

The Transformation of Culture as New Evangelization (for the Third Millennium in Oceania)

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the peoples of Oceania approach the third millennium, what is required for a new evangelization of the region at this time? The life of a community in Melanesia, and the interventions at the recent Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops will provide fresh points of reference for this paper¹. Synod participants rightly pointed out that the crisis of faith experienced today occurs in the midst of a crisis of culture, and that new evangelization requires a transformation of culture—hardly a simple matter amongst the cultural complexity of the region. This paper argues that, if evangelization is to be culturally and morally relevant in Oceania in the coming decades, then the Church, through dialogue, must contribute a Christological dimension to the life-giving elements found in the wider society. In particular, compassion, community and care of creation will be essential components in any attempt to re-express the truth of the Gospel.

2. FRAGMENTED COMMUNITIES

I had been looking forward to getting established in my new family in the village. It was a special opportunity to try a

¹ References to “the Synod” in the text refer to the recent Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops (22 November-12 December 1998).

different form of missionary outreach. For years I had lived on mission "stations" which have structures that often insulate one from the common people. Then I had been teaching at the Seminary, which tends to isolate one even more. Now there was an opportunity to stay with a family for several months, hopefully a chance to learn at first hand the daily realities that people face.

My arrival coincided with a crisis in the Kaiap community. The family I was to stay with have four girls, and one of them had been attacked by a group of young men, high from smoking marijuana. She is a very strong girl and had managed to beat off her assailants, but suffered a badly bitten hand in the process because, in order to prevent one of her attackers from calling out, she had tried to pull out his tongue. That was only one of a whole series of crises that I experienced in the community. In the first week there we had to deal with a case of incest, drunken brawls, and accusations from one group in the splintered community against another. Except for one Seventh Day Adventist and one Baptist, the community is Catholic and their religiosity has been behind some of the tensions. One group claimed that they were seeing apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, and inferred that others were not able to have the experience because they were too sinful².

These are the sort of realities faced by communities in the Papua New Guinea Highlands as they move towards the dawn of the third Christian millennium. For nineteen centuries people there had been unaware of the Christian Gospel. The first evangelization began only fifty years ago. People embraced the new Gospel enthusiastically at first. However, now, after fifty years, a new generation of young people – educated and rather critical – find themselves caught up in a crisis of faith. Changes have fragmented the community. Fundamentalist preaching stirs up fears about the year 2000 and the coming millennium. In such a situation, what forms of evangelization are appropriate?

² Funding for the research in the Kaiap community was provided by the Research Enablement Program, a grant program for scholarship supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA., U.S.A., and administered by the Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, CT, U.S.A.

3. OCEANIA IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE SECOND CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM

The account above is a particular example from Papua New Guinea. However, it illustrates several features common throughout Oceania: a very recent history of evangelization and dramatic and rapid social change.

Geographically Oceania spans almost one third of the earth's surface. As Cardinal Tomko noted during the recent Synod, Oceania is sometimes called the "water" or "floating" continent because apart from Australia, it is made up of islands and vast expanses of sea³. The bishop of Toowoomba noted how his diocese alone is two and a half times the size of Italy, and a former bishop of Rarotonga described his diocese as little dots sprinkled over an area of water the size of Western Europe. The vast distances, resulting in isolation and dispersion of communities, and the mosaic of different cultures and languages, make communication a very real challenge.

The Church "born under the Southern Cross" is relatively young. Christianity came to the region only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries⁴. In Australia the Catholic Church arrived in 1788 along with the first convicts sent from Ireland. The official beginning of Catholic evangelization in New Zealand coincided with the arrival of Bishop Pompallier in 1838. The nationality and denominational background of the missionaries left a lasting impact on the development of Christianity in the Pacific. A few islands are predominantly Catholic, but throughout most of the Pacific the Catholic Church followed after the previously established denominations of Protestant origin⁵.

³ Synodus Episcoporum - *Bulletin*, 10 - 26.11.1998 - 4.

⁴ There were some isolated early mission efforts, but they left little lasting impact on the region. See J. GARRETT, *To Live Among the Stars - Christian Origins in Oceania* (Geneva and Suva: World Council of Churches in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies, 1982) 3.

⁵ See M. ERNST, *Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands* (Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva/Fiji, 1994).

