

## Chapter 5

### **Toward Inculturation and Reform**

The Church of Melanesia was under missionary leadership for 125 years before it attained independence from the Anglican Church of the Province of New Zealand on January 26, 1975. In the late 1960s, the Anglican Church in New Zealand felt that the Anglican Churches in the Pacific outside Australia and New Zealand should consider forming a Province. If that idea had been implemented, the Anglican Churches in Papua New Guinea, Polynesia and Melanesia would have formed an Anglican Church of the Province of the South Pacific. However, things did not work out. Papua New Guinea became a Province of its own; Polynesia remained with New Zealand and Melanesia was left to become a separate Province.

The reasons given for Melanesia wanting independence have not been very clear, but a common speculation has been that, in the 1970s, the Anglican Church in New Zealand was moving towards ordination of women, so, as a show of opposition to the move, Melanesia wanted independence. While attending St. John's College, Auckland, New Zealand in the late 1980s, I had a chance of talking to Judge Rob Smellie about the matter. Rob Smellie was a former Chancellor of the Diocese of Melanesia, and it was him who drafted the Constitution and Canons of the Province of Melanesia. According to Smellie,

'ordination of women' was not the issue for driving Melanesian independence. He said that if it was an issue, it was not expressed. Rather the issue was that, in the 1970s, the Anglican Church in New Zealand was involved in a dialogue with other Churches to form a Church Union. Assuming that the Anglican Church in New Zealand would end up merging with other Churches, Melanesia decided to attain independence.

In the first four chapters, I reflected on the origin of the Anglo-Catholic tradition in Melanesia. The tradition was established by the missionaries and no doubt it had achieved its original purpose — to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring peace and new life to the people in Melanesia whose livelihood was exceedingly haunted by fear of tribal in-fighting and head hunting. Credit must be given to the missionaries who under severe and hostile conditions persevered to labour for the spread of the gospel. They encountered hardship and innocent lives were taken, but their commitment, dedication, and, above all, their faith went from strength to strength.

In this chapter, I shall focus on how Melanesia could allow cultural aspects which are compatible with the gospel to be included in the liturgy and rituals of the Church, for instance, songs, tunes, expressions, idioms, art, etc. As it is the intention of this thesis, I shall also look at how Melanesia could bring about responsible changes to the missionary tradition to present new meaning of the

gospel in the present time.

### **The Strengths and Limitations of the Anglo-Catholic Tradition**

Looking back to the history of the Melanesian Mission, one could not agree more that the Anglo-Catholic tradition had brought meaning and purpose to the life of the new converts in Melanesia.

One strength of the Anglo-Catholic tradition in the early days was the emphasis on cognitive thinking. Baptism and confirmation were administered only to converts who had shown that they had sufficiently understood the basic principles of Christianity. This was to avoid people falling away from the Church too soon. Secondly, there was an emphasis on orderliness in its organization and structure. Those who occupied the different levels in the organizational structure were expected at least to have gone through some forms of professional training.

Accountability has also been part of the structure. The life of the Church in the villages has been the responsibility of the Catechists who are responsible to the District Priest and the District Priest to the Diocesan Bishop. Doctrines, beliefs and practices of the Church are documented in the Canons and are thus binding. This prevents too many ad hoc activities. In this approach, everyone knows who is doing what, thus creating stability. The use of the Book of Common Prayer in liturgical worship could also be considered as a strength of

the Anglo-Catholic tradition. It unites all members of the Church and enables each individual to participate in worship.

However, while the above points are strengths of the Anglo-Catholic tradition, those very points are regarded as its limitations. Those in the evangelical and charismatic camps often describe Anglo-Catholics as people with a closed heart who have not experienced the Holy Spirit. The organizational structure is often seen as the main obstacle to the mission of the Church. It is seen as the basis of discrimination, exclusiveness and intolerance in the Church. Similarly, the use of the Book of Common Prayer is seen as making worship dull, monotonous and boring. It is argued that spontaneous prayer is more inspiring and touching than reading prayers from the Prayer book.

There may be some elements of truth in those arguments, but it must be realized that no one system is perfect. Usually systems have been designed for a good intention and purpose. In this regard, there is nothing wrong with any system, although to depend entirely on a system may lead to marginalization and abuse of people. For instance, the system in the Church of Melanesia was established by the missionaries and no doubt the system was appropriate at that time. Now, the same system is probably becoming an agent of repression and abuse because Melanesians who are now controlling the system lack vision and

innovation to bring about appropriate changes to suit the present time. They are there only as custodians of the system and are just keeping to routines.

