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THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S MISSION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA: INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS AND AN SVD TRADITION

Despite a growing economy powered by resource projects, Papua New Guinea ranks poorly on the UN Human Development Index and the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. These and other socio-political indicators present a challenging context for the mission of the Church. Changing intercultural relations, both in the country as a whole and within the SVD, call for even more attention to cultural issues. The SVD urgently need a conversation with the social sciences to appreciate better how to deal with the context both ad intra and ad extra. This requires a new recognition of the Anthropos Tradition not as a historical project, but as a way of looking to the future and the importance of intercultural life and mission. Taking humanity (anthropos) seriously calls for both a theological and a cultural anthropology that informs our missiology, and an intercultural hermeneutics to help navigate through multiple cultural identities.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit Sisters in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea (PNG), received a call on the radio from the nurse at the health centre at Ambulua, a mission station on the slopes of Mt Wilhelm (4509 m). A woman in labor was experiencing great difficulty and needed emergency care. The sisters said they would come with an ambulance, but the people would have to carry the woman on a make-shift stretcher some six hours along mountain tracks to reach the road. The sisters set out that night on the 120 km trip, but the 4WD Land Cruiser ambulance could not make it across a swollen river and they

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had to turn back. The next day they called various companies to try to obtain the services of a helicopter to bring the woman out to hospital, but all helicopters in the area were committed to work with mining companies. So the sisters hired another 4WD pickup with an experienced driver who managed to cross the river and to reach the woman who was now in her third day of labor. Returning with the woman on the back of the pickup the vehicle got stuck in a deep hole, and in the struggle to free the car, the woman gave birth.

The tale above might sound like a mission story with a happy ending. However there is a wider context in which such episodes often end in tragedy. The woman and her baby were very fortunate. A number of women die every day in PNG due to birth complications. Maternal mortality in Papua New Guinea is now thought to be at a rate of 730 deaths for every 100,000 live births.¹ Australia's maternal mortality rate at 8 per 100,000 live births means that PNG's rate is about 90 times that of its neighbor.² However, without looking abroad, distressing disparity is found within PNG itself symbolized by a chaotic birth on the back of a bouncing truck. The disturbing contrasts between haves and have-nots, traditional and modern, village and the town, global and the local, exemplify the context of mission today.

How does one assess that context? How does the changing context affect intercultural relations? What does it mean for Divine Word Missionaries, particularly from a missiological perspective? These are some of the questions I address in this paper.

Who Benefits?

Unlike in much of Europe, the PNG economy is growing steadily. Estimated real GDP growth in 2011 was 8.9%, faster than that of China. However, with inflation as high or higher than the growth rate, who benefits? A large liquefied natural gas project led by Exxon-Mobil is powering the economy, and other ventures contribute to the resource boom, with various mining projects and the establishment of special industrialized economic zones. Yet, despite the frenzied exploitation of its natural riches, PNG stands at 137th (of 187) on the UN Human Development Index—in company with Madagascar and

¹ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/papuang_statistics.html (accessed 23 Jan. 2012).

² http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/australia_statistics.html (accessed 23 Jan. 2012).

Nigeria.³ PNG also ranks 154th (of 182) on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index—the same ranking as the Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Nepal.⁴ The sad truth is that few local people benefit from the resource developments, and most Papua New Guinean incomes, adjusted for inflation, have barely risen since the country gained Independence in 1975.

In this situation the Catholic Bishops of PNG and the Solomon Islands question whether the resource boom might be more of a curse than a blessing.⁵ Resource development can benefit some people when managed well, and be a curse for many if they are marginalized and their human rights are neglected. A recent report from the Human Rights Council of the United Nations noted issues of capacity and resource constraints, as well as tough geographical terrain, cultural diversity and lack of infrastructure development that seriously undermine PNG's efforts to implement human rights commitments and obligations.⁶