In recent times there have been dramatic and rapid social changes which leave a lasting effect on Christian faith. Unemployment and migration from the Islands to Australia and New Zealand lead to the breakdown of families. Drift to the cities and urban growth provide opportunities for the rise of new religious groups. Burning issues today include poverty, the physical and sexual abuse of children, the unjust taking of life, the low status of women, the neglect of youth, the problem of drugs, the exploitation of workers, the policies of transnational companies, the rights of indigenous people, and the destruction of the environment.

Today, a tidal wave of secularism, sweeping across the Pacific, is testing the vitality of church life. Worse than antagonism comes indifference. In Australia, weekly mass attendance has fallen from 50% in 1960 to 20% now. In New Zealand the number of those who declare themselves as having "no religion" has increased from 27.2% of the population in 1991 to 37% at the present time⁶. Clearly, many people are facing a crisis of faith in institutional religion.

The problems and challenges notwithstanding, the Church in Oceania offers a unique contribution to the Universal Church. Among these are the following:

- Richness of cultures, languages and ways of expressing faith.
- Laity involved and taking responsibility in church life.
- Closeness to the environment.
- Freshness. The region is the most recent to receive the Gospel
- Multicultural societies
- Tradition of small communities
- Australian and New Zealand societies exhibit the value of tolerance.
- Societies in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific value relationships and hospitality.
- Indigenous spiritualities as an expression of the sacred

⁶ Source of statistics: intervention of Archbishop George Pell at the Synod, and the address by Cardinal Tomko to the New Zealand Bishops, reported in the *NZ Catholic*, Nov. 29, 1988, p. 8.

Oceania	
Area: 8,508,769 sq.km	Diocesan Priests 2,813
Population: 28,829,000	Religious Priests 2,296
Catholics: 8,047,000	Brothers 2,085
Missionaries sent 1,255	Women Religious 11,872
Missionaries received 1,647	Catechists 12,658
Source: International Fides Service. Nov. 13 and Dec. 11, 1998, pp. 721 and 794.	

4. CRISIS OF FAITH – CRISIS OF CULTURE

The importance of evangelising culture was noted by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975): “What matters is to evangelise man’s culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one’s starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God” (EN 20).

In most parts of Oceania the culture that was the object of the first evangelization no longer exists as such. People today live in a completely different world. How does one proclaim the Gospel in a way that resonates with the local experience of a people’s culture and history, in a time of rapid change? The *Instrumentum Laboris* from the recent Synod notes: “The crisis of evangelization is more than just a crisis of faith; it is also a crisis of culture. A number of responses state quite explicitly that the faith has not sufficiently penetrated the culture in question so as to call it and lead it to Christ”⁷.

Consider again the people in the Kaiap community. Life is changing rapidly in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. Children go to school and learn about a world quite different from that of their parents. The boys no longer live in the “men’s” house, and the initiation rites are abandoned or radically changed. Traditional culture seems outdated – belonging to

⁷ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Oceania, *Instrumentum Laboris* #21.

those who have died. Village life is "hard". One spends a lot of time gathering firewood, fetching water, and preparing food. In urban areas, for those who have the means, gas cookers, running water, and electric appliances save a lot of time and trouble. However, usually, the gas stove and the television come along with many other trappings of modern Western culture. The religious symbols attuned to a rural tribal way of life begin to lose their meaning in a modern urban setting.

The changes have fuelled an intense debate in the community about traditional cultural values. Some argue that Christians must distance themselves from anything to do with traditional culture and its values, and lead a life guided by "Christian" values and principles. For example, they argue that people who decorate their bodies with feathers and other traditional finery are making a deliberate display of themselves and are guilty of the sin of pride. The element of truth in such thinking conceals the mistaken notion that culture is an extrinsic separable reality, that one can abstract the "essence" of the Gospel, and that traditional cultural values and Christian values share nothing in common. Such ideas easily lead to a separation of faith and life typical of the dualism found in the Western scientific world view⁸. This state of affairs is hardly conducive to a healthy resolution of the cultural crisis in the community.

In New Zealand and in Australia, the crisis of faith for many Catholics is associated with the breakdown of the former Irish Catholic subculture. While the older people experience the collapse of a culture that once nurtured and supported them, young people find themselves hung up between the modernity of the scientific-technological world and post-modern relativism with its questioning of dogmatic certainties. With new found individualism, mobility and competition people are searching for new identities and relationships. In a world deeply suspicious of claims to truth, Christian faith

⁸ See H. JANSSEN, "Changing Communities in the Context of Changing World View", *Catalyst* 24.1 (1994) 47.

becomes a personal option. The church is feeling the strain of trying to transmit the Gospel to such an evolving new world⁹. What sort of vision can the Church propose in this situation?

