

# THE GOD TRIWAN MOVEMENT: INCULTURATION ENGA STYLE

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*The God Triwan Movement started in the Catholic Pompabus parish in the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea in 1989. Since then it has expanded to several other parishes. The movement is characterised by forms of divination and prophecy, rereading the Bible from an Enga perspective, symbolism in colour word and action, and ways that it incorporates elements of Enga experience into people's Christian commitment. The movement promotes evangelisation through a characteristically Enga synthesis of faith and culture. The paper concludes with a reflection on the theological and pastoral implications of working in dialogue with such movements.*

Religious movements are a worldwide phenomenon and Papua New Guinea is no exception. They present a bewildering variety of religious expression. Some movements are strongly influenced by indigenous cultural forms. Others manifest clear links with Judeo-Christianity. They have been labelled variously as "movements," "cults," and "independent churches".

Some scholars have seen religious movements in Papua New Guinea as examples of irrational human behaviour (Williams 1976). Others have considered them coming from tensions arising from collisions between traditional culture and the colonial order (Worsley 1970). Alternatively they have been viewed as specific Melanesian expressions of indigenous spirituality and value systems (Burrige 1960, Lawrence 1964). Often attempts at classification reveal more about Western rationalism than about those Melanesian ideas and practices to which they are meant to refer in the first place. Thus, many movements are only truly irrational in the context of Western discourse.

Attempts to develop a typology of religious movements in Oceania often fall short in the complexity of the phenomena under study. Anthony Wallace (1956) used the term "revitalisation movements." He differentiated between "nativist", "millenarian" and "messianic" movements. Subsequently, many alternative interpretations have been offered. Harold Turner's spectrum from "primal revival," through "syncretist" to

“church revival” (1978: 7ff.) is one of the more promising attempts at classification. In the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea, which is the focus for this study, there have been several accounts of religious movements, including Gibbs 1977, Biersack 1998, Wiessner and Tumu 1999. The latter study in particular illustrates the variety of indigenous religious movements in Enga, including a Female Spirit Cult, which attracted followers in the Eastern Enga region shortly before the arrival of the first missionaries.

There are various movements within the Christian churches themselves. The Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea hosts a variety of movements including the charismatic renewal movement and various Marian movements. This paper will present a study of the God Triwan Movement, which developed recently within the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Wabag in the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea<sup>1</sup>. The paper will outline the origins of the movement, some of its characteristics, and then consider the movement as a way some Enga people are trying to integrate Christian faith and local culture. Other questions will also be considered, for example: How does the experience of the God Triwan Movement contribute to our understanding of inculturation? What are some theological and pastoral guidelines for co-operating with movements such as these?<sup>2</sup>

## Origins

Today most Enga people are members of a Christian church. In the year 2000, from a total Enga population of 295,000, Catholics numbered 64,000 (Population in Private Dwellings, Census 2000). Church growth has been rapid. Missionaries first came to the Enga province in 1947. In 1982, the Catholic Church in the province became an independent Diocese (of Wabag) led by Bishop Hermann Raich. Benefiting from the typical Enga zest for life, including matters political and religious, the “politics” of religious movements both contribute to and complicate the life of the institutional church. In the late-70s, led by catechist Simon Es, the charismatic movement began to influence the life of the Catholic community at Anji in the Eastern corner of the diocese. The movement, accompanied by “revival” phenomena such as a “born again” experience and speaking in tongues, quickly spread to all corners of the Province. However, a decade later, as the fire of spirit-filled enthusiasm cooled, some communities began seeking alternatives.

At Kungupalama, a community within the Pompabus parish, catechist Matthew Ima was wondering how to boost the lagging en-

thusiasm in the parish. Matthew puts it this way:

One time we met concerning the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, and we were talking about "skin-Catholics." I was really struck by the term. I thought that Jesus was not within me and that I was like an empty fish can, and I felt ashamed. I brought back the point to share with my community. We prayed about it for three years from 1985-1988, and then in 1989 the [God Triwan] movement started.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1989, Matthew had a powerful religious experience while praying with the community. He felt a force pushing him to the middle of the prayer house. Then he found himself calling out, "I am crying for my sheep. I want to take my sheep to heaven, but wild dogs have eaten my sheep."<sup>4</sup> He stretched out his arms and went through the movements of dying on a cross. He fell, lay on the ground for some minutes, rose, climbed onto the altar and made as if he was climbing a rope, saying, "Now I am going up to heaven. I will go to heaven first. Later I will tell you what is in heaven."<sup>5</sup> He found himself making the sign of the cross three times. This worried him because he had seen the bishop giving such a blessing, but no one else. He started to wonder if he was being influenced by an evil spirit. So, thinking that he would be protected if he held a cross, he took hold of a crucifix and found that the crucifix itself seemed to have a power that was leading him around inside the prayer house. The movements were quite violent: "The cross moved strongly by itself. It almost destroyed the house!"<sup>6</sup> After that the fear vanished. Once peace had been restored, they opened the Bible to find Ex 3:10ff: "I send you to Pharaoh to bring the children of Israel, my people, out of Egypt ... this is the sign by which you shall know that it is I who have sent you..."

What did the Bible verse about bringing Yahweh's people out of Egypt mean? At first Matthew's community thought that they were to somehow revive the charismatic renewal movement. Later they decided that they should start a new ministry and that it would be called "God Triwan. (Trinity)" The idea of the Trinity came from the sign of the cross which was a striking feature of their experience. Holy Trinity was also the name of their outstation at Kungupalama. The community saw their first task in the pacification and re-evangelisation of their own Itokone clan.