Weak governance and severely underperforming institutions leading to the survival of the “fattest” are not unique to PNG. Logging operations that have decimated large areas of tropical forest in Indonesia are starting to do the same in PNG—often disguised as Special Agricultural Business Leases.⁷ People in West Africa have lost large tracts of land to commercial oil palm plantations—a practice starting to take hold in PNG. The HIV and AIDS epidemic is not as serious as in parts of Africa, but PNG has the largest number of HIV and AIDS cases in the Pacific region. Many countries have school systems that discharge young people into the ranks of the alienated unemployed as happens in PNG. Despite the similarities there are also elements typical only of PNG. Cultural realities make a difference, as one will notice in travelling just a few kilometers across the border from the Asian atmosphere of Jayapura in Indonesia to the Melanesian mood of Vanimo in PNG. Moreover, taking into account the “soul” of the

³ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PNG.html>

⁴ <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>

⁵ *LNG—Blessing or Curse? A Question for the People of Papua New Guinea to Answer* (Pastoral Letter of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands), April 18, 2010.

⁶ http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-18_en.pdf. The most serious concern raised in the report is the appalling state of domestic and sexual violence in the country.

⁷ PNG exported 3 million cubic meters of round logs in 2010 with 86% of the exports going to China, <http://www.actnowpng.org/content/latest-log-export-data> (accessed 13 Feb. 2012).

nation, one should also consider the PNG claim to be a Christian country.

A Christian Country?

Christian missionaries first came to coastal regions of the PNG mainland in the 1880s. People accepted the Gospel message and now over 95% of Papua New Guineans say they are Christian. The preamble to the PNG constitution reads: "We, the people of Papua New Guinea... pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are now ours..." The PNG Constitution is a special document, not only because it is the foundation for law in PNG, but also because much of its inspiration came from the Social Teaching of the Church—many of the leaders at the time having been mentored at the national seminary by Fr. Pat Murphy SVD.

There seems to be an incongruity in the low level of development and a high level of corruption noted above in a country that professes to be Christian. The Apostolic Nuncio, the late Archbishop Hans Schwemmer, declared in 2001 at the funeral of a murdered priest that Papua New Guinea's claim to being a Christian country is getting weaker every day. The situation presents new challenges and opportunities for evangelization.

The Church in a Changing Context

In a situation powered by the political economy, the Church is challenged to strengthen the faith and to promote the common good. The Catholic Church has over one and a half million members in PNG (27% of the total population) in nineteen dioceses. As the largest Christian church it plays an important role in civil society, being responsible for almost a quarter of the health facilities in the country and a good percentage of education services. Church health and education facilities are particularly valued in isolated rural areas where often they provide the only functioning services. At Easter 1999, the Catholic Archbishop of Port Moresby publicly warned that the future of Papua New Guinea as a free democratic country was threatened and that the personal conduct of many Papua New Guinea leaders was shameful. The Archbishop's statement acted as a catalyst for change and three months later the Prime Minister was forced to resign.

A decade later, at the beginning of 2012, PNG is experiencing a constitutional crisis and political chaos with two leaders claiming to be Prime Minister and their supporters forming two Governments. Church leaders have offered to mediate, and the Catholic Bishops have issued a statement noting how it is not a time for political instability and infighting since “the country is already facing problems of corruption, poverty, unemployment, law and order, and many more.” The Bishops have appealed “to all involved in this current dispute to place the peace and good of the nation above self-interest.” However, the appeal seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Ironically though, one of the major political parties is now promising to give 10% of national income to the Churches to do “God’s work.” In practice that would only put the churches in the position of being just like another department of government, accountable to government and dependent on it. If implemented, it could seriously impede the freedom of the Church to speak truth to power.

Current changes are even more significant for the mission of the church. Recently, Parliament-elect Prime Minister Peter O’Neill said that he would like more foreign missionaries to help deliver services in the country. An American Baptist missionary replied that the government should be delivering services itself. The headline in the newspaper read, “Missionaries in PNG for God’s work not Government’s.”⁸

The SVD in PNG faces changes in doing God’s work in the present context. Even with local men entering the Society, numbers are reduced. The SVD in PNG now has 110 confreres in final vows in PNG—less than half the manpower of 20 years ago. More significantly, after being the founder of the Church in many parts of PNG, the SVD now has to find a new identity in relation to the maturing local church. How can the SVD best be of service to the Church and the people of PNG today? In a recent survey a number of respondents commented that they wanted the SVD to continue to supply personnel for institutions that the SVD helped start such as Word Publishing, Divine Word University, the National Seminary, and the Melanesian Institute. Yet others propose a change from traditional approaches to mission. One called for a “re-alignment of the SVD’s projects in line with social and civil challenges and crises, including human rights challenges facing PNG and its people.” Another proposed that the SVD might have to learn how to engage with the elite on behalf of the poor. Still another noted, “Whilst the Bishops’ Confer-

⁸ “Missionaries in PNG for God’s work, not government’s,” <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/201111/s3361771.htm> (accessed 10 Nov. 2011).

ence has its particular role in terms of speaking up for the people of PNG, why not a prophetic voice from a Society with much experience and history in the country?"