In his report, at the Synod, Archbishop Hickey of Perth, asked: "Have we a vision of an evangelised culture or society? What then are the signs of an evangelised culture?" He then replied in terms of Mt. 11:4-5, the vision Jesus gave in response to the questions of John the Baptist's emissaries: "Go back to John and report what you hear and see; the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead people are raised to life, and the poor have the Good News preached to them". The Archbishop added: "our region will only be successfully evangelised when we are able to repeat these words of Jesus"¹⁰.

5. EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURE

The Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, helps us realise that evangelization 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" (EN 18). Now one hears frequent reference to the "new" evangelization. Pope John Paul II declares that it is new in its enthusiasm, its methods, and its expression¹¹.

Firstly, the new evangelization is noted for its evangelical boldness whereby the agents of evangelization show an irrepressible enthusiasm for the task of announcing the Gospel. Since evangelical boldness has its source in the Spirit, since the new evangelization requires a clear appreciation of ways that

⁹ See Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Oceania, *Lineamenta* #17.

¹⁰ Synodus Episcoporum - *Bulletin*, 04 - 23.11.1998 - 18.

¹¹ According to Avery Dulles these three aspects of the "newness" of the new evangelisation were first mentioned in the pope's address to the bishops' council of the Latin American churches at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on March 9, 1983. See *Origins* 12 (March 24, 1983): 659-62, at 661, referred to in A. DULLES, "The New Evangelization: Challenges for Religious Missionary Institutes", in S. BEVANS and R. SCHROEDER, eds., *Word Remembered, Word Proclaimed* (Steyler Verlag, Nettetal, 1997) 19, f. n. 3.

the Spirit can inspire a hopeful vision of society in Oceania, based on a revived sense of human dignity. That vision will be accomplished only with Christ (2Cor 5:17).

Secondly the new evangelization should use methods that will "make the Church present at the cultural cross-roads of our time"¹². This is easier said than done. In many ways the Church throughout Oceania is becoming marginalised from the mainstream culture. The new evangelization does not mean helping people to overcome their indifference to a past Christian culture, but presenting the Good News in a way that offers a life-giving alternative to the dehumanising effects of modern technical culture. Being present at the cultural cross-roads may mean adopting different models of mission and methods of evangelization. The first evangelization accompanied the colonial take-over by European powers. The new evangelization must present the Church not as a power over against the world, but as a sacrament of God in the world. This requires communicative methods, especially collaboration in life situations.

Thirdly, the new evangelization expresses the Gospel News in unaccustomed ways to contemporary audiences. At the Synod, Bishop Walker of Broken Bay asked: "Is the life of the Catholic community a genuine embodiment of our traditional faith which speaks meaningfully and relevantly to the society of which it is a part?"¹³. Offering the gifts of faith in a language and form that are true to tradition yet responsive to modern cultures is a particularly challenging task in Oceania with its great diversity. The more traditional societies must deal with issues of inculturation, while the more modern secularised cultures must take on the challenge of helping people rediscover the sacred dimension of life¹⁴.

¹² "Opening Address of the Holy Father", #22, in *Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*, ed. A.T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) 54.

¹³ *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition) n. 49 - 9 December 1998, p. 18.

¹⁴ There are moves in this direction, for example, the attempt in the Sydney Archdiocese, in a project entitled "A Sense of the Sacred", to revise the curriculum of Catholic Secondary schools. It hopes to affirm what Catholic schools aim to achieve - young people and teachers committed to transforming the world and sharing the Good News.

Dialogue entails both challenging and listening. While every effort must be made to be sensitive to culture and cultural change, at times evangelization means being counter-cultural. To evangelise is to confront not only personal sin, but social and structural sin where there are abuses of power and “cultures of deceits” contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Agents of evangelization cannot hide from or ignore sinful realities. Cardinal Ratzinger warned the bishops against any false sweetening of the figure of Jesus, and pointed out that the Lord wanted his disciples not to be sugar, but rather the “salt” of the earth¹⁵.

