

# CONTEXTUALISATION IN MELANESIA

## (A Paper Presented Towards Understanding the Contextual Bases for Reviewing the Theological Task in Melanesia.)

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### Introduction

The term “contextualisation” has become widely accepted as a way of doing theology, particularly in the so-called “Third World”, and especially to signify a shift from the use of the familiar word “indigenisation”. This shift was predominantly influenced by the belief that “indigenisation” posed some ambiguities and limitations in adequately conveying, or even understanding, the faith of Third-World Christians. The adoption (or alternative usage) of “contextualisation” is meant not to abandon but retain the ideas and feelings, as expressed in “indigenisation”, and to relate them to their future meanings. As Shoki Coe<sup>1</sup> puts it, “indigenisation tends to be used in the sense of responding to the gospel in terms of traditional culture. Therefore, it is in danger of being past-oriented.” Culture, admittedly, does not remain static, but changes in time and place, and, therefore, it is necessary and important to speak of a new context. Regarding the term “contextualisation”, Coe further pointed out:

So, in using the word “contextualisation”, we try to convey all that is implied in the familiar term “indigenisation”, yet seek to press beyond for a more-dynamic concept, which is open to change, and which is also future-oriented.<sup>2</sup>

There is still a need for the use of “indigenisation” in theology, or rather, a particular identity of theology in indigenous culture, or the culture of indigenous people. Because the concept “indigenisation” has been applied exclusively in the Third World, the rise of political consciousness

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<sup>1</sup> Shoki Coe, “Contextualising Theology”, in *Theological Education* (Summer 1973), Association of Theological Schools in USA and Canada. Part of this article has also been published in *Mission Trends No 3*, G. H. Anderson, and T. F. Stransky, eds, New York NY: Paulist Press, 1976, pp. 19-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

in pre-independent, and post-independent, periods has led to identification of indigenisation (and localisation) of the church, or the Christian faith, as a form of paternalism and imperialism of the missionaries. This attitude elevated other problems inherent in, and created by, the process of indigenisation.

Firstly, the term implies importation and transplanting of the Christian gospel (from outside) into the culture of the local people. Since the missionaries dominated this activity, and they brought with them their own cultural practices, their efforts to indigenise the gospel (and the church) suggested, and impressed, into the minds of the local people, that their (missionaries') culture was better than that of the local people. Moreover, the gospel and Christian faith come from outside rather than from within human experience and consciousness. This image was (and still is) magnified by the presence of anthropologists in a kind of joint-enterprise with the missionaries. Alfred Krass<sup>3</sup> highlights an underlying goal of this enterprise "to create a church where non-aculturated African or Asian peoples feel at home". Thus, either the church becomes the tool for Western civilisation, or the act of indigenisation becomes a patronising mannerism. Both are counter-productive and oppressive.

Secondly, preserving and promoting cultural values of sharing, community, caring, extended-familyhood, respect for the elderly and disabled, together with certain customary laws or taboos, could not be easily retained without reviving the old traditional myths and worship of evil and ancestor spirits, which were almost completely wiped out by the church. Indigenising the faith received a negative response from many church members, especially among the leaders and elderly parishioners, who contended that new faith requires new spirituality, and new morality, even if the cost involves the whole culture. The gospel appears to be above and against the culture, as proclaimed by the missionaries and early converts. Indigenisation would draw life back to ways of the primitive society.

Thirdly, indigenisation implies localisation, particularly of the leadership and structure of the church, where localisation was meant to

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred C. Krass, "Contextualisation for Today", in *Gospel in Context* 2-3 (July 1979), pp. 27-30, see especially p. 27.

bring about gradual and smooth transition to independence and maturity, the role of the remaining missionaries, and the new, foreign, church workers, became increasingly critical in the face of rapid localisation. The programme of localisation, as a “child” of indigenisation, in some sectors of the Third-World communities, was being regarded as a premature exercise. It all seemed natural that the process of indigenisation, and the programme of localisation, were linked together in the struggle for political freedom and home rule. Indigenisation appeared to be costly because it meant the loss of missionary aid, on one hand, and the struggle for self-help, on the other.

The so-called “theology of indigenisation” has become unduly preoccupied with the pattern of reaction against the theology of the West. This creates undesirable repercussions in Third-World theology, which constantly seeks to inspire and permeate the realities of particular human situations, without necessarily denying or competing with theologies of other situations.

