionary Society, tried a different approach on the South Papua Coast in 1871, using evangelists from Polynesia (Samoa and the Cook Islands in particular). Later, Catholic missionaries returned and other groups followed: Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, and many more. Whereas in1927 there were 531 missionaries in the area comprising Papua and New Guinea, by 1971 there were 3,411 missionaries present (Pech 1985:58). By the year 2002, with localization of the churches, the number had been reduced to 2,832 non-citizen church workers in PNG (including the 50 non-citizen staff in the two church-run universities).[2] However, the churches continued to multiply. There were six major denominations at work in 1927. By 1971 there were over 30, and currently the number of churches has more than trebled. In 2002 there were 88 different church organizations requiring work permits from the Department of Labour and Employment, as well as the many local churches not appearing in the work permits listing. Training for these missionaries prior to arrival and during their time in PNG varies greatly. The material for this paper relies heavily on Catholic sources but includes contributions from the other three "mainline" Anglican, Lutheran, and United Churches.

### *Ad Gentes*

The Second Vatican Council Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*ad gentes,* hereafter written AG) 1965, is a milestone in the Catholic theology of mission and policy on mission practice. It is both a response to pressure for reform before the Council, and a catalyst for developments afterwards. The Decree was written over several years, mostly at the house of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) situated at Nemi in the hills behind Rome.[3]

Notable in its theology is the move away from an ecclesiocentric view of mission to a biblically based one affirming that the mission of the church is based on the idea of God entering into humanity through the Incarnation of Christ and on the life of the Spirit manifest in the Church at Pentecost. The Church is said to be a pilgrim people of God missionary by its very nature (AG 2). The decree acknowledges "truth and grace" to be found among the nations (*gentes*). Thus, "whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, is not lost. More than that, it is healed, ennobled, and perfected for the glory of God . . ." (AG 9).

The Decree calls for the serious study of culture so that it can be more clearly seen "in what ways faith can seek understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation" (AG 22). It also stresses the importance of adequate training and preparation. Missionaries should study peoples' cultures and religions, looking both to the past and present, so as to "esteem" the people's patrimony and language. The decree announces, "Let missionaries learn languages to the extent of being able to use them in a fluent and polished manner" (AG 26). This was the official ecclesial background that provided new opportunities for the establishment of mission centers such as the Melanesian Institute.[4]

## THE MELANESIAN INSTITUTE BEGINNINGS

The SVD was one of the earliest Catholic missionary congregations working in Papua New Guinea. They arrived in 1896 to establish the first mission on Tumleo Island, and later moved along the north coast to Madang, and from there into the Highlands. In 1914, prior to World War I, there were 51 SVD missionaries working in New Guinea.. By 1945, after WWII, there were 123 (86 SVDs had arrived, but 18 had left the country and 17 had died, nearly all because of malaria.) (Divine Word Missionaries and Holy Spirit Sisters 1995:10, 43). Many early Catholic missionaries from the SVD received training in anthropology and linguistics at the Anthropos Institute in Switzerland. Wilhelm Schmidt encouraged early PNG

missionaries like Fathers Joseph Erdweg, Christian Schleiermacher, Nikolaus Spoelgen, Joseph Schebesta, and Franz Kirschbaum to do cultural research and helped them to get their articles published.[5] Later, missionaries like Fr. Henry Aufenanger SVD studied language and culture in North East New Guinea and beyond (Aufenanger 1972, 1975), and Karl Böhm SVD, the islands off the New Guinea North Coast (Böhm 1975). However, after WWII more of the SVD missionaries were coming from outside of Europe, particularly the USA. Ernest Brandewie SVD was one of those missionary priests from America. He was appointed to receive training in anthropology at the Anthropos Institute, but felt that he wanted training in a tradition other than the *Kulturkreislehre* (culture-history) tradition of the Institute, so began studies at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Chicago. Studies for his Ph.D. in Anthropology (1963–65) included 14 months of fieldwork near Mount Hagen, PNG (Brandewie 1966, 1981).