### **What are the Issues in the Church of Melanesia?**

The Church of Melanesia has been independent of missionary leadership for twenty-three years now. The main objective of this chapter is therefore to reflect on what issues the Church of Melanesia has encountered during that period of independence. To help us identify the issues, the question that needs to be asked is, what changes has the Church made as an independent Church? The answer to that question is that the Church of Melanesia has been very cautious about any forms of change that affect the missionary tradition. Any move to bring about reforms, however small it may be, has been strongly resisted. To name but a few, the following are some examples:

- a. The Church building must always face the east and the altar attached to the wall on the eastern end.
- b. The priest celebrates the Eucharist facing the altar and with his back towards the congregation.
- c. Prayer is strictly based on the Prayer Book. Extemporaneous and spontaneous prayer is not seen as an alternative.
- d. Only men are licensed to assist the Priest during the Holy Communion.
- e. Ordination is only a ministry for men.

f. Admission to Holy Communion is only by Confirmation.

In view of the liturgy, there have been attempts to include cultural aspects, but still the progress is slow. Until very recently, Melanesian tunes and songs were not acceptable in Church worship. Anything outside the 'Church Hymnal' and the 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' were regarded as unsuitable for praise and worship. Melanesian expression and idioms have not been used in the translations of the Prayer book and the Bible. Translation work has been done on word to word basis, and therefore they lack contextual meaning. Melanesian prayers, have been placed at the fringe. In some editions of the Melanesian Prayer Book there were prayers for things that were totally foreign to Melanesians, for instance, a prayer of protection from hail storm.

In liturgical rituals, the missionary ways of doing things are very much alive. Oil that is used for anointing is still ordered from overseas. Coconut oil which Melanesians use for medicinal purposes is readily available and cheaper and could be a suitable substitute. During the Holy Communion, a bell is rung when the host is elevated. Such bells are ordered from overseas and are very expensive. A locally-made wooden drum could serve the same purpose. Wine for communion is imported and wafers are made from flour using equipment also ordered from overseas. Can 'coconut water' take the place of wine and 'taro' the wafer? This may sound too ordinary but did Jesus not use wine and

bread which were just as ordinary to the Jewish culture?

Colourful vestments are ordered from Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and England. Considering the exchange rates and the stipend of the clergy which is practically inadequate even to meet the basic necessities in life, it costs a fortune to import such vestments to Melanesia. They are not only expensive but also climatically unsuitable. The materials are often thick, which are suitable for temperate climates. I have seen a chasuble on Ysabel made from a bark of tree and coloured by dyes made locally from roots and barks of trees. Can such cultural ingenuity be promoted and utilized? Altar clothes for the liturgical seasons are also imported from overseas. Can they not be made locally using local expertise and innovations? The Mothers Union which endeavours to promote the place of women in the Church and Society have attempted to provide opportunities for women to acquire skills in sewing, cooking and crafts. Can they be encouraged to mastermind the production of such materials? This should also be true for other liturgical vestments such as albs, stoles, cinctures, etc.

Building materials are very expensive but in every village at least the Church building is made from permanent building materials. It is not uncommon to see an expensive cross and candle sticks on the altar. Such could easily be carved by local carvers and beautifully decorated with inlaid shells that depict cultural

significance. The same would also be true for chalice and patens. That is, the Church of Melanesia at the present time is still in the adaptation stage of the missionary tradition.

A lot of work is needed in order to move towards inculturation. Darrell Whiteman was right in his observation when he said,

The Melanesian Mission has evolved into an independent and autonomous Island Church, but it is not yet completely an indigenous Church. This will undoubtedly come in time as Melanesian Christians in their striving after meaning, develop their own Melanesian theology and worship in a manner more appropriate to Melanesia, and not simply a copy of Canterbury.<sup>178</sup>

The statement "not yet completely an indigenous Church" by Darrell Whiteman is not only ascribed to ritual and theology, but also in terms of finance and human resources. The Church of Melanesia is far from self-supporting. A good portion of its operational cost comes from the Melanesian Trust Board in Auckland, New Zealand. The Trust Board administers business transactions on a piece of land which Bishop George Augustus Selwyn bought in Auckland to support the work of the Church in Melanesia. In addition to that, partner churches from overseas are still major contributors. What is generated locally is almost negligible. The Church invests in the business arm of the Church which runs a shipyard, a printing press and a plantation, but the Business Arm

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<sup>178</sup>Whiteman, 417-418.



is just a white elephant which struggles to survive. The questions that one often grapples with are: how long can Melanesia go on like this? How secure is the property in Auckland? Will the New Zealand Government continue to allow that money to leave the country every month? These are but a few questions that the Church of Melanesia must seriously consider if it is to be truly independent financially.