### **Itokone's Spear**

As with many movements, there is a supporting myth. The myth tells of an ancestor, Pondoleane, who had a problem because he had

no male genitals. It was doubly frustrating because there was a woman living nearby who seemed very liberal in exposing her private parts. After a ritual, involving cooking and offering bush rats, Pondoleane felt an itch. After a further ritual he felt a bulge. After repeating the ritual six times his penis was so long that he had to roll it up and keep it in a net bag at his side. Next time his seductive neighbour came he was able to give her a big surprise. Later he was able to file his penis back to a manageable size. He married and had a boy child - Itokone - the original ancestor of the Itokone clan. Itokone had 9 children: Mupu, Palu, Napu, Koe, Langata, Luitupu, Yaimbane, Tandaka, and Nенаe.

Before he died, Itokone called for his children so as to bequeath his valuables to them. When he got to the last one, Nенаe, he had given away all his pigs and gardens and land, and had nothing to give except a net bag and a spear. Later it was discovered that that the netbag Nенаe had received was a special one containing the gift of powerful speech. Nенаe is said to be the great great grandfather of catechist, Matthew Ima.

The myth has implications for contemporary events. Matthew Ima carries a special netbag, which he uses to carry his Bible. Thus, Nенаe's gift of powerful speech is replaced by the Word of God. On special occasions, Matthew also carries a shortened spear.

In 1992, when the Itokone clan was embroiled in tribal warfare, Matthew felt inspired to help end the hostilities. He announced to the warriors that the fight was over because God would finish it. This did not go down well with the "enemy" clan, who started making plans to deal with Matthew. Matthew, in turn, asked a relative to go secretly and steal a spear from the other clan. Having obtained the spear, he publicly cut off the sharp tip announcing that he had broken "Satan's teeth." He then resolved to "kill" Satan. Thus, instead of being used for fighting, the spear would now be used to end violence.<sup>7</sup>

## **Evangelisation**

Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelisation in the Modern World), reminds us that evangelisation is a complex process. Essentially, however, evangelising means "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN18).

Matthew and his community had not read the Pope's exhortation; however, realising that true renewal would come only from within the

culture, they started various initiatives towards that end. Aware that the Good News should impact on the reality of people's lives, their first focus was on marriage and family life. Community members, led by Joseph Lindi, visited communities in Pompabus and the nearby Pumakos parish, encouraging couples to strengthen their marriage, and preaching strongly against polygamy, which is traditionally accepted in Enga society. They made a case for monogamy, not only from Christian principles, but noted that according to Enga custom, the most sacred part of the traditional marriage ritual (*enda lyonge katenge*), during which a couple planted taro together, was only performed by a man with his first wife, not with any subsequent wives. Thus, they argued that even according to Enga tradition, the first wife was a man's "real" wife.

Community members, called *kendemane* (workers), also formed into teams of seven people to go out on mission (seven being seen as "God's number," God having resting on the seventh day of creation and the Catholic church having seven sacraments). They would come to pray and discern where to place a large cross outside the house of each family joining the movement. Enga family (women's) houses have one side for women to sit and the other for men. Once a cross was erected, people would look to see if it was placed outside the "woman's side" or the "men's side" of the house. Being placed on the woman's side indicated that the woman had a stronger faith and that the man would have to perform prayer and penance - and visa versa. Because the discernment was done holding a small cross, which was said to move of its own accord, the judgment was said to be the decision of the cross and not a subjective decision by the movement worker.

The "workers" were mostly men. At home the women formed "generator teams" in which seven women would pray around the cross "generating" spiritual power. The image is that of an electric generator which allows the mission station to have power for light at night. Praying day and night while their men-folk were out on mission ensured that the power of the Triune God was with the evangelising team.

To this point, the description of mission teams of workers and generator teams around the cross could be situated anywhere in the world. The Enga innovation was to see also the cross as a form of antenna through which God can communicate visions (called "TV") and prophetic messages ("telephone") to members of the generator team. Later, they would share with the community what God (or some-

times Mary) had shown them in a vision (*lemanemana*) or told them as prophecy (*pitama lenge*). They distinguish three forms of prophecy. One form is a message to tell people to change their lives, another is a warning about something that will happen at time in the future, and the third form, called “action prophecy,” is to tell people about what God is doing in some other place, for example, in a place where their team of workers is evangelising. An example of the first form was a message in 1996, reassuring them that the world would not end in the year 2000 (as some other churches were predicting) and that they should prepare themselves spiritually to joyfully celebrate the Jubilee year 2000.

The women’s generator teams also went into action if trouble or a fight started within theirs or a nearby community. Four members would stay praying around the cross to generate power while the other three would go to the trouble spot and secretly sprinkle holy water around the area or simply pray at the site. If the fight continued, they might prepare food, pray over it, placing whoever ate the food in God’s hands so that God would calm the hearts of those concerned. They then took and offered the food to the troublemakers.