Pope Paul VI reminded us that the Church as agent of evangelization must begin by being evangelised itself (EN 15) The principal source of such evangelization is the Spirit of God. However, the Spirit may well work through elements of the surrounding culture. For example, in Oceania, the traditional cultures can share values including the integral character of indigenous spiritualities, a sense of the sacred, of community, sharing and communal ownership. Modern cultural values include the promotion of the dignity of the person, the contribution that all should make to decision making and the ecological movement. From an ecclesiocentric perspective, culture is too often viewed merely as a *praeparatio evangelica*. However, the divine mission goes far beyond the confines of the Church, and sometimes cultural resources may help to re-express the Gospel in unexpected ways.

6. CREDIBLE AND RELEVANT WITNESSES

While the first evangelization was relatively successful in Oceania, most would agree that the official Church at least is losing ground in keeping abreast of changes and in influencing the agents of cultural transformation. At the Synod, Cardinal

¹⁵ In the summary of Cardinal Ratzinger’s intervention, the *L’Osservatore Romano* (daily edition) Saturday 28 November, 1998, p. 8, refers to “un falso addolcimento della figura di Gesù”.

Williams of Wellington said that in the more Europeanised local churches of Oceania, the shepherds' joy has turned to grief and anxiety because their flocks are diminishing.

The new evangelization in Oceania must shy away from attempts to restore a form of Christendom—presenting the Church as a powerful force over against the world. Salt or leaven are more appropriate images. The Church does not have a monopoly on evangelization. If evangelization entails bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new, then there will most likely be other agents of evangelization besides church-going Christians. Church members surely offer an indispensable contribution in giving witness to Christ. But is Christ limited to the Church?

One must be open to the possibility of the Good News being shared by other agents. Where would one find such dialogue partners? They will be found where one finds witness to values such as community, compassion and care of creation.

These values are singled out for three reasons. Firstly, they run counter to many of the dehumanising effects of modernity. Secondly, for some in the wider society, the present performance of the Catholic Church with regard to these values is a source of scandal; as agent of evangelization, the Church may need a conversion of consciousness in these areas. Thirdly, these three values are elements from the surrounding culture in Oceania that can help to re-express the Gospel today. Community, compassion and care for creation surely have meaning in other regions of the world, but they are particularly important for the transformation of culture required for the new evangelization in Oceania.

7. COMMUNITY

God is calling the world to a *communio* of right relationships with the created world and with all people regardless of culture, nation, age, gender, or race. Jesus is the perfect example of this communion (Eph 2: 13-18). He extended a welcome to all, particularly the poor and marginalised, and he left a

memorial meal as a way of expressing his commandment of love.

Today throughout Oceania many people are experiencing the undermining and collapse of traditional structures of family and society. Yet the faith is lived and shared primarily through communities and the domestic church – the family. Hence the importance of stressing the communal dimension of Christianity as leaven within existing groupings.

If the Church is to be effective, it must be perceived as demonstrating *communio*. Often this is not the case. For the Catholic Church in Oceania to show greater cohesion and a spirit of communion, a number of issues need to be faced realistically. For example, it is important for the local church to be able to celebrate the liturgy with appropriate liturgical texts in the language and culture of the people. Issues such as the perceived view of the Church on women and on sexual morality must be confronted honestly. More needs to be done in dialogue with other Christian churches and with non-religious currents in society. While there is an evangelical desire within Oceania to progress in these areas, sometimes such initiatives are blocked by outside influences.

Those outside of the region can hardly imagine the immense distances separating small pockets of population throughout much of Oceania. With so few priests, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the dimension of ecclesial union central to Catholic communities – the celebration of the Eucharist. At the Synod, Bishop Kiapseni of Kavieng said that it seems the right of the community to celebrate the Eucharist has become a privilege and a rare one at that. Celebrations of the Word with Holy Communion distributed by a catechist or non ordained religious is no substitute for the celebration of the Eucharist¹⁶. This is an important issue for the healthy growth of Catholic communities in Oceania. Again, proposed solutions are often considered unacceptable by people outside of the region.

¹⁶ Synod Intervention, reprinted as “Tradition and Inculturation” in *General Bulletin msc*, 6/1998 - December, pp. 9-10.

Nevertheless, there are many factors in favour of the communal dimension of a new evangelization in Oceania. There is a widespread desire for participation by all in the life, decision-making processes and ministries of the local Churches. This is apparent, not only in modern societies, but also in traditional tribal cultures as well.