In terms of human resources, there is still a shortage of qualified and skilled personnel to staff fully the activity centres of the Church. Not long after the missionaries left at the time of independence, Melanesians realized that they still needed help from expatriates in the schools, in the seminary, in the shipyard, in the printing press and in the plantation.

When Bishop Cecil John Wood became the 4th bishop in 1912, he wanted to see the three principles of self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending occur in that sequence in the Church of Melanesia.<sup>179</sup> However, Melanesia has not applied these principles in that order. After achieving a 'self-governing' status 1975, it jumped over 'self supporting' and landed on 'self-extending'. At the time of independence, there were only three dioceses. Now there are eight and the operational cost is sky-rocketing, because while the number of dioceses has increased, the size of the cake to be shared has remained the same.

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<sup>179</sup>Fox, 56.

Surprisingly, decision-makers are content with the income from New Zealand and do little to promote stewardship locally.

### **Why do Melanesians want to retain the missionary tradition?**

Generally speaking, there may be two main factors that contribute to the fear of reforms in Melanesia. One is missionary paternalism. In the 75 years before gaining independence, missionary paternalism was very apparent in Melanesia. Melanesians were never given the opportunity to make decisions that affected the life of the people and the Church in general. The decision-making web was confined within the white missionary circle. It is the hangover of that experience which continues to be seen in the Church of Melanesia today. What the missionaries established is believed to be the right thing for the Church. Anything Melanesian cannot be incorporated into the Church. As Whiteman had observed,

The bishops of the Church of Melanesia have tended to be quite conservative when it comes to 'tampering' with the formal worship service. They have been hesitant to do anything other than perpetuate the pattern taught to them by the European missionaries. The pattern of Anglican worship in Melanesia is today more reminiscent of the Church of England in England than of Melanesian modes of worship.<sup>180</sup>

Secondly, the way in which localization was managed may still be an extension of missionary paternalism. Although the missionaries knew that at

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<sup>180</sup>Whiteman, 380.

some point sooner or later, they were going to hand over the job of administering the Church to Melanesians, the training and preparation of Melanesians to take over positions of responsibility was inadequate. So that at the time of independence and in particular in its 'self extending' activities, Melanesians who lacked appropriate education and training have been placed in positions of responsibility and become dysfunctional. They lack broader perspectives and fail to provide direction that would allow growth and improvement to take place. In a set-up like this we cannot expect changes because those who are supposed to initiate changes have nothing to offer. They can look back to the past, but they cannot look ahead to the future. To set out into a new territory would be risky. The safest thing for them is just to continue to trample on the old ground, however infertile that ground has been.

**Why is the present situation is not satisfactory?**

The position taken by the Church of Melanesia to resist any change occurring in the tradition it has inherited from the missionaries obscures the mission of the Church in the present time. The Church of Melanesia must realize that the Anglo-Catholic tradition was founded on three main principles: 'Scripture', 'Reason' and 'Tradition'. These three principles are interdependent — one cannot go without the other two or else the whole structure will collapse. However, Melanesia has placed little emphasis on 'scripture' and 'reason'. They

see the Church only in the eyes of tradition which deals largely with rituals, ceremonies and other liturgical components. Some of those aspects may have been regarded by other members of the Anglo-Catholic camp in the Anglican Communion as anachronistic and they have allowed reforms to occur in those areas.