Intercultural Relations

The changing context brings major changes also in intercultural relations. It used to be that one could ask a person in PNG where "home" is and the reply would be the name of a village or a particular locale. Now many company employees and public servants migrate or commute to work in various parts of the country. There are an increasing number of "mixed" marriages with partners from different parts of the country, different mother tongues and dissimilar cultural norms. Children from such marriages may not feel at home in their parent's village, particularly if they have been raised in a town. There is an increasing number of younger people with no knowledge of a mother tongue other than the lingua franca Tok Pisin, and no real ties to the land. Young people with secondary school education are generally averse to returning to life in a rural village, and many girls (often supported by their parents) want to marry only a wealthy man or a man with paid employment. A recent study in my former parish at Porgera, the site of a gold mine, notes how now over 60% of men are in polygamous marriages.⁹ As a consequence many young men have little hope of finding a marriage partner. An increasing number of educated women earning a wage decide against entering into marriage lest they lose their personal and financial independence.¹⁰

The majority of the population still lives in rural villages, but village life is changing. With radio and now mobile phone communication rural villagers are becoming much more aware of events outside of their valley. They are also aware of the health and education services that they lack because of the drastic breakdown of services to rural areas.

⁹ Penny Johnson, *Scoping Project: Social Impact of the Mining Project on Women in the Porgera Area* (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea: Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti, 2011), 20. Johnson notes how many men have between 3 and 6 wives.

¹⁰ Martha Macintyre, *Money Changes Everything: Papua New Guinean Women in the Modern Economy*, in: Mary Patterson & Martha Macintyre (eds.), *Managing Modernity in the Western Pacific*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 2011, 90-120.

Intercultural relations are changing for the SVD also. In past decades German and American missionaries played an influential role in the SVD mission in PNG. Their energy and management of funds and resources had a remarkable influence on the SVD mission effort. Now the leadership is passing on to national members and confreres from other lands. There were no Germans or Americans at the January 2012 PNG Provincial Chapter. The SVD cultural composition is changing, and this makes a difference to our way of relating to the world and to each other.

The change in intercultural relations, both in the country as a whole and within the SVD, calls for even more attention to cultural issues. Yet, that can be difficult if one works with an unsuitable understanding of culture. The SVD urgently need a conversation with the social sciences to appreciate better how to deal with the context both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

In a recent article in *Mission Studies*, Michael Rynkiewicz questions whether there has been a parting of the ways in the relationship between mission studies and the social sciences.¹¹ Missiology appears to utilize a model of anthropology steeped in structural functionalism and the study of symbol and ritual. However, with post-modernist thought, the science of anthropology has moved on. First, there is a new reflexivity in ethnography, with a different understanding of power and the nature of personhood. During the “modern” period after WWII anthropologists tended to look for culture as it was assumed to be before the missionaries arrived. Now some anthropologists are studying “local Christianities,”—for example Joel Robbins’ thought-provoking study of conversion and moral torment among the Urapmin people in PNG.¹²

Second, there is a new epistemic humility with the realization that there are many possible interpretations emerging over time. Culture is constructed and contested daily by those wanting life to be different. Theologian Robert Schreiter argues convincingly that in our changing world we must find ways for greater engagement and cohesion between groups that are different, and that intercultural herme-

¹¹ Michael Rynkiewicz, Do We Need a Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World?: *Mission Studies* 28 (2011) 1-19.

¹² Joel Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2004.

neutics is necessary to facilitate the interpreting of different communities to one another.¹³

Third, there is what Rynkiewich terms a new “global gaze” in ethnography, acknowledging that society is no longer uniform, bounded or isolated and that persons, products and ideas are travelling back and forth between home and elsewhere. The 2006 Australian census records 24,020 people born in Papua New Guinea living in Australia.¹⁴ Links with Australia and other countries continue to develop and the national airline Air Niugini is adding substantially to its fleet of aircraft for international routes.