## **Peace Bridge**

Leaders of the God Triwan Movement soon realised that evangelisation often involves reconciliation and that reconciliation sometimes requires prophetic action. In the year 2000, tribal warfare erupted between the Itokone and Waiminukini clans at Pompabus. The fight intensified and also spread over into the nearby Tsaka valley. The Itokone members of the God Triwan Movement community felt isolated as the tribal war raged all around them. To visit other communities would be a very risky proposition. Having prayed in vain for the war to finish, they felt they had to do something more. They discerned that God was telling them to build a bridge across a deep ravine lying between themselves and their enemies. The image of the bridge came from a picture in the early editions of the Wabag Diocesan Pastoral Plan where it signified the passage from sinful reality to the promised new life in Christ. For six months, in the latter part of 2000 until Easter 2001, they laboured - fasting and praying during daylight hours — carrying stones to build up the base of the bridge. The base was formed by three huge tiers of stones representing God in the past, now and in the future. Stones are important for the God Triwan community. For them, stones represent faith, and they often recall how Jesus said that he would build his church on stone (Mat. 16:18). Atop the stones was a triangular wooden support structure representing

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then a vine and sapling walkway was strung across the top. The whole structure was some 20 metres high. On their side of the bridge they planted a coffee bush. They would have liked to have planted a grape vine, however, the coffee bush had much the same symbolic meaning: prosperity and good times. On the “enemy” side they hung a notice reading, “Welcome to the road to Emmaus.”

Amazingly, no one got shot or injured during the construction of the bridge. Moreover, miraculously the fight calmed down around the time the bridge was completed.<sup>9</sup> The bridge had collapsed by the time of the formal reconciliation ceremony two years later in November 2003, when the former enemies had to be welcomed to the Kungupalama community by a member standing in the middle of the river. Nevertheless, in recognition of the intention of the bridge, the former enemy clan carried a small model of the bridge with a plastic statue of the Holy Family (Joseph, Mary and Jesus) on the bridge, which they set before the altar at the beginning of the ceremony.

## Women’s Role in Reconciliation

The statue of the Holy Family, including Mary the mother of Jesus, is not incidental. Devotion to Mary plays an important role in the God Triwan Movement. Not only is Mary seen as a mother figure, but also as a medium for reconciliation. There is an Engan saying: *Wanakunya nuu ongo lyini pingi* (There are many good things in a young woman’s net bag). The “good” thing is usually pig meat, which, in Engan society, is the primary currency for establishing and cementing relationships. In 1992, in a ceremony at the gateway to the Kungupalama, Matthew dedicated the community to “Santu Maria i nogat sin” (Mary of the Immaculate Conception). He prayed, saying that he had killed a pig and was putting it in Mary’s net bag. After the prayer, a small 15cm plastic statue of Mary, dressed as an Engan woman wearing a net bag, was carried into the community compound.

The most striking way an Engan woman can mediate reconciliation is through *kii pingi* (literally, sewing up), whereby a woman will be married into a clan as a way of bringing an end to a tribal war. Consider the testimony of Magdalena Sotopa, now a leader in the God Triwan community:

When there is tribal warfare, we women do *yanda kii*, meaning that we bring peace. So, I asked God to give me a husband from the [enemy] Itokone clan so as to bring about reconciliation between my people and the Itokone. ... When I was pregnant, I

asked God, 'I will be happy if you give me a boy or a girl. I have come here to bring peace and reconciliation to my people and the Itokone, so when I have the baby, you must help put an idea into my husband's mind so that we can agree to give the child to my clan and strengthen the relationship between the clans.' I bore a baby girl and when she was two years old, my husband said to me, 'My clan killed many people from your clan and this is still affecting you, so let us send our child to your side so that seeing our child they will forgive the death of those from your clan.' I agreed and sent the child away to my clan. Later I had a baby boy. When the boy was two years old, we sent him also to my clan and they said, 'Girls get married and leave us, but giving us this boy is something important for us. Compensation with pigs and money is one thing, but giving a child as well is something very special. When the child grows up he will not belong to you and your husband's family. He will take the place of those men who were killed, and if he has children, they will take the place of those who were killed, so he will remain with us.' So I told my son, 'I came here to marry so as to bring about reconciliation because your father's clan killed many from my clan. So my clan are happy for you to stay with them and you must stay there for life and when you marry and have children, they will take the place of those who were killed.'<sup>9</sup>

The leaders of the God Triwan Movement see Mary the mother of Jesus as having been prepared to offer her child for the sake of peace and reconciliation in a way similar to the testimony of Magdalena above. Mary was a woman prepared to practice *kii pingi*. Thus, God Triwan Movement members pray, asking the intercession of the mother of Jesus to bring about reconciliation between hostile clans, and more recently, to bring about reconciliation between competing church denominations. In November 2003, the God Triwan Movement invited other churches to an interdenominational celebration at Kungupalama, at which some 2000 people were present. Noticeably, Pentecostals, Born again Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists and others felt free to join in traditionally Catholic prayers like the Rosary.

## **Jesus' Tomb**

In recent times, Matthew has turned to other prophetic gestures. His construction of a replica of Jesus' tomb was a result of theological reflection over a decade. In 1990, when he was seriously ill, he had experienced a dream in which he slept in Jesus' tomb. Later he reflected on how we must die with Christ in order to share in the new



life of his resurrection. But every day we “die” in our sleep, so each day before sleeping, Matthew remembers his Baptism where he “died” with Christ, and spiritually prepares to leave anything to do with sin behind in the tomb so that he can rise anew the next day. In this way, according to Matthew, every day is a new Easter.