The Church of Melanesia fails to realize that some aspects of the tradition it inherited from the missionaries do not address the Melanesian context. To defend the entirety of the missionary tradition therefore projects an unfortunate image because it does so at the expense of its own culture. When Bishop George Augustus Selwyn founded the Melanesian Mission, he wanted to establish a Melanesian native ministry to spear-head the establishment of an indigenous Church<sup>181</sup>. Apart from the gospel, he did not want the Church to be influenced by Western tradition and practices. Melanesians have failed to appreciate Selwyn's plans and dreams and, furthermore, they fail to appreciate their own culture. It appears that there is still a hangover of the undefined attitude of the early converts towards the missionary tradition. George Sarawia, the first Melanesian to be ordained said that he was willing to go with Selwyn and Patteson to New Zealand because he wanted to go to the source of Western Civilization so that he could easily get for himself axe, knife, fishhooks, clothes

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<sup>181</sup>Hilliard, 8.

and other material things. From the very beginning of the Missionary/Melanesian encounter, Melanesians have been of the opinion that the things of the missionaries are better and more appealing than their own things. This kind of mentality continues to be seen even today where anything Melanesian in culture is given second place to what is western and missionary-like in form and nature.

However, this thesis does not suggest that the whole missionary tradition is irrelevant and must be replaced. Rather it suggests that the missionary tradition can be improved by the inclusion of some cultural aspects which are compatible with the gospel. In addition to that, it recognises the need to bring about reforms within the tradition based on the gospel and on the needs of the present time.

### **Toward Renewing the Tradition**

Since the majority of the members of the Anglican Church in Melanesia live in rural areas, no other agents of change are possible other than a strong leadership that is committed to reforms. Bishops and clergy of the Province must make it a commitment to shift from being ceremonial figures whereby their pastoral visits are only seen in terms of conductors of confirmation services and presiders of the Eucharist respectively, to involvement in more aggressive teaching programmes. This will facilitate discussions to dispel unnecessary fear and misconceptions and it will help people to realize that the purpose of change

is not to weaken but to strengthen the Church. If people see that changes are necessary for a good cause, they will give it all their support. Bishops and priests in their pastoral visits have always received more from the people in terms of hospitality and entertainment than the people from them. They should engage more in teaching and in addressing issues which affect the Church and not merely ceremonial figures.

Leaders in the Church of Melanesia cannot say that all is well. In the late 1980s pentecostal activities had fragmented the Church of Melanesia. Two prominent lay preachers Sir Frederick Osifelo and Rosylen Aitoreia and an Anglican priest Alfred Alufurai got the support of a retired bishop, Leonard Alufurai, and a number of Anglicans to break away from the Anglican Church. Leonard Alufurai was one of the first Melanesian bishops and Alfred is his son. They formed what is now called the Rhema Family Church. However, not long after, Alfred Alufurai, supported by his father, led a faction away from the Rhema Family Church and formed the Church of the Living Word. This shows that the Church needs a bit of shaking. It means that the people are calling for clear direction. They want assurance that the Church belongs to them and that its mission continues to provide new insights which are refreshing and relevant to the contemporary time. To meet that expectation the leaders must be in a position to provide guidance and work along side those who feel that the

Church needs to move away from just being a ceremonial Church to a more pastoral and a teaching Church. In this regard, the Church calls on its leaders to stop just keeping to routines and exercise creativity and innovation.

Let us now look at some specific issues which need to be reformed in order to be relevant to the present time.

### **Church architecture:**

In many village Churches, a high altar is still attached to the eastern end of the wall, and the priest celebrates with his back to the people. This tradition was introduced by the Anglo-Catholic missionaries and it became widely accepted in Melanesia because Melanesians were able to identify with its significance. In the Melanesian traditional culture, the 'source of mana' was believed to be transcendent. The priest was seen as a mediator between the 'source of mana' and the people and therefore the rites that he did on the altar were to be hidden, a practice that is also found in the Old Testament.

However, that understanding of the 'source of mana' is no longer relevant to the present time. Melanesians need to be taught about the relationship between God and people according to the New Testament. The coming of Jesus into this world shows the incarnational presence of God among people. Thus, the altar should be brought closer to the congregation so that they can see the rites that the priest is doing. The liturgy and worship must be incarnational —

'God with us', not just an undefined relationship with the 'source of mana'. The liturgy is a ritual in which the community of faith must share and participate in and be able to see what the priest is doing. God has been revealed in Jesus Christ, but that revelation has not made God any less 'Holy'.

### **An Inclusive Liturgy:**

Ordination of women is still not accepted in Melanesia, let alone women assisting the priest during the Eucharist. 'Culture' is often used as a source of problem when talking about this particular issue. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Melanesia is a heterogenous society and therefore different islands and areas do things differently. In some Churches, women are not allowed into the Sanctuary, to be servers or are not even allowed to read lessons. In other places, however, women are allowed to serve, read lessons, lead intercessions, allowed to the Sanctuary to clean the altar or to change flowers and, to visit and pray with the sick. They are not allowed, however, to assist the priest during Eucharist and to be ordained.