Rynkiewich questions whether we will “continue to engage the Social Sciences, particularly Cultural Anthropology, as a conversation partner, or has the time of cross-fertilization between these disciplines passed, leaving Mission Studies to survive on History and Theology alone?”¹⁵ The matter raised by Rynkewich is particularly relevant for the current situation of the SVD in PNG. There is a pressing need for an insightful and comprehensive approach to mission, building on the past, critically aware of the present, in order to serve more effectively in the future.

The Anthropos Tradition Today

The Anthropos Tradition has been an important part of the SVD approach to mission. SVD Founder Arnold Janssen insisted on the inclusion of sciences in the training of future missionaries.¹⁶ Wilhelm Schmidt took up the challenge in what was then called ethnology. The frontispiece of the *Anthropos* journal stated that it was published *unter Mitarbeit zahlreicher Missionare*—“with the cooperation of numerous missionaries.”

A living tradition develops—it is not unchanging. General Superior Antonio Pernia described the Anthropos Tradition at a meeting in Poland in 2003.

¹³ Robert Schreiter, *A New Modernity. Living and Believing in an Unstable World*. The 2005 Anthony Jordan Lectures, Newman Theological College, Edmonton, Alberta, March 18-19, 2005.

¹⁴ <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/pdf/papunew-guinea.pdf> (accessed 1 February 2012).

¹⁵ Rynkiewich, *Postmodern Anthropology*, 152.

¹⁶ Ennio Mantovani, *Anthropos Tradition in the SVD Yesterday and Today: Verbum SVD* 46 (2005) 209-11.

Our Anthropos tradition is really a way of doing mission which considers an appreciation of people's culture as a necessary precondition for genuine evangelization. A way of doing mission whereby the gospel message is not simply parachuted from outside, but enters into dialogue with the culture of the people.¹⁷

Pernia adds, "Without this tradition, something essential would be lost from our Society."

But how are we to appreciate people's culture or enter into dialogue with the culture of the people in a situation of globalization and rapid cultural change, and when, in social science circles, the modernist understanding of "culture" is being questioned?¹⁸ We too often tend to take an essentialist view of culture which is now seen as deficient by social scientists.

Today in PNG cultural identities are more fluid than static, more syncretic than pure, more invented than received.¹⁹ The descendants of the Sepik people that Franz Kirschbaum, one of the first SVD missionaries, lived with, drink from coconuts, but they enjoy Coca Cola too; Louis Luzbetak's mid-Wahgi informants can watch Charlie's Angels as well as the local EM TV news on their TV sets; Ennio Mantovani's Chimbu contacts exchange money using mobile phones and negotiate relationships as "phone friends." Recently I struggled up a muddy path in Porgera intending to meet and discuss local concerns about injustice with the chairman of the landowners' association only to be told that he was in New York presenting their views to the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues. They added that they could give me a cell phone number to contact him in New York if I wished.²⁰

¹⁷ Antonio Pernia, Expectations of the Generalate of the Anthropos Institute: *Verbum SVD* 45 (2004) 34.

¹⁸ See Holger Jebens and Karl-Heinz Koht (eds.), *The End of Anthropology?*, Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishing 2011.

¹⁹ See Colleen Mary Mallon, *Traditioning Disciples. The Contributions of Cultural Anthropology to Ecclesial Identity* (American Society of Missiology, Monograph Series, vol. 8), Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publ. 2010, 12.

²⁰ See Philip Gibbs, Mission and Culture: The SVD Connection, in: Stephen B. Bevans (ed.), *Mission and Culture: The Louis J. Luzbetak Lectures*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2012, 294.