In 1966, Brandewie spoke with the SVD Superior General, Fr. John Schuette, about establishing a center for training missionaries in Papua New Guinea. As Brandewie notes, "The Superior General was not deliriously enthusiastic, but neither did he discourage the possibility" (Brandewie 1995:18). After being assigned to the University of San Carlos in the Philippines, Brandewie contacted the Provincial Superior of the SVD in PNG, Gerard Bus. Bus was concerned about the introduction and training of newly arrived missionaries and was looking for better ways of introducing new missionaries to the culture of the people. At the suggestion of Louis Luzbetak SVD, Bus took a summer course with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in 1958 at Norman, Oklahoma in the USA. Having studied practical linguistics with SIL, and experienced the challenge of trying to learn the culture and language of the Enga people, Bus was very open to the idea of a missionary training and research center in PNG, and invited Brandewie to a meeting with the superiors of the various Catholic religious congregations in PNG in 1967. The Marist Superior brought Fr. Gerry Arbuckle SM along to the meeting, and the Provincial of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart was accompanied by Fr. Herman Janssen. (Arbuckle had a Ph.D. in Social Philosophy from Angelicum University, Rome, and an M.A. in Social Anthropology from Christ College, Cambridge University. The late

Herman Janssen MSC had a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Vienna, with a dissertation (Janssen 1966) about the tribal culture of the Barila-Bhilala people of Central India.)

Fr. Arbuckle had been specializing in socioeconomic development in the South Pacific, and at the time, Fr. Janssen was doing research into cargo cult activities in West New Britain, PNG. Janssen (1995:28) notes, "It was here, in the huts of the people, during their feasts and while discussing their problems and aspirations that I began to learn practical anthropology."

Brandewie called the result of the meeting "a match made in heaven." They agreed that goodwill was no substitute for cultural sensitivity and community skills, and after the meeting, Hermann Janssen was appointed to organize a missionary training and research center in PNG. The Catholic religious superiors met the following year and agreed to set up the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service. Bus notes that the Institute was to provide a sound introduction course for new missionaries, opportunities for ongoing formation of missionaries in the field, and research so as to be able to provide professional advice (Bus 1995).

## ETHNOLOGY AND THE MI FACULTY

Of those appointed to the MI faculty over the past 38 years, eight had doctorates in Anthropology and several others held postgraduate awards in Anthropology. Other doctorates were in related fields such as Sociology, Social Philosophy, and Missiology. Most had done ethnological research as part of their degree programs, and several had been involved in extensive research programs after having graduated but prior to their appointment to the MI.

The initial idea of a missionary training and research center like the Melanesian Institute was to make certain that Catholic missionaries would have personnel and resources available to ensure a greater level of cultural sensitivity in the task of evangelization. Already in 1971 other denominations joined the Catholics in the Orientation Courses, and in 1974 the MI board of directors agreed that those churches could join the MI and share in the burden of finances and personnel. The Evangelical Lutheran Church was welcomed into active participation in the MI in 1975, and other

churches (United and Anglican) were to follow. In 1978 the Association of Clerical Religious Superiors, which was still the decision-making body for the Institute, resolved that bishops from the Catholic, Anglican, United Lutheran Missouri Synod, and Lutheran Church in PNG should be on the MI board of directors.

The early courses run by the Institute lasted three months and involved a great deal of work in the preparation of lectures and teaching materials. A number of these lectures were later published in the Institute's journals, *Catalyst* and *Point*. Present day readers of these publications may find them written simply, with modest academic terminology. However, it should be noted that many of the papers were initially prepared not for academics but as talks for the Orientation Course for new missionaries. Nevertheless, the papers often contain considerable ethnological detail. Janssen (1995:32) notes how the MI was not meant to be an academic institution, but "a mediator between theory and praxis." Early contributors included Gerard Arbuckle, Joseph Knoebel,[6] Leo Brouwer,[7] and Bill Siefert.[8] Linguist John Z'graggen[9] joined the presenters in the first Institute course and was an Associate Member of the Institute, but did not publish through the Institute's journals.

The published work of Ennio Mantovani stands out for the frequency of his references to culture and religion. Hence this paper will initially focus on his work, but with reference to that of Theo Ahrens, Darrell Whiteman, Mary MacDonald, James Knight, Gernot Fugmann, John Paul Chao, Simeon Namunu, Franco Zocca, Caspar To Vaninara, William Longgar,[10] Henry Paroi, Michael Rynkiewich, Hermann Janssen, and myself.