The way to tackle this diversity in cultural belief is for the Church to begin by educating the people to accept women as lay leaders and to encourage women to accept their baptismal ministry in worship and in the different lay ministries of the Church, "for in Christ there is neither male nor female"(Gal.3:28). It must be noted that in the sacrament of baptism, women



and men receive the same baptism and become members of the body of Christ on equal-footing. That is, whatever men can do in their Baptismal ministry, the women can also do. The liturgy is the work of the whole people of God and therefore, there should not be any discrimination by gender or otherwise. Melanesia should initially encourage women to take full and active part in the liturgy as lay people and later when the time is right as clergy.

During his ministry, Jesus had many women followers — Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene and many more. He treated women as equals and established good relationships with them. The healing of the woman with a flow of blood (Mark 5:25) is a classical example. In the Jewish law (Leviticus 15: 19, 25) and in Melanesian culture she should not be in the presence of men because she was unclean. However, Jesus allowed her to touch him and then he healed her. On the way to the cross Jesus was followed, and helped by women and were the first to witness the Risen Christ. Cultural structures which oppress women must be abandoned because after all the Melanesian society is also based on the togetherness of its members. That sense of community must be fully reflected in the liturgy and in the different ministries of the Church.

#### **Admission to Eucharist:**

In the Church of Melanesia, the sacrament of Holy Communion is governed by Title A, Canon 2 of the Canons of the Church. The requirements for

admission to communion are stipulated in Section E of the Canon which reads,

Only those who have been confirmed or are preparing for confirmation may receive the blessed sacrament, but we welcome baptized communicant members of other Churches who wish to receive the Holy Communion with us if they come in faith, in penitence and with preparation.<sup>182</sup>

At the present time, the Christian initiation practice in Melanesia has been baptism in infancy and confirmation in the early teens which is also admission to communion. Confirmation is administered by a bishop but only after he is satisfied that the candidates had thoroughly studied and understood the catechism of the Church. This is to comply with the instruction which parents and god-parents receive in a baptismal service. The instruction reads;

You are to take care that this child is brought to the bishop to be confirmed when he/she has been given teaching in the faith as set out in the Church Catechism and can say in his /her own language the Apostle Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments.<sup>183</sup>

Confirmation is regarded as the last step of initiation and it is an opportunity for young Christians to speak for themselves in affirming their faith on the Trinity and in publicly renouncing the devil and all the works of evil thus reinforcing the promises which their parents and god-parent had made on their behalf at their time of baptism. Holy Communion is seen as a holy act which requires

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<sup>182</sup>The Manual of the Church of Melanesia, 1996, 13.

<sup>183</sup>A Melanesia English Prayer Book with Hymns (Honiara: Provincial Press, 1985), 250.

baptized members of the church fulfilling certain tasks before gaining admission to it. Fasting is often encouraged, and a service of preparation is said before the communion. The service of preparation could be led by a clergy or a lay person. Holy Communion is highly revered and is taken carefully and with reverence.

Other provinces within the Anglican Communion have taken the lead to carry out reforms as recommended by Lambeth 1968. With democracy and secularization influencing the Church, the Lambeth Conference in 1968 recommended;

That each province or regional church be asked to explore the theology of baptism and confirmation in relation to the need to commission laity for their task in the world, and to experiment in this regard.<sup>184</sup>

Provinces and Churches which have allowed reforms to occur in the unity of baptism and communion reflect a deep understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church. However, the Province of Melanesia is yet to realize the value of such reforms. For some Melanesians the idea of reform is scary. They see it as a process which would dilute the tradition of the Church. To move away from the missionary tradition is believed to be a step in the wrong direction. There is a general resistance to change.

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<sup>184</sup>C. Buchanan, Nurturing Children in Communion: Essays from the Boston Consultation (Grove Book Ltd, Bramcote Nottingham, 1985), 23.

However, Melanesia must realize that reforms are part and parcel of the growth of the Church. Melanesia must also realize that while each province within the Anglican Communion is free to determine its own destiny, each province is also a part of the world-wide Anglican Church. For that reason, links and dialogue with each other must be maintained. Now, considering the fact that infant communion has been accepted by other Provinces in the Anglican Communion, I wish to make the following suggestions to Melanesia:

- (a) That baptized children/people be allowed to receive communion prior to confirmation.
- (b) That parents and god-parents of children seeking baptism be given thorough teaching on the meaning and purpose of the sacrament and on the responsibility of bringing up their children in the Christian way. It is particularly important for parents and god-parents to understand that in baptism one becomes a full member of the Church, the body of Christ and that membership automatically allows him/her to participate in all Christian activities, including communion.
- (c) That confirmation be retained to give an opportunity for young Christians to make their own allegiance of faith to God.