In the Archdiocese of Wellington in New Zealand, there is a Commission for Evangelisation with a full time co-ordinator. An important insight for the church in Wellington is that evangelization is the task not just of the individual but also of the faith community as a whole. Much effort is put into stressing that being Catholic is personal but not private. In a society which increasingly claims no need for faith in the transcendent, there is a renewed effort not to impose impossible obligations, on people but to present the Christian community as one of compassion and companionship. One important area is to reach out to non-practising parents of children in Catholic schools. Also young people are being encouraged to contribute to parish life in active and leading roles¹⁷.

At the Synod, Bishop Gilles Cote of Daru-Kiunga argued for the importance of building Church upon the strengths of culture: "The only way to build the Church, Mystery of Communion, in our Melanesian Society, is to build it with the participation of all, making sure that the key values of the culture become somehow the key values of our process of evangelization.... our efforts and our methods used for evangelization need to make it possible for the Catholic faith to immerse itself in our Melanesian culture and to be re-expressed according to the legitimate forms of that culture. Will the Institutional Church allow Jesus to walk the way of the people of Melanesia, just like he did in Palestine, challenging the truth of their own religious experiences, purifying and enriching their lives, not from outside or from the top, but from within?"¹⁸.

¹⁷ See *Response of the Archdiocese of Wellington to the Lineamenta*, published by the Archdiocese of Wellington, January 1998.

¹⁸ Synod Intervention, summary in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition) n. 48 - 2 December 1998, p. 15; quotation from type-written manuscript by Bp. Côté.

The church in Oceania will be a credible and relevant witness to *communio* only if it be allowed to grow and flourish as a community. For communion to be a way of life, the church must deal with the obstacles identified by people who have left the practice of the faith. The evangelisers must be prepared to build upon the cultural, ecclesial, and technological strengths that are already present. Communities of the future need not necessarily be physical communities, but could be linked into networks through electronic media. Even if communities are not able to share the Eucharist, they could share in a communion of witness and prophetic action. Christians in Oceania may find existing communities which will welcome the leaven of faith-filled people intent not simply on expanding church membership, but on being effective witnesses to the transforming action of God in the world.

8. COMPASSION

The media so often portrays the Catholic Church as rigid and judgmental rather than as welcoming and compassionate. This leads to a very real difficulty for the Church in terms of its credibility in the wider community. In Oceania, people are generally very tolerant, but not towards hypocrites. At the Synod, Bishop Patrick Power of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Gouburn noted, "As Church entering a new millennium, we must find new ways of embracing those people closest to the heart of Jesus so that authentically we may 'walk his way, tell his truth and live his life'"¹⁹.

In his intervention at the Synod, Cardinal Williams of Wellington spoke about why some people choose not to be members of the Catholic Church. In New Zealand, religiously mixed homes outnumber homes where both spouses are Catholic in the ration of 2 to 1. In such mixed marriages the faith of both the Catholic spouse and the children is perilously at risk because the spouse who is not Catholic finds no welcome in

¹⁹ Synodus Episcoporum - *Bulletin* 06 - 24.11.1998 - 4.

the Catholic Church. Pastors witness families choosing reluctantly and painfully to withdraw from allegiance to the Catholic Church in favour of joining another where all the family members can celebrate their unity as a family. The second example given is related to marriage breakdown. In New Zealand only 45% of school age children are being reared in two-parent families. After marriage breakdown some Catholic single parents are faced with the choice of marriage outside the church, or hardship for both themselves and their children. They end up on the periphery of the worshipping community or they join ecclesial communities "where the words of our Saviour, 'Come to me all of you who are heavily burdened and I will give you rest,' appear more credible and comforting." The Cardinal acknowledged the scriptural, theological and canonical bases for the position of the Catholic Church but added, "I simply draw attention to the pastoral consequences, and plead for the development of a pastoral praxis characterised by compassion both for the poor as we usually understand that term and for the 'ecclesially' impoverished"²⁰.