A Post-modern View of Culture

The reinvention rather than the recovery of tradition may be illustrated in a personal experience over a period of four years, 2006-9, meeting with a group of men from the Western Province in PNG. Two or three representatives were invited from each parish of the Daru-Kiunga Diocese, which covers a substantial area from Daru on the southern coast to Bolovip in the Star Mountains. In considering manhood the men often referred back to cultural initiation. Some had experienced a full ritual initiation, others not. Most are searching for what to pass on to their children. In group work we followed a process whereby men shared their experience and then enquired what was the value behind the ritual. For example, during initiation boys would go and live in the forest for extended periods of time. The men agreed that above all this was meant to teach the boys to be disciplined. The group then looked at Scripture and noted in Mk 1:12-13 and Lk 4:1-13 how Jesus went into the desert and there was disciplined enough to follow the will of God despite the temptations of Satan. The question then turned to how young men and women today could be strengthened to face the trials of life. In the light of Scripture the men considered how they could relate to the value of discipline today. They spoke of the importance of being faithful to their wives, of not being tempted to misuse alcohol, and keeping cool and not getting involved in fighting. Traditional initiation with long periods of seclusion in the forest seems unrealistic today, but through their own practice of discipline the men felt that they could pass on values to their children, particularly their sons. For support they decided to form a men's association and to have a "fathers day" in addition to the already established "mothers day" in the parishes.

Throughout the process over the four years, we were called to look deeply into the culture, both in terms of tradition and of current global influences. The men coming from villages in the isolated Nomad area had walked five days to come to the meeting in Kiunga; others came by canoe or by air on commercial flights. Some men had salaried work with the Ok Tedi mine, others lived as subsistence farmers in isolated villages. All were united in faith and in their concern about how to relate to their sons and daughters as fathers, providers and protectors. As resource person I was expected to engage in thoughtful interrogation of the men's accounts and to assist them in interpreting the accounts of faith found in Scripture.²¹

²¹ The initiative for these meetings with the men came from Bishop Gilles Côté, a Montfort Missionary. Aside from occasional visits the SVD do not serve in the Daru-Kiunga Diocese.

In a process such as that outlined above culture is still fundamental, but it is important to be critically aware of the way we understand the term. The effects of globalization on culture must be taken into account. Globalization has become, in the words of Roland Robertson, “glocalization”, a mixture of the global and the local.²² Hence the importance of intercultural hermeneutics—methods of interpretation across cultural boundaries as we seek to dialogue with people, between people, and among people.²³ This amounts to taking into account the context, which Steve Bevans refers to as the “entire situation in which men and women live.”²⁴

I think that a contemporary application of the Anthropos Tradition in our missionary service means taking what we now call the context seriously. Thus, studying, or even giving sufficient attention to language, culture and religion today in a place like PNG might require, for example, not only learning local languages, but taking into account the cyber language of the internet and mobile telephony. It might mean being informed about and respecting traditional cultural values, but also the culture of political and economic globalization. It could involve inculturation of the Christian faith, and also being empathetic with people's search for new forms of utopia.

In the following sections I will suggest some possible approaches, keeping the Anthropos Tradition in mind.

Language and Communication in the PNG Context

PNG is well known in anthropological circles for having over 800 different languages. Missionaries have worked to learn local languages and have sought to share the Good News through the language and symbols familiar to the local people. The effort by an outsider to learn a local language is still appreciated by the people. I have seen tears in people's eyes upon hearing the Word in their own “mother” tongue.

However, now the local interacts with the global. At the beginning of 2012 PNG has over 65,000 Facebook users—most using English, but sometimes Tok Pisin as a medium of communication. Recent events in Port Moresby with the political crisis have revealed how

²² See reference in Robert Schreiter, *A New Modernity. Living and Believing in an Unstable World*, 24.

²³ Antonio Pernia, *Arnoldus Nota*, November 2009.

²⁴ Stephen Bevans, Inculturation and SVD Mission: *Verbum SVD* 42 (2001) 260.

PNG's growing blogosphere is bringing the nation together in new ways.²⁵ In a report to Pacific Media Watch, Emmanuel Narokobi noted how quickly the information spread in December 2011 when the Parliament-elect Prime Minister and his supporters were rushing down to the gates of Government House trying to get in. People were reporting that action within seconds, so a lot of people didn't need to go to mainstream media such as radio and TV because they were getting real-time information just from Facebook and Twitter. Narokobi thinks that people weren't rioting in the streets as they had in the past, because now they had an outlet and were having a say via Twitter and Facebook. They didn't feel the need to go out onto the streets and throw stones.