### **(1) Contextualisation in the Third World**

“Contextualisation” is not an innovation of Third-World theology, as one might say “indigenisation” is of Third-World Christendom. In view of the points outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the concept of indigenisation portrayed the spirit of cultural self-containment, prejudice, and to some extent, opposition, against the theologies of other peoples. Indeed, “contextualisation” must not be regarded as separate from theology, as such, as if it were a method, or an ideal, for expressing theology in a particular context. Rather, the term, itself, profoundly proclaims the contextuality of the gospel. It implies immanent revelation of God, and His concern in the realities of a particular context, as if that context were speaking for itself – striving to gain liberty, and triumph over the world. Humankind’s encounter and struggle to rid itself from the bondage of the realities of its situation is entwined with the immanence of God in human life. Incarnation demonstrates this quite clearly. Struggle to overcome bondage in the presence of God is, itself, a realisation of incarnation taking place in a particular context. As such, the term “contextualisation” differs in orientation, as well as substance, from what is implied in “indigenisation”. It is important to point out some very significant factors,

which inspired theology in the Third World to take particular contexts seriously:

(a) Theology cannot be done in a vacuum. The word of God cannot be proclaimed, or heard, in isolation from human realities. Theology is not purely a matter of personal salvation, which is usually preoccupied by ways of withdrawing from or surrendering to the powers of the world. The problems of poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, war, exploitation, crime, etc., prevailing and increasing in Third World situations, as well as in other parts of the world, have much to do with the conditions set by certain kinds of powers in those particular situations. Theology in the Third World naturally responds to these situations, and confronts the conditioning powers of the world, manifested in dehumanising structures, institutions, and policies. Christian theology proclaims and reflects on the life lived in Christ to overcome and defeat the evils of the world. Revolutionary struggles, common in Third World countries, are a manifestation of that painful groaning of humanity, and, indeed, of the whole creation, towards ultimate redemption, which St Paul spoke about in Romans 8.

(b) The way every society has come to encounter God has been very much linked with the experiences of their time and place. Christian theology, as well as theologies of peoples of other faiths, have grown out of the contextual encounters. The early church, for instance, found it appropriate to develop doctrines and church orders, based on thought patterns and social or political influences of those times. The subsequent growth of the church, and the proclamation of that faith in later times and other places, also took up the conditions of later societies. Liberation theology, black theology, water-buffalo theology, death-of-God theology, secular theology, ecological theology, mystical theology – all have been shaped in and by particular cultures or needs. Robert McAfee Brown clarifies this further in his analysis of the conditioning elements in theology, in an article, “The Rootedness of All Theology”, published in July 1977, following his visit to Latin America and the Caribbean:

“(1) All theologies are contextually conditioned. Theologies emerge out of a certain set of experiences, or out of a particularised historical context.

“(2) There is nothing wrong with theology being contextually conditioned. There is no way in which a historical faith (one that has received embodiment in specific times and places) could be expressed other than through the cultural norms and patterns in which it is located. If it did not do so, it would fail to communicate . . . it would not be historical.”<sup>4</sup>

(c) Contextualisation involves a critical awareness, which, in the language of liberation theology, is conscientisation. The people become aware of the reasons why certain changes have taken place, and why the conditions in which they are living are so in their particular context. They ask questions why news ways happen fast, especially among urban people. They ask questions why more and more people become poor, unemployed, involved in crime, separated from families, unhealthy, etc., despite claims of growth in national production and revenue by governments and business enterprises. In the Third World, it is quite common and easy for people to raise such questions, but it is almost impossible to find answers, let alone prevent the loss of numerous lives, in the search for truth in such situations. It is, in fact, in such contexts, where problems, questions, and struggles happen that theology emerges as a way of seeking and building human life upon truth. Human awareness, and the revelation of God, leading to the ultimate truth, forms the basis of theology, and this takes place in concrete historical situations. Theology is that revelation contextualised in people’s awareness.