The bridge was part of the old millennium. Matthew sees the (empty) tomb of Jesus as representing the new life of Christ in the new millennium. They have renamed the hill on which the tomb is situated, “Victory Mountain”, to signify Jesus’ victory over sin and death. The road to Galilee passed with the time of the missionaries. Enga people walked again on that road during the ‘Bokis Kontrak and Pilgrimage’ in the mid-90s (Gibbs 1997). The road to Calvary was experienced during the corrupt and violent politics of the 1997 and 2002 National Elections and the tribal conflicts that followed. Now they see themselves on the road to Emmeus and the road to Bethany. On the road to Emmeus, they will encounter the Risen Lord (Lk 24:13-35). At Bethany, Jesus gathered his disciples and blessed them before sending them on mission (Lk 24:50-52). In 2004, they see their future mission in terms of ecumenical outreach and the evangelism of the younger generation faced with trials of money, power, violence, drugs and AIDS.

## **Distinguishing Characteristics of the Movement**

To this point, the focus of this study has been on Matthew Ima and the Kungupalama community. However, it should be noted that the movement spread rapidly to communities in five out of the sixteen parishes of the Wabag Diocese, and by 2000, membership in God Triwan communities numbered between one and two thousand people. The growth rate has slowed in recent years.

The movement shares elements common to many renewal movements in the churches: a prophetic leader, dreams and visions, miraculous events, a sense of new life, a strong sense of community, evangelical outreach, and so on. But there are also some distinguishing characteristics of the movement, which will be described briefly: the shaking cross, rereading scripture, symbolism, and their interaction with Enga culture.

Firstly, traditionally in Enga, there is a form of divination called *pepe*, in which the spirit of a dead person is called to “sit” on a spear or similar object. The person leading the divination asks a question and taps the spear. If the answer is negative, the spear remains motionless. If the answer is positive, the spear will move, sometimes

quite violently. This form of divination may be used, for example, to find the cause of a person's death. The God Triwan Movement leaders employ a form of *pepe* using a cross. They use two types of cross. One is a smaller hand-held crucifix, which, moving by its own power, will lead the holder to a special place, for example, the moving crucifix might bring the leaders to a person who needs prayer, or (commonly) it will show them the exact position where they should erect a large cross for the whole community.<sup>10</sup> The practice is performed openly in public. The other cross is about two metres high. Two leaders stand back to back with the cross resting on their shoulders. After a period of prayer, Matthew will ask a question addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ and tap the cross with his spear. If the answer is positive, the cross will move vigorously, tossing about the men holding it. They believe that Jesus' Spirit is present with the cross making it move in answer to the questions posed. Generally, this practice with the larger cross is done in private, and as the writer observed it, in the dark at night.

Divination to elicit answers to definite inquiries was widely practiced in antiquity, including deliberate behaviour like shooting of arrows or the casting of lots. In the book of Genesis, Joseph claims to be upset because of the alleged theft of the cup he used for divination (Gen. 44:5).<sup>11</sup> However, such practices were frowned upon in later Israel. Going to mediums or fortune-tellers is expressly forbidden in Lev. 19:31, and priests using a wand for divination are ridiculed in Hos. 4:12. The only reference in the New Testament is in Acts 16:16-19, telling of a slave girl at Philippi who earned money through fortune telling. Paul considered her possessed and she ceased to tell fortunes after Paul had driven the spirit from her. Does this mean that the God Triwan practice of the moving cross is unacceptable for Christians? Is it objectionable superstition to think that the Spirit of Jesus will "sit" on a spear? ("Touch wood...!") One must distinguish going to mediums and fortune telling from the God Triwan practice. Matthew does not try to communicate with the spirits of the dead. People do not come to Matthew to seek their fortune. Neither is there any direct financial reward. The God Triwan practice is questionable and could easily be misused by shamans. Yet, as practiced by the present movement leaders, it is basically a form of prayer of petition to Jesus Christ with an overlay of Engan "magical" performance, and therefore, could be allowed conditionally, to be used with discretion, not unlike the discretion required for forms of Catholic piety such as the wearing of protective "scapulars" or the use of "holy water."

A second distinguishing characteristic of the movement is its

relatively sound way of selecting and rereading scripture. As noted above, Matthew carries his Bible in a special net bag. The basic principle for selecting and interpreting biblical texts appears to follow the statement in the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*): “that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life” (DV 4). We see the elements of this statement in Biblical texts commonly quoted by movement members. One often hears the expression, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and the converse, “I have come that you might have life ... The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (John 10:10-11). The text from Exodus 3:10 about calling the people from the slavery of Egypt has already been mentioned. There is also the text in Numbers 21:8-9 about Moses and the bronze serpent on a pole, and the corresponding passage in the New Testament, referring to the cross, in John 3:14-15. Often people make reference to the paradox of the foolishness of the cross being the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). In a predominantly oral culture, such as Enga, one might expect to hear preference given to stories or parables, but instead, one hears more frequently, texts referring to the central themes of life and death, slavery and freedom, foolishness and wisdom. Despite the name of the movement, their theology is not strongly Trinitarian, but rather Christological, with a healthy theology of redemption in terms of freeing people from fear and the power of evil, and establishing a new relationship, not only in Jesus’ death, but in his life and resurrection. The emphasis at this stage in the new millennium is on walking the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13ff) and the road to Bethany (Lk. 24:50ff).