This illustrates Marshall McLuhan's saying that "the medium is the message." In other words a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only by the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself. In PNG we are in the midst of a change in inter-personal dynamics brought about by the innovations of modern means of communication. The message may have been information about what was happening at government house, but the medium allowed young people to adopt a new attitude towards political events—a peaceful attitude in this case. One hopes that this reflects a responsible peace and not a retreat into a virtual cyber world. Modern information technology is allowing Papua New Guineans to communicate in new ways, both within the country and around the world. As we have seen elsewhere in the "Arab Spring," it provides not only access to more information, but becomes a new way to mobilize people as well. The SVD traditional interest in language must surely extend now to modern means of communication. There are immense opportunities for the SVD to develop God's mission in this field.

Culture and Context Today

Most Pacific countries flirted with socialism on the eve of their independence, PNG included. But it has been more the enchantment of capitalist development that has appealed to the masses. Unfortunately, socio-political "developments" these days appear to be pursuing a goal of turning society into a hypermarket, and citizens into consumers with rights equivalent to the amount of money they have (or owe).

²⁵ "PNG: Social media the news leader during political standoff," <http://www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/pacific-media-watch/png-social-media-news-leader-during-political-standoff-7785>

All too often nature is reduced to being a mere source of natural resources, and the neoliberal form of economy accepted uncritically presumes that in exploiting nature the country will have resources for social goals—a presumption that in reality is an illusion, particularly for the rural population and the poor in urban settlements.²⁶

Recently I was interviewing people at the formerly Church-owned Vidar Plantation near Alexishafen affected by preparations for the establishment of a Special Economic Zone—the first in the country. Those interviewed spoke out strongly about pollution and damage to the reef. However, I noticed that their indignation was not so much concern for the environment, but outrage that they had not been compensated. I had the impression that some would welcome greater damage if it would qualify them for increased recompense. Is this a sign of the transfer of enchantment from nature to capital (money)?

How could the Anthropos Tradition be pertinent to such a context? One could blame distant capitalists but that might only obscure the intriguing complexity of intercultural hermeneutics. Marshall Sahlins notes how non-Western people use their encounter with the world capitalist system to develop their own culture in its own terms. So the ends of social life remain the same, but the means of attaining them and the scale on which they do so change.²⁷ How is it that the local people seem more concerned about money than the environment? If they did get cash compensation, what would they do with it? Would micro-credit ventures be accepted or would the money fund conspicuous consumption like a beer party or vanish in the pockets of a few in corruption? Could it be that “desire is the global flow perhaps least susceptible to mitigation?”²⁸ We might also ask how the Social Teaching of the Church on rights and responsibilities and the care of creation might apply to our sharing of the Word in such a culture/context.

²⁶ Some of the urban and rural poor respond with holdups on the roads, and demands of large sums of monetary compensation for any government or commercial “development” on the land.

²⁷ Marshall Sahlins, *Cosmologies of Capitalism: the Trans-Pacific Sector of “the World System,”* in: N. Dirks, G. Eley & S. B. Ortner (eds.), *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994, 414.

²⁸ Mary Patterson and Martha Macintyre, *Capitalism, Cosmology and Globalisation in the Pacific*, in: Patterson & Macintyre (eds.), *Managing Modernity in the Western Pacific*, 11.

Religious Change

“Without a vision the people perish” (Prov 29:18). What happened to the vision and dreams of PNG at Independence? Did the “Melanesian Way” die with Bernard Narokobi—the Catholic layman, lawyer and politician who helped develop the PNG Constitution? Has the race for mammon imposed itself as the total fulfilment of human dreams? Recently I visited “Vision City” in Port Moresby—the new shopping mall built by the Malaysian company Rimbunan Hijau. It struck me as an empty mini-version of what one finds in Manila or Kuala Lumpur. Melanesia is known for its innovative “cargo movements.” Could it be particularly vulnerable to globalized consumerism with its novelty, colorfulness and abundance of supplies, substituting for eternal life? I wonder how an unemployed youth from a Port Moresby settlement area such as Morata would feel in such a context. What other form of utopia could one desire? Religion and secularized consumerism exist side by side, each trying to negotiate the questions that modernity raises.