## THEOLOGICAL MODELS AND CULTURE

Anthropologists and missionaries have not always co-operated well. Some anthropologists accuse missionaries of cultural violence, imposing a Western religion and Western values on indigenous people. Some missionaries feel that anthropology promotes cultural relativism, putting all cultures and religions on the same level. Admittedly there are examples of indigenous people being exploited, subjugated, and promised second-class citizenship in a white man's heaven, and there are instances of people being treated as though they

are museum pieces. There can be both fundamentalist missionaries and fundamentalist anthropologists, both behaving as though they have a monopoly on the truth. Recent studies have moved from reproach to reinterpretation, with new insights into ways foreign missionaries, far from subjugating people, established an indigenous process by which foreign domination was questioned (Hiebert 1997:274; see also Luzbetak 1985, Arbuckle 1985).

Being both missionary and anthropologist provides a distinctive point of view for many of the members of the MI, one that takes the religious dimension of culture seriously while at the same time poses a unique form of cultural relativism from a faith perspective. This essay illustrates how the MI faculty have, in various ways, been taking the opportunity to work with these apparently incompatible differences.

With personnel of various nationalities and from different churches, it is only natural that the MI has not presented a uniform view on culture which is partly due to theological differences. There are two basic approaches. The first, which I call the "Creation-centered approach," recognizes the inherent goodness of the human person and hence human culture. This may be summarized in theological terms as "Grace builds on nature." It is within people's culture that one finds the symbols and concepts with which people live their faith. God's revelation is encountered within the complexity and humanness of culture itself. The second, which I call the "Redemption approach," sees creation and human culture as having been tainted by sin. Revelation is supra-cultural and God-given, posing a question and a challenge to human culture so as to promote a radical revision of it. The summary phrase here would be "Grace reforms nature."

## RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM AND CULTURE

The first theological approach follows a model that looks for God's revelation and self-manifestation within the symbols, values, and relational patterns of the culture. This approach is exemplified in the work of Ennio Mantovani.

Ennio Mantovani[11] has been a prolific writer for MI publications. He is a pupil of Paul Schebesta, who taught ethnology at St. Gabriel,

Austria, from 1952 to 1958. As Mantovani describes it, "It was typical *Kulturkreislehre* in the best Wienerscühle tradition" (p.c. 12/12/04). Mantovani's interest in the relationship between culture and religion was awakened during Schebesta's lectures in which he would draw on the experience of his field research on the structures and religions of the Pygmies in Africa. "I remember him saying: 'What is surprising is not the fact that pigmies [sic] know and use magic, etc., but that they have a unique knowledge and relationship to a Supreme Being, whom the Bantu around them do not know" (p.c. 12/12/04). Later, at the Gregorian University in Rome, Mantovani "fell under the spell" of Joseph Goetz, who was teaching phenomenology of religion and who every year went to Chad for field research. Goetz used the term "cosmobiology" for what Mantovani later came to call the "biocosmic" religious system. Mantovani was not interested in historical succession of forms of religion (in the manner of Wilhelm Schmidt's *Kulturkreislehre*), but rather the link between culture and religious experience. His study of early Lutheran PNG missionary Christian Keysser reinforced his interest in missionary methods and the knowledge of and respect for the culture. Work for his doctoral thesis on the relationship between missiological and anthropological preparation in Europe (St. Gabriel, Austria) and the actual practice in Chimbu of the first Catholic missionary to Chimbu, Alphonse Schäfer SVD, deepened that interest.

Mantovani, in his research, teaching, and writing, continued to explore the relationship between religion, religious symbolism, and economic culture. He sees it as a form of dialogue between the understanding of a religious experience, which he calls biocosmic, and a "theistic" understanding of Christianity.[12] According to Mantovani, Christianity was not totally unbiased as it grew out of Israel which, in order to survive as an ethnic group, had to fight against the agrarian and strongly biocosmic religions of Canaan. That fight for survival did not allow Israel to dialogue with the biocosmic religious experience and its symbols (Mantovani 2000:85). Christianity followed suit. People in PNG easily accepted the typically theistic (heavenly, spiritual) Christian God, who seemingly had little concern for PNG biocosmic issues of gardens, growth, and fertility in all its forms. Mantovani claims that today Christianity does not need an ethnic identity, as was the case with

Israel. Christianity subsists in a plurality of local churches and is thus free to dialogue with different forms of religious experience (Mantovani 2000:98).

According to Mantovani, the Christian Gospel cannot challenge what it does not know. He feels that most missionaries have not even been aware of the possibility of God being revealed through different but equally valid religious symbols, other than those found in the Bible. He refers to the *dema* myths common in PNG in which a *dema* offers to die in order to bring forth that reality without which life is not worth living.[13] For Mantovani this is part of God's revelation to the people of Melanesia going back thousands of years prior to the coming of Christianity.