For a credible and relevant evangelization of culture in Oceania, the evangelisers must follow a lifestyle more explicitly marked by charity and compassion. Several areas stand out for special attention. In Australia and New Zealand, many women, some highly qualified in ecclesial sciences, feel they can find no home in the church. The new evangelization must challenge elements of culture that demean women and, where necessary, challenge practices of the church itself. Youth are another group that warrant particular attention. They are calling the church to witness to the Good News. As Bishop John Dew of Wellington noted at the Synod, young people are struggling with life issues and the church is called to give hope and life to them by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ: "Our world is not going to be changed by ideas, words, sermons or books. Our world will be changed by the witness of holy lives"²¹.

²⁰ Synod Intervention, summary in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition) N. 48 - 2 December 1998, p. 16; quotation from type-written manuscript by Cardinal Williams.

²¹ Synodus Episcoporum - *Bulletin* 06 - 24.11.1998 - 5.

The socio-economic sphere is another area of particular concern for discovering the compassionate face of Christ in the transformation of culture in Oceania. Evangelisers need to propose alternatives to the economy-driven model of society which dominates current policy. They must challenge the Darwinian model of survival of the fittest with another in which compassion figures prominently.

In order to break down some of the negative images of the church at present it may be necessary to seek forgiveness of those who have been hurt by its behaviour. It is important to tell the truth, even when this involves the truth about past wrongs and the need for reconciliation. Besides dealing with the blocks to receiving Christ's message of love and compassion, people in Oceania, as they enter into the third millennium, need religious images that touch their deepest aspirations for a truly human society. Bishop Peter Cullinane of the NZ Bishops' Conference said that "we need to re-imagine, re-image, and re-form the church around the theme of discipleship – the church as a community of disciples"²².

Among the signs in Jesus' proclamation, there is one of particular importance: the humble and the poor are evangelised, become his disciples and gather together "in his name" (EN 12). Witnesses to the Good News in Oceania, following in the footsteps of Jesus, are called to present this compassionate face to the world and in so doing to call people into communion with his Body²³. This will be an essential part of the new evangelization of culture in Oceania.

9. CARE OF CREATION

People in Oceania find that their resources are being sought after by other nations, for example, in nuclear testing and dumping, logging, and mining. Yet Pacific people are custodians of the ocean which contains over one half of the earth's

²² Synodus Episcoporum - Bulletin 06 - 24.11.1998 - 8.

²³ See "Message to the People of God" #28. Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, 1998.

total supply of water. Its continued health is important for everyone. With environmental changes and the prospect of rising sea levels, some Pacific islanders are starting to think about finding a new place to call home.

In recent years the question of a nuclear free Pacific has captured the attention of people in Oceania in a way that few other issues have done. It has been admirable to see nations being prepared to sacrifice economic gain and military power in an effort to ensure a life-giving environment for future generations. The church has played an important role in supporting the moral dimension of such questions. However, there are many incentives to find a way to promote respect for creation as the next millennium, draws near.

Traditionally in most parts of Oceania, the land did not belong to the people, but "the people belonged to the land". Today the idea should be stressed that the earth is an expression of the providence of God. The earth and its resources are a challenge to the industriousness, skills and intelligence of the human being taken individually or socially. The task is to promote a life-giving environment for the present generation and their descendants.

Evangelisers in Oceania need to consider the cost to the human environment of "development" which ignores human suffering, and which destroys community values and beliefs. They must challenge models of development that are deeply unevangelical in their squandering the world's resources. As the Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands bishops have said, "The ultimate determining factor will not be science and technology, but human persons recovering a sense of the unity in creation and arriving at a consensus about what are the right choices to ensure the common good"²⁴.

The church must also challenge the dualistic world-view that considers nature as helplessly fallen. How can one love and respect what is perceived as sinful? Unfortunately while people are being liberated from fear of demonic inhabitants of the reef

²⁴ "Creating an Environment for Tomorrow" in PNG/SI Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, ed. *Justice and Development inside Papua New Guinea*, Boroko, Papua New Guinea, n.d. p. 48.

and forest, they are also losing their sense of the sacred significance of the natural world. The challenge is to build upon indigenous spiritualities that help people in Oceania understand that they are part of creation, and at the same time enable them to be citizens of modernity. They are called not only to live in harmony with nature, but also to assure that natural resources lead to fuller human life. This is accomplished through culture - by which they humanise the world and give it meaning.