Situations of illusion and delusion provide new opportunities for Pentecostal churches and an upsurge in other religious movements. Census results show how “born-again” churches and the Seventh Day Adventist church are now growing much faster than the older churches such as the Lutheran and Catholic. In a situation of perceived chaos these newer churches help bring discipline into family life, providing support especially for adult males to give up drinking, gambling and to take seriously faithfulness in marriage. Gifts of the Holy Spirit provide a new sense of self-worth. Also, the emphasis on spirits and healing seem closer to patterns of indigenous religiosity.²⁹ In contrast to efforts at inculturation by the Catholic Church, many people seem to find that these newer churches help provide a smoother transition into modern globalized forms of life and worship.

The Anthropos Tradition as a way of mission that enters into dialogue with the culture/context of the people will encounter challenging developments in the intercultural spiritualities and religious dynamics of contemporary PNG.

Sharing Intercultural Life and Mission

The Word as good news has much to say today in our world that faces globalization, cultural and religious change, and modernization

²⁹ See Robert Schreiter, *Mission in the Second Decade of Globalization*, 2008 SEDOS Seminar, Ariccia, Italy, 20-24 May, 2008.

(a world that comprises the “παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν”—“every nation and people and language” of Rev 7:9 that is part of the theme for the 17th General Chapter of the SVD).

In John 1:4 we read, “In him (the *logos*) was life; and the life was the light of men (*anthropon*).” From a theological perspective we need to focus more on how the Divine Word can be life-giving to humanity today, whether from the perspective of nation or tribe or people or language. From a cultural perspective “intercultural” is still cultural, no matter what difficulties we might have in trying to define the term. The social sciences are still relevant in providing insight and scholarship to further our mission. From a missiological perspective, we still have a long way to go in discovering the implications of “prophetic dialogue.” The SVD adopted that term in an effort to bring together the Latin American concern for social justice and the Asian concern for dialogue. In the present context, PNG urgently needs both prophecy and dialogue. Could it be that prophecy and dialogue and their special composite in prophetic dialogue become vague or confused if we don't study and take seriously the changing, multidimensional, context in which people live? This requires a new recognition of the *Anthropos* Tradition not as a historical project, but as a way of looking to the future and the importance of intercultural life and mission. Prior to other “characteristic dimensions” of the SVD, could it be that the fundamental characteristic of the SVD is the way we participate in the incarnation of the Word becoming not only “flesh” but giving life and light to humankind. The SVD in PNG is faced with the task of developing a closer life-giving relationship with faith seekers, the poor and marginalized, people of diverse cultures, and people of different faith traditions or secular ideologies.³⁰

People have new issues to face in our contemporary world, yet they still have the fundamental questions about what makes for a meaningful, humane and dignified life for themselves and their loved ones. This is where our return to *anthropos* is important since many modern developments can be dehumanizing. How can we promote the common good of humankind in the face of such trends very much dominated by the political economy?

Some of our previous attempts to understand how to do this were limited by dualistic reasoning. We compared the concerns of the cosmic spirituality of the *ethnos*: the earth, nature, wellbeing and exchange, with their equivalents in metacosmic spirituality: heaven, transcendence, salvation and grace. While not denying such concepts, might it not be better to develop our SVD spirituality by listening to

³⁰ See Antonio Pernia, *Conversations: Missiology* 39 (2011) 102.

what the *Logos* is saying to *anthropos* as it participates in the transformation of culture as formed by the reign of God? Human beings have the capacity to relate to the Divine because of the incarnation of the Divine Word. With a relevant theology of the Spirit and of the incarnation, our lives need not be reduced to anthropological secularism nor to some form of dualism. In order to take *anthropos* seriously we need both a theological and a cultural anthropology that informs our missiology, and we need an intercultural hermeneutics to help us navigate through multiple cultural identities.

Conclusion

Intercultural dialogue in PNG is important if the SVD are to realize the potential to “work with God to build our earth.”³¹ In order to do this the Congregation would do well to revitalize the Anthropos Tradition for the study and appreciation of language, culture, and religion both *ad extra* and *ad intra*. The Anthropos Tradition is an essential part of SVD identity. However, it is important not to become imprisoned by the tradition, but to utilize it as a wellspring from which to engage in intercultural mission today, and from which to explore new avenues for mission in the future. For example, could the SVD in PNG host an annual mission symposium with contributions from PNG and beyond?