Both Melanesian religions and Christianity hold that something essential is amiss and that there is need for new life. Melanesian religions have been described as a search for the continuation and celebration of life. However, they differ from Christianity in the way they symbolize what is missing, and the desired new life. Melanesian farmers see the *dema* as bringing life which was missing to supply the incompleteness of the world. By contrast, Christianity tends to blame the failure and the need for redemption on human sin. It had to introduce sin, as the cause of the lack of true life and as the reason for the death of Jesus. According to Mantovani, theoretically, the biocosmic religious experience of Melanesian spirituality could focus on redeeming love without needing human sinfulness as a motive for that love to appear.

Mantovani's work has not been without controversy, both within and without the MI. In 1986, Christopher Garland, an Anglican priest lecturing at Newton Theological College, Popondetta, published an article, *Is Traditional Religion in PNG Theistic?*, in which he argues that Mantovani's biocosmism is merely a stress upon one element within theism rather than a separate form of religion. Garland (1986:128) suggests that "for some reason Mantovani has given a one-sided view of theism in order to make his non-theistic alternative seem all the more attractive." Garland argues that traditional religion in PNG has room for personal relationships, and thus is really a form of theism. Mantovani (1986:357) replied that treating Melanesian religions as a form of theism means treating them as distorted or inferior. Using the analogy of Melanesian Pidgin he argues that to call all Melanesian religions theistic is like saying that

Pidgin is an inferior brand of English. He insists that the "ultimate" for Melanesian religions seems to be "life" and not relationships or love.

## GRACE AND CULTURE

A second theological approach influencing attitudes to culture at the MI sees divine revelation as supra-cultural, posing a challenge to human culture so as to promote a radical revision of culture through grace—grace being theologically understood as free and undeserved help from a personal god. One of the proponents of this approach, Theo Ahrens (2002), recently published a collection of papers, most previously published over many years by the MI. Ahrens (2002:365) claims that Mantovani advocates a representation of Christianity in terms of a fertility cult, and that in Mantovani's promotion of the *dema*, he spiritualizes a principle that violence (sacrifice) lies at the root of Chimbu society and traditional Chimbu religion. In doing so, he is only reinforcing the cultural principles of retribution and reciprocity in his attempt to contextualize Christianity in Melanesia (Ahrens 2002:366). Ahrens says that retribution and sacrificial thought must be restructured and that this can be accomplished through a theology of grace, which is free, unmerited, and does not rely on reciprocity, and is more suitable for bringing about a less violent society than retribution.

Western Protestant theology tends to work out its anthropology in terms of "conscience" and "sin." As a result, some interpreters assume that such teaching misled the local people to condemn the whole of their cultural past under the label of "Satan." Others argue that people connected whatever experience of evil they had with the symbol, Satan, while they linked the name, "Yahweh" or "God," with the good they knew (Ahrens 2002:127). From his 1972–73 experience working in the Southern Madang district, Ahrens notes how Lutheran missionaries stressed the decisiveness of the Christian message and aimed at a clear break between "heathendom" and Christianity. People started to integrate part of the alien culture and religion into their own epistemological system, which often resulted in a syncretistic folk-religion.

Seeking a dialogue within the social sciences, Ahrens (p.c. 01/13/05) said:

> I have always tried to do theology in dialogue with anthropology, sociology, and the wide field of religious studies. My basic theological impulse is always to try and find out where theological ideas and rights are based in society, how they address current conflicts, what theology, sociology, and ethnology have to say, addressing these issues, and to see whether or not these sciences in the wider choir of the humanities have something to say to each other.

In terms of anthropology, Ahrens credits Kenelm Burridge with highlighting the importance of the concept of new life, or becoming a "new man," which provides a means for grace to interrupt or absorb retribution, resulting in hope for a new future (Ahrens 2002:127). The question is what sort of transformation is involved in becoming new? Will it mean rejecting the "religion of the garden" centered on the idea of fertility, or can that same traditional religion continue "infected by an eschatological virus?" "The attraction of Christianity may have been that it suggested a future which is not just a void but pregnant with new life in the spirit of Christ. Who do the people want to be tomorrow?" (Ahrens 2002:128).