A third distinguishing characteristic of the movement is its use of symbolism in colours, word and action. The colour yellow has special significance for the movement. In the early 90s, movement members came to see the colour yellow as symbolic of Jesus’ resurrection and, hence, new life. On festive occasions, they would cover their bodies with yellow clay and carry yellow flowers. In 1999, in response to a dream that she had experienced some years earlier in which she saw a yellow cloud descend to cover everything on the ground, a woman from the Kunguplama community wove three caps using yellow thread mixed with green (green signifying “life” in Engan symbolism). The colour symbolism caught on and spread rapidly. Five years later, whenever God Triwan members are present, most wear yellow attire and yellow and green caps.

One of the ways some God Triwan Movement members spread the Good News is through participating in traditional Enga dance festivals. Typically, Engan body decoration is an impressive combination

of bird plumes, wigs made from human hair, grass skirts (women) and aprons woven from tree bark (men), along with oil, black ashes and various other colourings. God Triwan members have adapted these traditional forms into a special “Christian” form of body decoration. They wear a cross on their wigs to show that they want to remain under the headship of Christ. In the middle of the bird’s plumes they place a special feather with three parts to it signifying the Trinity. They wear the yellow or red bird of paradise plumes (*kaiyele*) as a sign of Jesus’ resurrection. This is also the reason why they wear yellow paint on their face instead of the customary black ashes. The red on their nose represents the blood of Christ. They wear *Metai* fern leaves because of their pleasant smell (God’s word is “sweet.”). Also, for the same reason, they wear two tails of a particular possum that leaves a strong pleasing odour where it sleeps. Also, the traditional Laiapu Engan wig is made shorter than usual, and their *yambale* (aprons) are short to follow the scriptural call to be ready because the time is “short” (1 Cor. 6:29).

They sing songs with traditional melodies, but with Christian meanings such as the following:

*Kataisame latamuli pitukame puu oo, yaka dake kondalas puu*

If I have to do Christ’s will, the feathers on my head must to dance forth and backwards

*Balu dake aipumaka muu pilipi, kindama muu pipuma pyoo.*

You do not know why I made my wig short. I shorten it because God’s Kingdom is getting closer

They sing and dance for an hour with songs such as the above, and then retire to let the more traditional dances take place. During the election period, they sometimes took part in singing and dancing associated with political campaigns, but they campaigned for Jesus as the *Enga Kamongo* (Lord of Enga).

## **Interaction with Enga Culture**

A fourth distinguishing characteristic of the God Triwan Movement is the way it intentionally incorporates elements of Engan culture, while at the same time being counter-cultural. There are a number of ways of approaching this complex issue. One way is for an outsider to observe how the movement relates to Engan life in its various forms (etic approach). Another way is to ask movement members how they perceive themselves in relation to the wider culture and life around

them (emic approach).

Taking up this latter approach, the writer found that leaders in the movement were conscious of structural links between the movement and traditional culture, and also ways their movement's practices transform traditional Engan rituals, and even go counter to Enga traditional values.

On a structural level, God Triwan Movement leaders often refer to the organisation of the *tee* pig-exchange. The *tee* used to be a very important part of life in Eastern Enga, but now appears to be supplanted by modern cash economy and contemporary politics. In the *tee*, a bigman (*kamongo*) would establish trading partners to whom he would give pigs, expecting a return gift of an even bigger pig in the future. *Tee* considerations influenced the choice of marriage partners, and the exchange network played an essential role in communication and peacemaking in traditional Engan society.

The God Triwan Movement uses this model for evangelisation. Just as pigs are given through relatives; either blood relatives, or relatives through marriage, so the Good News can be shared through similar networks. Through these same blood and marriage relationships, the God Triwan Movement has sent out workers on evangelical missions to other parts of the Wabag diocese. The Biblical image is that of the seventy-two disciples sent out by Jesus (Lk. 10:1ff). Combining the image of the Enga Kamongo (bigman) and the symbol of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, they say that they are the workers of "Jesus Christ Enga Komongo Epe" (Jesus Christ the Good Bigman [Lord] of Enga). As a good shepherd/bigman, Jesus knows his sheep/pigs/people. As an Engan bigman puts a rope on the leg of his pigs so that he can keep them safe and feed them, so Jesus the Good Shepherd/Bigman binds people to him in the church.

On the matter of transforming Engan rituals, movement leaders gave eight examples:

1. Marriage (*Enda kelenge*). They recognise the importance of marriage in society, yet promote monogamy and the church practice of blessing marriages.
2. Food Offerings (*Gote Mau*). In the past they would cook food in a special ground oven as an offering to a deity-like spirit, symbolised in the sun and known as *Gote*. (The apparent similarity of the name to the Christian "God" is purely coincidence). Now they still pray when cooking food, and, at least on all official occasions, ask for God's blessing on all who share the food.