(d) Every human experience has both the past and the future connected to it. Every context also has its past as well as its future. The only place and time where and when one truly talks about either the past or future, or both together, is in the present context. Contextualisation does not, and should not, intend to separate these time distinctions, even though the present is more-significantly focused than the past and the future. In fact, Third-World cultures still regard time in its wholeness. Therefore, it is proper to view contextualisation as an evolution of time. It envisages a struggle to free human life from the conditions of a previous time to pursue a future, which ultimately fulfils the hopes of the present life.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, “The Rootedness of All Theology”, in *Christianity and Crisis*, July 18, 1977, pp. 170-174, see especially page 170. He taught ecumenics and world Christianity at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

In many so-called “developing” societies, planning and operations in development activities are based on the belief that, if good investment is done in one area, it is possible to gradually spread the benefits around to others later on. The opposite is regarded as impossible; that is, if investment is spread around far and thinly it will be impossible for anyone to benefit. This whole belief is built on the principle of competition and materialism, which inevitably becomes corrupted by greed and selfishness. The few in a small space become richer and more powerful, and tend to dominate the rest, usually the majority. Much of this is conditioned by lack of understanding of equal rights for development and benefit; justice, freedom, peace, and fulfilment are the inalienable rights of everyone. As such, enjoyment of them by society should not be conditioned too much by restricting time and space to purely “secular” notions. We can say that contextualisation implies the sacredness of a particular context. The sacred value of the context must be realised in the wholeness of time. It brings to our consciousness the urgency of realising the future – the ultimate future – dawning upon human kind.

The attempt here is not to load the term “contextualisation” with all these meanings, so that every time it appears, it ought not to be understood for anything else. Also, the concept should not be considered merely as a method of doing theology. Rather, “contextualisation” should be felt as a process in which the decision and actions are directed at local situations seriously. Thus, theology rises from being the word of God to responsible and active involvement in the work of God, as proclaimed in Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of God, to bring about His purpose in a particular local situation. Theology, in other words, comes alive in a particular context.

## **(2) The Melanesian Context: a Papua New Guinea Perspective**

In order for theology to reflect authentically the faith of Melanesians, it must definitely emerge out of the experiences of Melanesians themselves, and also directly with the conditions of their particular context. This is to say their faith in God has much to do with the way they have encountered Him through their history and culture. Their faith, history, and culture – their particular context – determine the way they conceive their future; that is, their hope and aspirations.

The Melanesian Papua New Guinea context today reflects a history and culture of a people dating back some several centuries. Although regarding themselves as one people and one nation, the continued existence of over 700 distinct tribal and linguistic groups or communities in that context hardly make them a homogenous society. These numerous tribes have been separated by rough mountain ranges, valleys, rivers, forests, swamps, islands, as well as tribal wars. Even today, no less than 80 percent of the three million people live in rural communities. Their corporate contact with the outside world does not go back further than the last century, and the Christian church has been present for just over one century. However, the Christian church is very strong, claiming the adherence of no less than 90 percent of the whole population. This generally makes Papua New Guinea a Christian country.

**(a) Social, economic, and political background**

At its independence from Australian rule a decade ago, the nation inherited political and economic institutions prevailing at that time. Some efforts by the leaders have modified some of these institutions, besides creating new ones, to suit the social structure of the people, which is basically communal and rural. Yet, the impact of Western political and economic systems has increased in this last decade, to the extent that it is causing rapid change in the social structure. As a result, new value-systems are emerging, and, in some instances, these new systems replace the traditional systems, while, in others, the new systems come to exist beside the traditional ones. For instance, traditional land tenure is still prevailing, besides presently encouraged individual ownership. The family and marriage systems have now begun to break down to nuclear family patterns. Traditional concepts of work and ceremonies are being affected by employer-employee relations and leisure ideas of modern economy. Patterns of trade and exchange are rapidly becoming dominated by competitive private enterprise and a money economy. Urban and industrial developments are creating mass migration of people to towns and industrial centres, resulting in the growth of new kinds of social unrest and other related problems.

It has become very clear that the present economic and political systems, propagated by the institutions and policies that we inherited from our former colonisers, are being deliberately secured and encouraged to

change the social systems inherent in the cultures of the people. To the dismay of the people, including the leaders, these economic and political systems are still being influenced greatly by foreign companies and political powers. It has now been realised that, unless culture is preserved, and social systems protected, uncontrolled economic and political practices can destroy some basic values of human life and development.

This trend raises some very important questions about national development: what kind of life do the people want, and what sort of society do the people want to build for themselves and their children? At least they know that their traditions nurtured a society in which every individual was cared for, fed, and brought up with dignity within a community. The life of collective sharing of work and benefits, decision-making by mutual understanding and respect, basic rights and obligations protected by the extended family, and by tribal relationships, and communal support for sick, aged, and weak, are elements that characterised the previous indigenous pattern of life.