Where Mantovani looks to the significance of religious symbols within the symbols, values, and relational patterns of traditional culture, Ahrens goes beyond social values and cosmic laws to the transformation of the Melanesian scene through dialogue with the Biblical narrative. Biblical revelation is supra-cultural, posing a challenge to human culture so as to promote a radical revision of it. Grace reforms nature and opens new possibilities for the development of culture.

## MISSION PARADIGM

It would be natural to assume that the MI scholars' belief in Divine Revelation might have a negative impact on their scientific approach. Certainly, few could be classed as "post-modern," though that is more a function of time than of ideology. Some of the recent work published has shown glimpses of the deconstructive agenda of post-modern scholarship (e.g., Paroi 2001). With degrees from modern universities, insisting on scientific method and the authority of reason, the MI scholars could hardly be classed as "pre-modern."

Most have been trained in some form of functionalism and symbolic anthropology, with culture accepted as a tradition guiding people in what they think, feel, and do.

For example, Darrell Whiteman (1984)[14] describes culture as a system of social, ideological, and technological elements interacting with each other (Whiteman 1984:10). He understands culture as ideas that shape our worldview and mold our behavior patterns. He (Whiteman 1984:24) then adds, "God uses cultures to reveal something of himself [the question of] how God interacts with and relates to human beings in the cultures in which they are immersed is one that is important here in Melanesia, because it is one that has been important from the beginning of Creation." Whiteman subscribes to the idea, common among the MI staff, that studying culture provides essential insights into peoples' minds and hearts and allows one to understand human behavior and the workings of society, but that there is something more; that is, a sympathetic understanding of the non-empirical or faith dimension of people's lives, an integral dimension that cannot be ignored and should not be separated.

In a paper giving an overview of Melanesian religions, Whiteman (1984:97) tells how "Melanesians are concerned with the religious question, 'Does it work? Is it effective? Will it bring abundant life?' The question, 'Is it true,' which may be very important to a Western Christian, is a cognitive entity separate from experience and thus not an important element in Melanesian religions." Whiteman senses the irony of Christian faith having to become more Melanesian in order to cope with the modern world. He (Whiteman 1984:114) wants "truly indigenous Melanesian forms of Christianity" to emerge that will enable people to cope with the rapid cultural transitions they are experiencing. This will only be possible if faith becomes "thoroughly integrated at the deepest level of our inner being" so as to be able to draw from its well of resources. The importance of understanding how faith and life can be integrated is central to the mission paradigm. Just how this can happen in a changing world is the principal challenge facing the members of the Melanesian Institute.

Below are four brief examples of attempts by MI staff to try to integrate faith and life. The first two (MacDonald and Knight) have a creation-centered theology akin to that of Mantovani; the third (Chao), a form of Christian humanism; and the fourth (Fugmann), a redemption oriented theology similar to that of Ahrens. As with

Ahrens, Fugmann struggles with the tension between Melanesian religious values and Biblical concepts. The reader may observe that three of the four examples show a strong reliance on ritual and a view of culture divorced from social action (Angrosino 1994:830). In fact, the Melanesian Institute does research and publishes in the field of social action. Nevertheless, there is room for a better integration of that field with the understanding of culture and culture change.

## HEALING AND COSMIC LIFE

Mary MacDonald[15] has studied symbolism, particularly as it pertains to magic. She (MacDonald 1985:7) says that magic "is a symbol of life, a philosophy, which reveals how people understand themselves and how they construct their cultural reality." She makes a point of taking seriously peoples' beliefs. One does not have to agree, but one needs to appreciate peoples' beliefs as part of their understanding of reality and how they construct reality. MacDonald (1985:1) sees peoples' use of magic as a quest for a more abundant life. The symbols used point beyond simple pragmatic concerns to an appreciation of human life opening into and interacting with cosmic life.

How does MacDonald see the integration of ritual, such as magic, and Christian faith? She (MacDonald 1985:55) writes: "I think that the ancestors' concern with healing, the restoring and enhancing the life of the cosmos, would strike a chord with Jesus's awareness of his own mission. Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, and so we could expect that the sincere attempts of Melanesians to find healing may be fulfilled in him." Connecting with Mantovani's understanding of biocosmic religious symbols, MacDonald holds that Melanesians have an acute awareness of participation in cosmic life, and this form of revelation from ancestral times is a valuable contribution they bring to Christian faith today.