Evangelisers must promote a culture of life. Respect for creation and "life" issues go together. Archbishop Adrian Smith of Honiara pointed out at the Synod how the Church would achieve much more success in its promotion of the dignity of human life if it were done in the language and context of creation as a whole²⁵. Promoting a culture of life demands a cultural transformation that affects people's system of values. It would lead to a spirituality that opposes competition for scarce resources, and promotes the fullness of life for all. It would mean communities of people who believe in the power of the Spirit more than in that of the economy. The new evangelization will dare to promote such an audacious dream.

10. CULTURE OF LIFE

I began this paper with an account of my first day in the Kaiap community. Reference was also made to the debate going on there concerning traditional cultural values. A former member of the community described the place as a battle ground of satanic forces. With government assistance, a leader in the community had opened an outlet for liquor sales (one of only three in the province), so the hills often resounded to the noise of drunken singing and the uproar from the occasional brawl. In addition, it seems that some "prophets" had introduced the youth to what was called a "faith test" in which boys and girls would sleep in close proximity; the test being whether they could control their desires. Not surprisingly, many "failed" the test. These and other misguided ventures resulted in a very unhealthy community.

²⁵ See Synodus Episcoporum - *Bulletin* 09 - 26.11.1998 - 3.

With my encouragement, the community leaders, elected a new chairman, and began to plan a program of renewal. The program of catechesis, worship and works of service would involve everyone: from the elementary school children, and the youth, to the mature men and women, and the elderly and sick. The leaders were also to press for liquor sales at the Lodge to be restricted to live-in guests only.

There were special healing events, including communal celebration of the sacrament of the sick, and of reconciliation, and even a charismatic mass with fire symbolising the power of the Spirit. However, the high points of the renewal were "bush" experiences; one for the women and another a month later for the men. Although seldom practised in recent times, the men have a tradition of going to an isolated place deep in the forest for rites of growth and purification. For the women it was a new experience. Because of the stories about moral laxity in the community, the leaders decided to conduct sessions on what it means to be a Christian woman today. Mature women instructed younger ones in traditional rituals and lore which they felt had given them pride and dignity as women in the tribe. Many of the young women experienced ceremonies that they had only heard about before. The days of seclusion ended in a procession with a statue of our Lady (dressed in the ceremonial costume of a woman of the clan) and a special celebration of the Eucharist. Reconciliation figured prominently for the men, who after their time of seclusion performed a ceremony in which a spokesman publicly confessed their wrongdoing and then shot an arrow off the mountainside into the valley below as a symbol of their desire to rid themselves of sin.

The account here is just one example of evangelization in a small community in Papua New Guinea. Community life, reconciliation (compassion) and the fullness of life were the prominent themes in this experience of culture expressing the values of the Gospel. I noticed the life-giving effect of people reinterpreting traditional cultural values so they could be meaningful today. For example, women took the symbols of their traditional menstrual seclusion (food taboos and symbolic plants) and incorporated them into prayer and instruction on Christian womanhood. The men reinterpreted the symbols from their purification rituals, applying them to Christian manhood. The

symbols had mostly to do with well-being and the fullness of life. At the end of six months, the change was so pronounced that even outsiders were commenting on the community. Symbols in isolation would have little power, but associated with faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit, they helped bring about a renewed way of life for the community.

11. CONCLUSION

What is required for a new evangelization in Oceania as the third millennium approaches? This paper has argued that amidst the cultural complexity and the rapid changes occurring in Oceania, a new evangelization will mean a cultural transformation. At present the Church is becoming marginalised from the mainstream in the secularised cultures, and is caught up in the separation of faith and culture in the traditional societies. To have an influence, evangelisers do not have to seek after power or privilege for Church institutions. Rather, the most urgent challenge for evangelization in the next millennium entails entering into dialogue, challenging the forces of death, listening to the Spirit working within the culture, infusing life-giving values that are shared by the Gospel. Evangelisers can work together with these elements in the wider culture and contribute a christological dimension to them. They will respectfully listen, challenge, and invite people to make their own the fullness of the truth which is revealed in Jesus Christ.

What will be the signs of an evangelized culture in Oceania? An evangelized culture will be regenerated by its encounter with the Gospel. In particular, community, compassion, and care of creation will be essential components in the new culture of life. These three values run counter to the dehumanising forces experienced today. Values such as these will anchor the delicate and charming canoes of oceanic cultures to Christ the rock of salvation.

“Let his praise be sung from remotest parts of the earth
by those who sail the sea and by everything in it,
by the coasts and islands and those who inhabit them....”
(Is 42.10).