3. Exchange Rites (*Tee takia*). Prior to attending a *tee* pig-exchange, they would sweep clean a section of ground. Then after the leader has dabbed his nose with red paint (symbolic of smelling the blood of a pig) and touching the ground with the same ritual red colouring, they would wait to see what insects appeared or what birds were heard to call. The type of insect or bird could be used to interpret who would receive pigs in the exchange. Now movement members spread a clean piece of cloth on the ground, place a Bible and a flower on it and pray, not for pigs, but for the well being of themselves and others. Here faith substitutes the sense of smell.
4. Public confession (*Wapu miningi*). Before any important ritual occasion, or before going into a tribal fight, men of a sub-clan would gather and openly confess transgressions which could be detrimental to the life of the community, or even cost a man's life in the case of a tribal fight. This would include unauthorised use of other's food supplies, particularly pandanus fruit, stealing of firewood, or seduction of a clan member's wife. Movement members say that normally today, the practice has been supplanted by the Sacrament of Confession. At times they practice a communal Christian confession, including songs and actions from the traditional *wapu miningi*.
5. Determining cause of death (*Pepe miningi*). Mention has been made already to this practice in the first distinguishing characteristic of the movement. Some hair from a dead man's beard might be attached to the divining spear so as to ensure that his spirit would be present to influence the movement of the spear. As has been described in a previous section, Movement leaders employ similar methods using a wooden cross to elicit a response from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
6. Love (*Auu kaenge panasingi*). Concern for others, hospitality, assisting in garden work, helping another find bride-wealth, or contributing to compensation payments, were all important values in traditional Engan society, particularly among clan members. Movement members say that the Christian love ethic is not new to them. However, as Christians they are called to apply the ethic to others with whom they have no blood, marriage, or exchange relations. "[In clans] we are united as blood relatives. Now, through Christ's blood, we are joined together in Christ's clan."<sup>12</sup>
7. Traditional singing, dancing and prophecy (*Mali*). Traditionally,

the words of songs at dance festivals were carefully chosen to praise the name of an important bigman, or his group in the *tee*, or to send messages to others about the *tee* pig-exchange. As noted above, movement members still sing and dance, but the underlying message is to praise Jesus Kataisa Enga Kamongo (Jesus Christ the Bigman of Enga) and to sing, not about pigs, but about the reign of God.

8. Teaching and sharing wisdom (*Mana pii*). Traditionally, wisdom was passed on to men in the men's house.<sup>13</sup> The men's house had a sacred quality about it and anyone approaching the house should introduce himself with a cough or similar sound to let the spirit of the house know he was coming. The man who heard and followed the wisdom learned in the men's house would live a long life and take his father's place. Movement leaders say that the Ten Commandments taught by the church cover much of what was learned in the men's house and that the God spoken about by the missionaries was not a complete stranger to them.

As can be seen from the examples above, members of the God Triwan Movement consciously practice forms of inculturation - Enga style, re-thinking and re-working the Christian message in a Melanesian context to find a new and unique blend of faith and culture. Their intention is Christological, to follow Jesus Christ, the Enga Bigman.

## Counter-culture

Genuine evangelisation also sometimes involves inculturation in the form of challenging cultural values and practices and perhaps transforming them. Examples have been given above illustrating how the movement has challenged the culture of conflict and violence. They have also challenged the whole Engan cluster of values and practices around becoming a bigman through the pig-exchange. At times during dance festivals, some male movement members will dress as women, with the intention of demonstrating humility.

Many of the most influential Engan customs are associated with death and funerals. God Triwan Movement members pray for the dead, yet have a strong belief in life as a gift, which God gives and can, takes away. The writer was present once with the Kungupalama community at the Feast of All Souls and noticed how people sat in groups around wooden stakes in the ground. Where, in traditional Engan culture, pigs are tied to such stakes before giving them in exchange, now people were gathered around the stakes as a sign of them being given to God.

The actions of Sara Thomas and her husband offer a remarkable illustration of a married couple acting counter to Engan custom. Sara's nine-year-old son had fallen out of a tree. In her testimony, Sara tells how she prayed, putting the boy in God's hands. After he died and people came to mourn, she told them to stop wailing, saying, "If you are really sorry for the boy, then pray for him. Crying won't raise him up from death. He is dead and if you are sorry then we should pray and think of his life."<sup>14</sup> People thought she was crazy and told her so. Later she did cry as she prayed to Mary, "Mother Mary, when they killed your son you sat feeling very sad. What you felt, I feel now too, so you must help me to put this boy into your hands along with your son, Jesus Christ. Also give peace to my clan so that they don't get too angry about the death of the boy."<sup>15</sup> This was the day before Sara and her husband were due to receive a blessing from the Bishop as a group of seventy-two *kendemane* or workers of the movement. According to Engan custom, it is totally forbidden for anyone in a family to wear colourful decorations during the mourning period for the death of a family member. Sara and her husband decided to go counter to custom and to wear festive clothing for the ceremony with the Bishop. She tells how it felt to be in seen in public. "At the main market it seemed that people's eyes were on nothing else."<sup>16</sup> They then went to the cathedral to receive the Bishop's blessing along with seventy others. Though Sara and her husband went quite contrary to Engan custom, they were consciously taking a stand on their belief that children are a gift from God, and felt that they wanted to celebrate the life of their dead son. Other members of the God Triwan community supported them in this.

## Reflection

What can one learn theologically and pastorally about working in dialogue with movements such as the God Triwan Movement? Any theological appraisal of such a movement must consider their understanding of Divine Revelation. Different churches vary in their understanding of this fundamental tenet of Christian faith. Those with a more conservative theology hold that the whole of God's revelation is found in the Bible. More liberal approaches are open to Divine Revelation beyond the Biblical text, and look to divine intervention in history, or as God encountering people through the Word when they hear it with faith. The Catholic Church is open to Divine Revelation outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, yet holds that Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation. The Church also maintains that history is still revelatory as faithful people grow in understanding of the fullness



of God's truth. This allows for what is termed "continuing" revelation, as Christ continues to be an ever-present saving reality for people today.