## RENEWAL OF COSMIC LIFE

James Knight has contributed a number of papers to MI publications. One of them, *Towards a Grassroots Theology among the Numai* (1986), based on more than 17 years of association with the

Numai clan (Chimbu), describes their traditional religious world, and the changes brought about with the introduction of Lutheran and Catholic forms of Christianity. He describes the Catholic custom of installing crosses in place of posts (phallic symbols) at traditional shrines, blessing them together with the pigs to be slaughtered and cuttings and seeds to be planted in the new gardens—piglets and people all gathered around the cross. The ritual slaying of the pigs to renew cosmic life was seen to parallel the Christian Easter ceremonies, especially the resurrection at the Easter Vigil on Easter Sunday. The slaughter of pigs caused new life to flow through the community, and the Easter celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus brings a breaking forth of new life, new people, and new creation (Knight 1986:121–2). Knight does not see a simple parallelism here, but understands both the traditional and Christian rituals as tapping into the same source of life.

Is this, as Ahrens suspects, merely the blessing of a fertility cult? Knight disagrees. The Numai should be supported in their effort to integrate community life and faith life. The renewal of cosmic life is not foreign to Christian faith. The Numai see individuals as part of small communities, and the larger communities as part of a cosmos. If one community dissents, or breaks away, it damages the whole cosmos, bringing a loss of potential or energy. Thus the Numai have discovered the inner connection between the economic, social, political, and religious responsibilities. They sense their complimentarity as parts of the same totality and their being sharers of the same Promise (Knight 1986:125).

## LIFE FOR EMPTY STOMACHS

Sr. John Paul Chao[16] came to the MI in 1982 after three years of intensive field research in Fiji. Encouraged by the MI to carry out first-hand research in a PNG culture area, she spent three months in each of her five years in PNG at Nine Mile settlement on the outskirts of Port Moresby. Chao writes:

> When I had my lunch, the children looked at me longingly. On the following day, I found out that they hadn't had food since I had last seen them. Each day was the same. I was shocked and gave away my lunch in the end. I couldn't bear doing "research" alone, so for six years I tried to get various types of help such as food,

clothing, and scholarships. When television came to PNG in 1987, a TV crew went into the settlement with me to do a special documentary. All these efforts helped to publicize the great needs of the squatters and prompted the government and churches to bring help to my friends in the settlement. It was a great relief to my aching heart which had carried countless worries alone for several years. I don't know if I had any contribution to anthropology in PNG, but I probably made a little contribution to the people at Nine Mile as a human being. (P.c. 01/15/05)

In a paper delivered at the 1986 Waigani Seminar, Chao (1987:19) says, "I believe that spiritual development can be best promoted when it is integrated with social and economic development. Jesus did not treat people of his time as disembodied spirits; to feed empty stomachs with only spiritual food may result in indigestion." Even in urban areas with a plurality of cultures, Chao, as an MI member, was motivated to integrate faith and life.

## LIFE AS *GUTPELA SINDAUN*

Gernot Fugmann was born in Fishschhafen, PNG. He left to return as a Lutheran pastor and later joined the MI. In a paper published in 1984 he describes how people in Melanesia have a deep-seated yearning for fulfilment in life and for deliverance from the misfortunes of everyday events, and that this motivates them to develop their own concept of salvation which predates Christianity. This salvation, which in Pidgin is *gutpela sindaun*, refers to health, success, fertility, respect, and honor or influence over others. It is the absence of sickness, death, defeat, infertility, contempt, or poverty. The concept is not so different from the Old Testament "shalom" (Fugmann 1984:282).

Fugmann refers to the coastal Pidgin term *lo,* which is the very intricate system of reciprocity that directs the life of all the members of a society. If lo is honored and fulfilled, then a harmonious existence is guaranteed. The important point here is that both Christian faith and new religious movements found in PNG can be seen in terms of lo and gutpela sindaun; in other words, in terms of a Melanesian view of salvation. Here, Fugmann sides with Ahrens because he recognizes how the lo concept implies reciprocal obligations, especially if ritual is correctly performed. But this appears to go contrary to the Christian understanding of saving grace. Fugmann points to some of the tensions between Melanesian

religions and Biblical concepts and sees them not as in conflict, but as opportunities for dialogue.