In the view of the above suggestions, I wish to offer the following observations.

### **Pastoral**

Melanesia is a society which believes in community undertakings. Birth, death, marriage and all other activities are celebrated by all members of the community and worship is no exception. Children are always part of their families in worship. Sunday worship often begins quite early, between 5:30 am and 7:30 am, and to allow children to be part of the service, Sunday School is arranged after the service. Children sometimes participate in the service as servers. The whole community is included from the beginning of the service up to the administration of the communion — then the children become non-members. They do not receive communion. They go up and kneel in front of the altar just to receive a blessing from the priest. It must be hard on the children, but they do not ask questions.

Admitting children to communion is not only a recognition of them as members of the body of Christ but also as human beings. The holy communion is no different from 'festive' meals where children are always part of, because they are part of the family. To exclude children from communion is not only un-Melanesian, but it is also unchristian. This is one area where the idea of 'unity in diversity' cannot be true. The community which is the body of Christ can

only be united when all members participate in all Christian activities.

### **Theological**

The argument that children should not receive holy communion until they understand its significance does not carry sufficient weight to warrant their exclusion from communion. The assumption that children are incapable of experiencing and thinking like adults undermines children. Children do have experiences which are religious, without which no mature religious life is possible. They may not be able to describe any religious experience until later in life but the fact remains that they do experience God. My four year-old son always wants to say the grace before our meals. All he does is to put his hands together in front of his face, close his eyes and then he says, "Thank you God for this day, bless this food for today." The actions he does and the simple words he says are expressions of his experience of God. What more does he need to be affirmed as a full member of the body of Christ? He has already been baptized. How can a sacrament which means to be an uniting force in a Christian community set out to exclude children. This is not only ridiculous but it is also contrary to the teachings of Jesus, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mk.10:14). When Paul says, "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor.10:17), he means that there

is a direct relationship between the sacrament of Holy Communion and the community as the body of Christ. That is, the sacrament of holy communion was instituted and given for the life and unity of the whole Christian community. In Acts we are told that the first Christians showed their community life-style by the daily breaking of bread in their home. This would mean the adults as well as children were participating in the common meal (Acts 2:46). The baptismal statement in Galatian 3:28 describes a community life that is not divided by any form of discrimination and 'age' must be included.

### **Historical**

If we look back in the history of the Church, the idea of communion prior to confirmation is not a venture into a new and unknown ground. Rather, the unity of baptism and communion is almost as old as the history of the Church. In the late fifth century the baptismal rite was closely associated with Easter and/or Pentecost. During the season of Lent, those preparing for baptism would go through a period of teaching, catechesis and examination; and on the day of baptism the ritual included the "ephphatha, renunciation, exorcism, blessing of the water, baptism, anointing, laying on of hands by the bishop, and mass with communion."<sup>185</sup> Let us look at a few sources of such evidence.

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<sup>185</sup>James F. White, A Brief History of Christian Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 80.

The Didache states that only those who have been baptized that can receive Communion.<sup>186</sup> In his writings, Hippolytus describes that a baptism service always ends with an Eucharist.<sup>187</sup> He also says that those who were to be baptized were not to bring anything else except the things that they needed for the Eucharist.<sup>188</sup> These statements suggest that in the early Church those who have been baptized also received Communion. Like Hippolytus, Cyprian sees baptism and Eucharist as a single event but he goes a step further to say that it is through the Eucharist that a baptized person becomes a member of the body of Christ.<sup>189</sup> He suggests that a person is initiated to become a member of the Christian community by actually participating in the rites. Both baptism and Eucharist are equally important that one cannot go without the other.

According to Augustine, infants are no different from adults. He said,

the weakness of infant limbs is innocent, but not the mind of infants. I myself have seen and have had experience with a jealous child: he could not speak, but growing pale, would stare with a bitter look at his foster brother.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>Cyril Richardson and Eugene Fairweather, Early Christian Fathers (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1993), Vol.1, 175.