Some of Matthew's experiences, noted in this study, such as the initial incident in 1989, in which he called out about the sheep being eaten, and went through the motions of dying on a cross and ascending to heaven, would come into the category of "private" revelation. In private revelation, there is a sense of an intrusion, the revelation coming independently of one's expectation. There have always been charismatic and prophetic phenomena in the Church (1Cor. 12, 7-11. 28-30), and the Church is open to the possibility that such phenomena are not fake, so long as there is no claim to surpass or correct the revelation of Christ, and if they help people to live Christ's definitive revelation more fully in a certain period of history.<sup>17</sup> Matthew Ima's experience may be seen in this light.

The practice of discernment through asking questions, tapping on a cross and waiting for a response is fundamentally a form of intercessory prayer to Christ with an overlay of Enga "magical" performance. As has been noted already, it is a questionable practice as it could easily be misused by shamans. Therefore, it should be viewed with caution, being aware of the danger of sensationalism and self-deception.

As for the visions and prophecies of the women in the generator teams, one should keep in mind how, in the Bible, angels and other spiritual beings appear without any great fanfare, in dreams and to people in a waking state. Sometimes a vision may be a person's way of speaking and thinking about the unspeakable and unthinkable. It should be noted though that visions should never be seen as ways of acquiring holiness at little cost. Moreover, genuine prophecy is not predicting the future, but looking to the future and warning a community to make the right decisions in the present. According to 1Cor. 13:9, prophecy is unimportant compared to charity, so the fundamental guide is, "Look at the fruits." Thus, visions may be welcomed with prudence if they open a way to going further on the spiritual journey.

Despite apparently simplistic talk of "telephone" and "TV," the writer noticed that the movement has in place a number of checks and balances. Most of the leaders are aware of the words of 1John 4:1, "Do not trust every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." To this end, they have their own system of "multiple attestation", whereby a divine message is only acted upon after several

community members attest to having received the same message. Another important quality is to be open to being wrong. Some expatriate missionaries have found the movement too independent for their liking. However, Matthew does try to witness to humility, and at times, seeks advice from the Bishop of the Diocese.

What can one learn pastorally from the movement? Firstly, it should be noted that the ability to imagine the experience of a movement is not the same as sympathising with the subject matter. Thus, it is necessary to be open and to listen, but not always to agree. Engage people want to express their faith in ways that not only make sense to them, but in ways that they can involve themselves totally in their search for life in the face of death. The response of faith to the Gospel is experienced in the unfolding events of life.

Faith is lived in community, which is not simply a matter of friendly relations between people. In Christian communities, people try to live in a way that their ordinary relationships are healed and enriched by a common commitment to Christ and the Gospel. Simply being a member of a parish, or an outstation, frequently leaves people with little sense of Christian community, particularly in times of tribal conflict, which often result in periods of Eucharistic famine. That is why they are attracted to movements such as the God Triwan Movement, because through it, the sense of *communio* is more real to them. This is particularly the case when a movement such as the God Triwan Movement works through marriage and blood ties. Attempts to establish "Basic Christian Communities" from outside have been less effective.

There is not only a greater sense of community, but also a feeling of newfound freedom. People frequently feel a burden of fear of human violence, or misfortune caused by malicious spirits. Renewed Christian commitment within a community provides an opportunity for a form of "born again" experience, or at least, renewal, which liberates people from fears that previously held them in bondage. This is particularly the case for women, many of whom have found a new freedom of expression within the community. The reader may have noticed that the majority of examples in this paper feature the experiences of women. Renewed commitment in community also frees some people for being counter-cultural where this is required.

Inculturation is not an end in itself, rather a means to a more genuine and vital local church. It is a two-way process. On the one hand, it encourages the local church, and on the other, it is the only way that Christianity can be truly universal. When Papua New Guinean

people feel “at home,” they are much more likely to contribute from their many resources of language, spirituality, ways of relating, and closeness to the environment. Their ways of responding to people’s struggles and hopes are potentially a contribution to the wider church in terms of stronger family life, insights from rereading Scripture from their own worldview, more vital forms of prayer, and a richer symbolic consciousness. The God Triwan Movement hardly fits the typologies of religious movements invented by social scientists. It is a church renewal movement that stresses inculturation - Enga style. Future developments will reveal whether the movement is promoting an idol, or whether it has really helped people come closer to Jesus Christ Enga Kamongo Epe (Jesus Christ the Good Lord of Enga).