There is an obvious conflict in the way people think about a good society. Modern development seeks to build a good society based on material wealth and individual freedom. Traditional society proved that communal well-being grows out of mutual sharing and support. Interestingly enough, the nation has officially endorsed these two ways in all areas of development. There is a dual economic system – cooperative and laissez-faire enterprises. In the political system, there are liberal democratic practices adopted by the national and provincial governments, and community governments, based on village and tribal traditions. Within the social structure, there are new forms of social organisations, based on professions, and other emerging interests, beside the traditional patterns.

With these as the bases of national development, at least in economic and political terms, society has become reorganised into 20 provincial states, to plan and administer the affairs of their respective provinces. At the same time, the national (central) government takes care of international matters, as well as dealing with areas of common provincial, or domestic, origin.

**(b) Religious background**

In relation to the religious life of the society, Melanesians were basically animistic. Their worship, and other religious activities, were preoccupied by the belief that gods and spirits live in the world, especially in trees, stones, land, and waters. Besides this belief, there is a special reverence for the spirits of the ancestors, and other dead relatives. It is important to note a fine distinction in this dual-religious tradition. The gods and spirits who live in trees, stones, land, waters, etc., are presumed to have come from other tribes, or simply from within nature. They are usually associated with powers to do harm, or even protect people from being harmed by the powers of similar spirits or gods. They can be manipulated by gifted men or women to do what these people want, as long as the rituals are properly, and correctly, performed. The spirits of the ancestors are confined to the welfare and discipline of the families or tribes from which they came. These spirits cannot be manipulated in the same way as the nature spirits. They do not live in trees, rocks, etc., as do the nature spirits. The ancestor spirits act, or react, with mercy, love, and discipline among their living relatives. They do not cause harm. They serve everyone, especially the weak members in the family or tribe. They protect the welfare and harmony of the family and cause situations of mercy, love, and care, through the discipline and wisdom of the elders.

In comparison, a sense of fear and horror is attached to the nature gods. They are usually the evil ones. The spirits of the ancestors and dead relatives are held in great reverence and awe. They are the loved ones. Unfortunately, this distinction was never realised by the missionaries or the anthropologists. Both considered the religious practices of Melanesians as being generally animistic, and considered family relationships to the dead (and ancestors) as worship of the spirits, with derogatory sense. As a result, in her condemnation of traditional religious practices as being animistic and “primitive”, the church, from her early beginnings, could not realise if the almighty and loving God could ever be in Melanesia before the missionaries set foot on the shores of that land. In fact, the church ignored that question altogether, mainly because of the great degree of pluralism, and tribal conflicts, cannibalism, and head-heading, polygamy, and nudity, witchcraft, and initiation taboos, and so on. These were the signs of a primitive, immoral, and ungodly society, as far as the missionaries were concerned, and they were a sufficient evidence for the

need of mass civilisation and evangelisation. By her first centenary, in the last decade, the Christian church had done a thorough job. She had converted about 90% of the 3 million people out of traditional religious practices to the religious practices of Western churches, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Two major concerns have grown out of this long effort; namely, the loss of some very fundamental and noble values, or traditions, and the growth of completely new religious divisions in what is supposed to be one faith, one baptism, one church, and one Lord. As the people became Christians (or, rather church members), they were taught to throw away all their traditional, and customary, practices, ceremonies, symbols, songs, and dances, with the attendant spirituality, and religious, or cultural; beliefs. In place of these, they were taught, and persuaded, to accept Methodism, Congregationalism, Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, etc. They were even taught to identify with the experiences of Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Knox, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope, or just the dreams of some moral fanatic from America, depending on which missionary confronted them. The old conflicts of the Reformation in Western Christendom had been resurrected in Melanesian Christianity. In the religious sense, the people are alienated from their society, and are living in Europe or America.

During the last decade, when the main churches dealt with localisation and autonomy in church structures, as a result of theological awakening, brought about by the project of indigenisation in Africa and Asia (as well as other Third-World communities), theological education was primarily “evangelical” and “denominational”. Hence, the training of ministers, priests, and other church leaders or workers, had little to do with Christian unity or national development. In most cases, this was done deliberately; the missionaries, being foreigners, had to abide by the code of ethics given to them by their sending boards, as well as conditions of service set for them by the government of their host countries. However, in the event of the country becoming independent, the local leaders of the churches soon realised how far apart they had been separated in their own society, and in this one-and-the-same religion. They took up the projects of indigenisation and ecumenism, in the hope of recovering the broken ties between the church structures, as well as with their own people and culture. Success has been very insignificant, but one thing is sure to remain: the

task of uniting the people in one faith, and in one Christ, has to take place from within the culture of the people, and, particularly, in the present context.