## NATIONAL PRESENCE

There is a risk of well-intentioned missionaries pushing for the inculturation of faith whether the indigenous people want it or not. Therefore, it is important to have national staff at the MI so that Melanesians have the chance to express their views from within the Institute. The first Papua New Guinean, Rev. Kasek Kautil, comes from Karkar Island in the Madang Province. He graduated Bachelor of Theology from Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, in 1974, and has M.Div. and M.Th. degrees from Wartburg Theological Seminary (USA). He joined the MI staff in 1993. In subsequent years, he was followed by other Melanesians, one of whom, William Longgar, published a paper on the Missionary Situation in PNG that provides insights into what a changing PNG culture looks like from a national perspective. Longgar (1999:94) refers to the "invading technological culture represented by the missionaries," but also to the "relativistic extremes advocated by secular Anthropologists, who called for a moratorium to preserve culture" (Longgar 1999:96). Longgar holds that Melanesians were not passive recipients of Christianity, "so we cannot blame the missionaries for destroying the Melanesian culture" (p.c. 09/07/05). Noting how Christianity had the ability to assimilate into the cultural ethos of various cultures and civilizations over the centuries, he says that the Gospel message seeks to provide new meaning to Melanesian cultural values. He asks that missionaries allow nationals to formulate their own theological paradigms because they "want to relate to Christ as [our] cultural hero and embrace Christianity with the similar emotional attachment we have and give to our traditional Melanesian religion" (Longgar 1999:108).

Does the paradigm of the nationals differ from the Mission paradigm discussed in this paper? The difference is not as great as might be anticipated, perhaps due to the pastoral tone of the MI work, and because many of the MI missionary staff are long-term residents of PNG. It could also be that what was the task of missionaries is now the mission of the local church. Paroi[17] (2001) has written about decolonizing theology; however, apart from desiring the freedom to

make their own choices, the Melanesian staff appear to share the common mission of integrating faith and life in the face of secular pressures that would divide them.

## DIALOGUE

Dialogue and inculturation have been frequent themes in my publications during the time I have been at the MI.[18] Though most Christians adopt new beliefs and cease to practice many traditional rituals, there remains an underlying spirituality which has its roots in primal religion. This spirituality becomes more apparent when facing life and death realities. Primal religion remains an underlying religious dimension of the human spirit (Gibbs 2004). If people can come to understand that these two forms of religion are not necessarily opposed, then a way is opened for dialogue.

I suspect that sometimes a scientific and secular worldview can blind scholars to elements of traditional beliefs and values. There are various forms of dialogue: intellectual dialogue, a dialogue of life, and dialogue of common action. Those wanting to be part of the dialogue of life and of action require a capacity to share in the sense of mystery which is so much part of traditional Melanesian spirituality. As a member of the MI, I try to do that.

During recent visits in Highlands provinces, I have been encouraged by requests from local people for courses and workshops on language and culture, more than I can ever hope to fulfill. With a growing fundamentalist Christian influence in recent years, many people from the generally more open mainline churches are tempted to adopt a negative view of culture, which amounts to rejecting everything from cultural tradition as evil and sinful. This is a common revival phenomenon documented by many researchers in Papua New Guinea (Robbins 1997, Schmid 1999). The cutting edge for me now at the MI is how to engage in dialogue between the traditional and contemporary wisdom of the people, and the wisdom of the Christian principles that, according to the prologue of the PNG Constitution, "are ours now." My aim is not just intellectual dialogue, but also a dialogue of common action encountered at the more profound levels of life and death.

## CONCLUSION

In the first edition of *Catalyst*, in 1971, Hermann Janssen outlined his vision for the MI. He notes how Christian evangelists and pastoral workers, expatriates as well as indigenes, will have to study the traditional Melanesian patterns of faith, ritual, and spirituality much more deeply. Echoing *ad gentes* 9, he says that these studies will have to be done in dialogue with the divine revelation "in order to lift out and cleanse the traditional treasure so that faith in God can come to a fuller bearing among Melanesians" (Janssen 1971:9). He also raises the topic of Christian secularization in a way that helps shed new light on Melanesian spirituality, which he terms a "proto-christian" spirituality. Just as Melanesian spirituality does not separate heaven and earth, so Christian secularization seeks the renewal of the world as world, and thus religion acts as the motivation and not the means to achieve socioeconomic welfare (Janssen 1971:16).