The woman mentioned at the beginning of this paper, rested and then walked home to Ambulua with her baby. Helicopters continue to fly overhead. She lives in a village with no road access and no electric power. Access to human rights and the exercise of community power are uncertain. With the help of the SVD, women’s groups and people responsible for rural health centres could develop ways to make their needs known to the wider world and empower relevant agencies to provide better services. In that way there could be a higher percentage of “happy endings” for women having difficult labor no matter where they live. Hopefully too the SVD effort will contribute to the birth of a new society with intercultural relations reflecting the values of the reign of God.

³¹ Bernard Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way—Total Cosmic Vision of Life (And His Critics and Supporters)*, Port Moresby: Institute of PNG Studies 1980, 32.

ABSTRACTS

Trotz eines durch Rohstoffreichtum angetriebenen Wirtschaftswachstums befindet sich Papua-Neuguinea auf einem der hinteren Plätze des *UN Human Development Index* (UN-Index der menschlichen Entwicklung) und des *Transparency International Corruption Perception Index* (Wahrnehmungsindex der Korruption der Organisation *Transparency International*, die sich dem Kampf gegen die Korruption verschrieben hat). Eine durch solche soziopolitischen Kennziffern geprägte Gesellschaft stellt für die Mission der Kirche eine große Herausforderung dar. Der sich vollziehende Wandel interkultureller Beziehungen, sowohl im Land als Ganzem als auch innerhalb der SVD, verlangt noch größere Aufmerksamkeit für kulturelle Fragestellungen. Die Steyler müssen sich mehr mit Sozialwissenschaften befassen, um mit dem inneren und äußeren Umfeld besser umgehen zu können. Dies erfordert eine neue Würdigung der *Anthropos*-Tradition, und zwar nicht als historisches Projekt, sondern als Weg, die Zukunft und die Bedeutung von interkulturellem Leben und Mission besser zu verstehen. Den Menschen (*anthropos*) ernst zu nehmen verlangt eine theologische wie auch eine Kulturanthropologie als Bestandteil unserer Missionswissenschaft und eine interkulturelle Hermeneutik, um sich in der Vielschichtigkeit kultureller Identitäten zurechtzufinden.

En dépit d'une économie en croissance, stimulée par des projets-ressource, la Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée se trouve dans une des dernières positions sur l'indice de développement humain des Nations Unies comme sur celui de la perception de la corruption. Ces indicateurs et les autres indicateurs sociopolitiques présentent un contexte aux multiples défis pour la mission de l'Église. Des relations interculturelles changeantes, dans le pays en général et aussi dans la société SVD, requièrent de porter plus d'attention aux questions culturelles. Il est urgent que les SVD entrent en conversation avec les sciences sociales pour mieux évaluer comment traiter le contexte, à la fois interne et externe. Cela requiert une reconnaissance nouvelle de la tradition *Anthropos*, non pas comme projet historique, mais comme façon d'envisager l'avenir et l'importance de la vie et de la mission interculturelles. Prendre l'humain (*anthropos*) au sérieux demande qu'une anthropologie théologique et culturelle informe notre missiologie et qu'une herméneutique interculturelle nous aide à naviguer à travers les multiples identités culturelles.

A pesar de una economía creciente empujada por proyectos de recursos, Papua Nueva Guinea se encuentra en un lugar relegado del Índice de Desarrollo Humano de la ONU y del Índice de la Percepción de Corrupción de Transparency International. Estos y otros indicadores sociopolíticos presentan un contexto desafiante para la misión de la iglesia. Relaciones interculturales cambiantes, tanto en el país en general como en la SVD, exigen más atención a los temas de cultura. A la SVD le hace falta urgentemente el diálogo con las ciencias sociales para apreciar mejor cómo tratar el contexto tanto hacia dentro como hacia fuera. Esto requiere una nueva apreciación de la Tradición de *Anthropos* no como un proyecto del pasado sino como una manera de mirar el futuro y la importancia de la vida y misión intercultural. Tomar la humanidad (*anthropos*) en serio exige una antropología tanto teológica como cultural para ofrecer una base a nuestra misiología, y una hermenéutica intercultural para ayudar a navegar entre las identidades culturales múltiples.