### **(3) Contextualisation in Melanesia**

A genuine Christian, in such a context, cannot avoid being moved in faith by the conflicting, and contradictory, attitudes among his or her people, or even within himself or herself. The faith that reflects these conditions is bound to be genuinely emerging out of that context. This is basically the faith that is contextualised. Firstly, faith is built on the belief that God is present in Melanesia through the realities of human life. Christ is resurrected, in the hope of the people who are struggling to overcome the barriers or constraints in their lives. This implies a need for serious and effective involvement in developing Christian unity amongst the people by the church leaders, particularly the clergy. They are still highly respected, and often regarded as the custodians of Christian faith. Nevertheless, theology will not grow out of their involvement alone. They will need to discover the faith of the people as it finds its expressions in their struggles and decisions. Obviously, the goal of national unity, as expressed by their National Constitution, gives a basis for Christian collaboration. Not only is unity of all people in that one nation needed under the secular constitution, but Christian faith is fundamentally a matter of fellowship and communion with God and His peoples. It has happened already between some churches that ecumenism has led to church union. Actually, if it does happen again, the world should not be surprised. But, on the other hand, church union should not be attempted merely as a programme of Christian unity. Moreover, Christian unity should not be prevented or delayed by reluctance to allow church union to take place.

Ecumenism has to be undertaken seriously. In such a pluralistic society, Christianity can play a vital role in witnessing the unity Christ has prayed for, and demonstrated in death and resurrection; “that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21 NIV). This unity has to be reaffirmed within tribal and linguistic groups first, since it is at that level that Melanesians truly identify their dignity and pride as human beings in their own right, created by the Almighty God. The richness of their relationship with their world – the wider society – is

inherent in cultural and ethnic unity. The unity, which Christians proclaim in Christ, is diversified by gifts of God, beginning in the cultures within which God brings them into the world, and their subsequent development in relationship with other cultures. Hence unity in diversity.

Secondly, the faith of Christians in Melanesia cannot avoid being constantly faced by problems of human existence. The questions of survival, comfort, satisfaction, and peace, as matters of basic human or physical needs, have been considered, at times, only to be dealt with through human efforts, denying the church and Christians their responsibilities to share spiritual function as an integral part of total human life. It is obvious that attempts are being made to create separation between the “physical” and “spiritual” concerns by emphasising the division between the church and state. That is, the church is to concentrate on the “spiritual” needs of the people, while the state provides the social, economic, and political services. Unfortunately, this view, or conviction, is based on the belief that human life can be logically divided into “physical” and “spiritual” categories, as imposed by modern scientific minds from the West. This belief became more and more pronounced in the church, particularly during the struggle for Independence, by expatriate missionaries, who insisted that the church maintain her separate identity from the state, and “set her mind on the things of heaven, rather than on this world”. However, Melanesians view life as a whole, and treat all human concerns in their social, economic, political, and religious inter-relations. He or she relates to every human concern with spiritual conviction, and conceives human life in the notion of wider existence.

There are many Christians and churches in Melanesia who misunderstand the implications of the process of secularisation. They believe that “secularisation” reaffirms the separation between “this world” and the “next world”, “physical” and “spiritual”, “this life” and “eternal life”, and, therefore, divide human affairs in terms of “secular” and “religious”. This view is rather intellectual and unrealistic. The word “secular”, which comes from “saeculum” (Latin), basically refers to “this present age”, in contrast with “the age to come”. As such, it does not negate the “spiritual”, “sacred”, or “religious” nature of human life, or even of this present age. In fact, so-called “secular theology” seeks to articulate the sacredness, both of human life and of “this present age”.

In Melanesian culture, the sense of secular responsibility cannot do away completely with “spiritual” or “religious” concerns in this present age or context. This does not mean he/she is not conscious of the distinction between the world of spirits and the world of physical existence. In his/her dealings with human concerns, the Melanesian Christian will find it quite natural to respond with a faith that sees human kind and human society in an integrated whole. He/she regards society as a sacred institution. So, the Christian in such a situation does not expect “secular” engagements to be regarded as profane, anti-spiritual, and anti-Christian. In fact, one tends to feel that, if Christians or the church, do not involve in “secular” affairs, particularly affecting human life, Christ and His gospel of salvation, freedom, justice, etc., have no meaning for Melanesians. The sense of the secularity of the Christian faith is not present in that context. In other words, the challenge of the Christians in Melanesia today is to witness their faith and convictions in concrete human situations in order to fulfil the will of God in this particular context. Thus, faith in Christ and the will of God, as proclaimed in the cross and resurrection, becomes contextually secularised.