The MI has kept closely to that vision over the past 36 years. With the SIL station an hour away, the MI has placed less emphasis on linguistic studies. The Institute has completed extensive research projects on Youth, Marriage and Family Life, and Land and Church in Melanesia. Current research includes the perceived causes of disabilities, *sanguma* (sorcery) and witchcraft, and the cultural dimension of the AIDS crisis in PNG. Introduction courses for new missionaries continue, with participants now being more often from Asia than from Europe.

The theological differences illustrated by Mantovani and Ahrens in this paper continue to provide diversity, with some placing more importance on Biblical revelation than others. Yet life remains as the ultimate value, and faith is still highlighted, whether as Christian faith or in terms of an inseparable non-empirical dimension of people's lives. This integration of faith and culture in the work of the Institute is its particular contribution to anthropology.

Unfortunately, the MI is not well known among anthropologists. Scholars such as Garry Trompf (Trompf 1991:184) refer to the MI, but such citations are rare. The library of over 14,000 volumes and periodicals, maps, and audiovisual materials relevant to Melanesian cultures is also a little-known resource, and it is a pity that publications such as the MI's three volumes, *Religious*

*Movements in Melanesia Today* (Flannery 1983a, 1983b, 1984), are not better known.

## NOTES

1. "Local church" refers to a church adapted to the culture and life of a particular geographical area, in this case, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. "Indigenization" occurs when church structures are in the hands of local (indigenous) people. "Inculturation" refers to the way the Christian Gospel becomes an integral part of the value system, attitudes, and actions of the people of a given culture, while at the same time the culture influences the interpretation of the Gospel. "Contextualization" is similar to Inculturation, but with more emphasis on contemporary culture and social change.
2. (David Tibu, p.c., Department of Labour and Employment, Oct. 21, 2002.)
3. A proposed statement on missions was presented to Vatican Council II in 1964, but was rejected by the council with a request that a new document be prepared with improved theological content.
4. For a summary of Catholic teaching on inculturation and the appreciation of other religions' values, see Zocca 1997 and 2001. Franco Zocca SVD has a doctorate from the Faculty of Sociology of the University of Trento, Italy.
5. For example, Fr. Franz Kirschbaum SVD exercised his capacity for languages in the Sepik River missions. Later, a number of SVD missionaries continued work in linguistics and ethnology. Prewar Highlands linguists Alfons Schäfer and John Nilles worked in the Kuman language area, Henry Aufenanger in Gende, and William Ross in Melpa. Pioneer linguistic work in the Highlands was also done by Fathers Gerard Bus, Henry Feldkoetter, Hubert Fautsch, and Paul McVinney. On the coast, Jakob Noss concentrated on the Josephstal region and Karl Böhm on Manam. Fr. Frank Mihalic's grammar and dictionary officially standardized the spelling of Tok Pisin in 1957.
6. The late Joseph Knoebel SVD was one of the founding members of the MI. He had an M.A. in Anthropology from Catholic University, Washington, D.C. in 1963.
7. The late Leo Brouwer SVD had an M.A. in Pastoral Theology and Psychology from the University of Nijmegen, Holland.
8. Bill Siefert SVD has a Ph.D in Anthropology from Catholic University, Washington, D.C.
9. John Z'graggen SVD holds a Ph.D. in Linguistic Studies from Australian National University in Canberra.

10. William Longgar holds a Doctorate in Missiology from Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky.
11. Ennio Mantovani SVD holds a Licentiate from Gregorian University, Rome, and a doctorate in Missiology.
12. Biocosmic religions focus on growth, fertility, life, and the source of life. Theism holds that there is a personal god. Deism believes in the existence of a god without accepting divine revelation.
13. Mantovani defines the *dema* as "a being who is human but also more-than-human, and who wants to be killed violently in order to bring what is missing in creation: the true life. The *dema* is not a god" (Mantovani 2000:75).
14. Darrell Whiteman received a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Southern Illinois University in 1980. He has published an early history of the Melanesian Institute (Whiteman 1981).
15. Mary MacDonald has a Ph.D. from University of Chicago (1988) in the History of Religions.
16. Sr John Paul Chao SMSM has a Ph.D. in anthropology from Catholic University, Washington, D.C.
17. Henry Paroi OP is from the Solomon Islands. He has an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology (2000) from ANU Canberra.
18. Philip Gibbs SVD studied anthropology under Peter Lawrence at the University of Sydney, and has a doctorate in Theology from Gregorian University, Rome (1995).

# ANTHROPOLOGY'S DEBT TO MISSIONARIES

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