## ENDNOTES

1. This movement, originating in the Laiapu District in the East of the Enga Province, is not the same as the movement with the same name studied in the West of the Enga Province by Janusz Bierniek (1997).
2. I wish to thank all who helped provide information for this paper, particularly the Kungupalama community for their hospitality, and Ms Regina Tanda who spent many hours recording and transcribing interviews.
3. “Wanpela taim mipela i bin bung long plen bilong daiosis na mipela i bin diskas long ol ‘skin katolik.’ Mi harim dispela tok nau na man, leva bilong mi i go pinis. Mi bin ting olsem Jisas i no stap insait long mi na mi stap olsem wanpela tinpis. Dispela i wok long givim bikpela sem long mi. Mi karim dispela wanpela poin i go long komyniti bilong mi na mi bin serim wantaim ol. Mipela i bin pre long dispela tripela yia 1985-1988 na 1989 muvmen i bin kirap” (Taped interview, Pompobus 30.10.92).
4. “Mi krai long ol sipsip bilong mi. Mi ting long kisim ol sipsip bilong mi i go long heven, tasol planti waildok i kaikaim ol sipsip bilong mi” (Interview, 30.10.92).
5. “Nau mi kirap na mi go long heven. Bai mi go long heven pastaim. Wanem samting i stap long heven mi bai tokim yupela bihain” (Interview, 30.10.92)
6. “Kruse em yet i muv na i no isi. Klostu haus i bruk” (Interview, 30.10.92).
7. One informant said that Matthew cut the tip off the spear at a place called Winakos. The significance is found through a change of code in the English/Pidgin connotations of the Enga name: win = Christ wins over death; kos sounds similar to “cross” upon which Jesus died.
8. Matthew had a hand in the last stages of ending the fight. He noted where fighter’s supporters would sit on hilltops to observe and direct the fight. Then, during the night he went and erected a cross on the site. Those involved in the fight found the presence of the cross unnerving when they came the next day. Also Matthew invited enemy groups to come to his place for prayer followed by a special meal. He explained his action later with the example of fishing. If you want to hook a fish you need a line and some bait. He was using the meal as bait to hook the warriors so that they could be influenced by the prayer of the community.

9. Taim birua pasin i stap orait yumi ol meri i save wokim *yanda kii*, i min olsem meri em bin kamapim wanbel. Olsem na mi bin askim God long givim mi wanpela man bilong Itokone bai mi ken go marit long en na dispela birua namel long lain bilong mi na Itokone i ken pinis na mipela i ken kamap wan. Taim mi gat bel orait mi bin askim God olsem: 'Wanem kain pikinini yu bai givim long mi, boi o gel, bai mi amamas long en. Mi bin kam long hia long kamap wan namel long lain bilong mi na ol lain Itokone, olsem na taim mi karim dispela bebi pinis orait yu mas givim gutpela tingting long man bilong mi bai mitupela i ken wanbel na givim lain bilong mi bai dispela wanbel namel long tupela lain bai kamap strong tru.' Dispela prea mi bin wokim yet i go inap long mi karim bebi na bebi em wanpela gel na taim bebi i tu yias old orait man i bin tok olsem: 'Ol lain bilong mi em ol i bin kilim planti lain bilong yu na dispela dai bilong lain bilong yu em i stap yet long yu, olsem na bai mitupela salim dispela pikinini bilong mitupela i go long hap bai taim ol i lukim em orait, ol bai lus tingting long dai bilong lain bilong yu husat i bin dai long en.' Na mi bin tok orait na salim i go. Bihain mi bin karim narapela manki. Taim manki i tu yia orait mitupela i bin salim em tu i go long hap na ol lain bilong mi ol i bin tok olsem: 'Ol pikinini meri bilong man na meri bai go marit long narapela hap tasol, manki yu bin givim long mipela em i wanpela bikpela samting yu bin wokim. Pik na mani long kompensasin em i antap na yu bin givim pikinini long mi em i bikpela samting tru na taim manki i kamap bikpela orait em bai i no inap long kamap long ples bilong yupela. Em bai kisim ples bilong man husat i bin dai long en na sapos em karim ol pikinini ol bai kisim ples bilong ol man i dai long en, olsem na nau em bai kam stap long hia wantaim yumi.' Orait manki bilong mi, mi bin tokim em olsem, 'Mi bin kam marit long hia em long kamapim wan, olsem na lain bilong papa bilong yu ol i bin kilim planti lain bilong mi na ol lain bilong mi ol i amamas long yu go stap wantaim ol na laip taim bilong yu, yu mas i stap long hap na taim yu marit na karim pikinini orait, ol lain pikinini bilong yu em bai kisim ples bilong ol man i dai long en.' (Taped interview by Regina Tanda at Kungupalama 1.6.98).
10. At the Kaipetamanda community the moving cross indicated that it should be erected in the middle of a small lake. People noted with dry humour, "We happen to be people" (not eels). So they built an island in the middle of the lake to accommodate the cross.
11. Divination would be by means of interpreting patterns of liquid poured into the cup - not unlike English custom the reading of "tea-leaves" in a teacup.
12. Mipela i bin kam long wanpela blut. Nau long blut bilong Jisas mipela i kamap wanpela bodi bilong Krai gen" (Interview with Matthew Ima at Kungupalama 2.11.98).
13. For examples of *mana pii* learned in the men's house, see Gibbs 2003.
14. Sapos yupela i sori long manki yumi mas pre tasol na sapos yumi krai orait yumi no inap long kirapim manki long kirap long dai. Em bin dai pinis na sapos yumi sori long em orait yumi mas prea long tingim laip bilong en (Taped interview with Sarah Thomas, Sangurap, 9.12.98).
15. Mama Maria, taim ol i bin kilim pikinini bilong yu, yu bin pilim nogut tru na yu bin sindaun i stap. Wanem kain tingting na pilim yu bin kisim long en, mi wok long kisim na stap nao, olsem na yu mas strongim mi bai mi ken lusim manki long han bilong yu wantaim pikinini bilong yu Jisas Krai. Na tu yu mas givim bel isi long

lain bilong mi na bai ol i no ken kisim tingting nogut long dai bilong manki.

16. Long mein maket ol man long hap ai bilong ol em ol i no bin lukluk i go long narapela samting!
17. The official Catechism of the Catholic Church (#67) states as follows: Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the church. Christian faith cannot accept "revelations" that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfilment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such "revelations".

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