Thirdly, Melanesians have often reflected, in their various communities, the common belief in the coming of the ultimate future. The notion of a “golden age” has been present in their traditional myths, and has emerged, from time to time, in various religious activities. Cargo cults of the post-World War period, for instance, are a reflection of the common myth present in the traditional religious beliefs, which anticipated a radical revolution in the future to fulfil the hopes of human kind. This would seem to demonstrate some affinity to Christian understanding of eternal life – a new heaven and a new earth. The Christian Melanesian is, therefore, not surprised to find confusion in the minds of followers of the cargo cult movements, who easily adopt Christian symbols and ideas, such as, the bible, the cross, resurrection, and Saviour, to convey their hopes and aspirations for freedom and salvation.

It is important to note the pragmatic implications of the Melanesian messianic expectations, which have become much more strongly articulated in modern Papua New Guinea society than in the past. Evidently, many of the cargo cult movements have sprung up again in recent years as a form of resistance against the government, as well as the church, in view of increasing economic and political concerns. The cult followers feel that the

way economic and political institutions and programmes are organised will never bring about well-being to everyone. They see human suffering increasing, and believe that more and more people will suffer more than at present.

This raises some very serious questions about the way the church preaches about the kingdom of God. Although the church conceives and proclaims the kingdom of God, manifested in Christ Jesus here and now, her usage of such terms as “eternal life”, “eternal salvation”, and “heaven” are easily limited to spiritual and other-worldly implications. The church would need to recognise that there is a close relationship between the kingdom of God and salvation, revealed in and through Jesus Christ, and the salvation and well-being of human kind, which can, to some extent, be brought about through human effort. The cross of Christ and the resurrection, as a confession of the presence of the kingdom God is the basis for the desire and spiritual ability to make manifest today the fact that salvation has already come. As such, in things, which others, perhaps, call human development, the Christian may witness a fulfilment of the kingdom of God in human life.

Thus, the Melanesian Christian considers the future apparent in the present life. The conditions of the present context do affect the way people think and act. It is, therefore, not surprising that people become engaged easily in social, economic, and political actions to bring about the future into reality today. As far as they are concerned, the future is contextualised in their faith and existence, here and now.

## **Conclusion**

Christians in Melanesia can, and ought, to be involved in the struggles of their people, and society as a whole today. The struggles involve building up the body of Christ, and, creating with God, the new society – the kingdom of God, in which all problems, human and natural, find their solutions, and bring about absolute fulfilment. This kingdom, and its fulfilment, is not only beyond this visible world; we are already sharing in it, and living it out in concrete human situations.

The Melanesian is, firstly, a human person. His or her faith in Christ unites his or her contextual and cultural identity with other Christians in the same society, as well as of other contexts or cultural situations. He/she

remains Melanesian, and, yet, shares in a wider communion. His/her commitment to Christ does not lift him/her out, or alienate him/her from his/her culture or context, and make him/her a Christian in a vacuum, or another culture or context. Rather he/she becomes a Christian Melanesian – a Melanesian, whose outlook on life is renewed by faith in Christ. His/her Christ-like life is born in him/her as a Melanesian. He/she realises, in a new way, the seriousness of being a true Melanesian, by discovering the reality of God's presence through Christ in human life. Therefore, Melanesians taking a serious concern, with faith in Christ, about the realities of their particular context, are really proclaiming the truth of the incarnation, and affirming the servanthood of Christ Jesus as the basis upon which the Lordship of Christ – the kingdom of God, or the true church – is founded.

Thus, it is more appropriate and meaningful to talk of “Christian Melanesian” than “Melanesian Christian”. The former implies contextuality of Christian faith and the gospel in the life of the Melanesian. In this particular historical human experience (or context), Christianity emerges as the power of God in the world. The latter, on the other hand, can be easily understood as implying withdrawal or alienation from cultural roots and migrating into another space, to be known as Christianity. As such, Christianity is made into another culture – a super culture – out of the world. The danger in this second pole is that it leads to neglect, ignorance, and indifference. It robs the gospel of its concrete human relevance.

In view of the conditions prevailing in the Melanesian present context, those who call themselves Christians cannot be worthy of the name unless their lives bear that cross in the struggles for freedom and unity of human society. This is true contextualisation; theology contextualised in the world.

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