<sup>187</sup>P.F. Bradshaw, The Canons of Hippolytus (Grove Books Ltd, Bramcote, Nottingham, 1987), 24.

<sup>188</sup>G.J. Cuming, Hippolytus: A Text for Students (Grove Books Bramcote, Nottingham), 18.

<sup>189</sup>David Holeton, Infant Communion - then and now. (Grove Books, Bramcote Notts, 1981), 5.

<sup>190</sup>Saint Augustine, Confessions, (The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1966), Vol. 21, 12.



Augustine believes that the fact that infants are physically weak does not make them weaker in 'the quality of inner life'.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, adults who are physically strong does not make them any better in "the quality of inner life." Infants are not under-developed. They have the ability to experience and understand, that does not need to develop into some higher form. Infants therefore need to be saved by Christ through the sacrament of Holy Communion just as adults. Infant communion was a normal practice up to the twelfth century. William of Champeaux wrote in 1121,

To little children just baptized only the chalice is given because they cannot assimilate bread, and in the chalice they receive Christ entire. But the chalice must be given to them because as it is impossible for anybody to enter into life, without baptism, so it is impossible without this life-giving viaticum.<sup>192</sup>

The separation of baptism and communion occurred in the middle ages. The term confirmation was first used in the fifth century to refer to postbaptismal rites in which anointing and laying of hand by the bishop were done. By the ninth century confirmation became formally separated from baptism and its meaning also changed from "'to complete' to 'to strengthen'."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Holeton, 6

<sup>192</sup>J.D.C. Fisher, Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 102.

<sup>193</sup>James F. White, Introduction to Christian Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 201.

Confirmation became reserved for those at the age of reason, which was "at least seven years of age."<sup>194</sup> At that age children would be in a position to understand the teachings and catechism of the Church. At confirmation the bishop was to sign the candidates on their fore-head the sign of the cross and lay his hands on them and pray that they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. In the Roman Catholic Church, confirmation was not only about knowing the catechism of the church but it was about receiving a sacrament which could only be administered by a bishop. The Anglican Church inherited the same tradition from the Roman Catholic Church, in which the presider at a confirmation service was a bishop and those preparing for confirmation must have learnt and understood the creed, the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments and the catechism. No one was to receive communion prior to confirmation.

Since the postbaptismal rites of anointing and the signing of the cross became associated with confirmation and the rites became reserved for a bishop, it became difficult for Christians in a large geographical area to bring those who were baptized by a priest to a bishop to complete the rite. The Eastern Church was able to keep the unity of the initiation rites together by allowing the priests to perform the final anointing by using oil that was consecrated by the bishop.

Another factor which contributed to the separation of baptism and

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 203.

communion in the middle ages was that the Church came to adopt a practice in which infants were baptized eight days after birth and confirmation was delayed until at the age of seven. In this practice baptism became a private rite between the priest and the family of the infant. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformers changed this practice by emphasizing that baptism be held during a community worship and in the language of the community.<sup>195</sup> In the later part of the eleventh century, the doctrine of transubstantiation played a part in the separation of baptism and communion. The belief that the bread and wine actually turn into the real body and blood of Christ led to the exclusion of children from communion because it was believed that children did not have the physical capability to swallow the host. In fear of spilling the consecrated wine, all laity regardless of age were excluded from receiving wine. It was the fourth Council of Lateran in 1215 which made the decision that children must first be given teaching before admission to Communion.<sup>196</sup> In view of all this,

Cyprian and Augustine need to be taken seriously, because Eucharist is the weekly constitution act of the Church, and ... participation in ... Eucharist signifies both our membership in the body and as such our allegiance to Christ Himself.<sup>197</sup>

However, the practice in which baptism and communion as a single event

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<sup>195</sup>White, 202.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>197</sup>Holeton, 22.

did not cease altogether in thirteenth century. When Queen Elizabeth I was born in 1533, she was baptized and confirmed just three days after birth.<sup>198</sup>

### **How can Culture be reflected in the Liturgy?**

The different cultural backgrounds in Melanesia provide rich traditional rituals, songs, instruments, music, tunes and poetry, but they have not been included in liturgical worship. A few church institutions like Bishop Patteson Theological College, the Melanesian Brotherhood Headquarters, and Selwyn College, the secondary school of the Church, have done experimental services in which traditional tunes, instruments, dress and dance have been included but such things have not been encouraged in the village churches. Some bishops and priests have resisted any addition or deletion from the liturgy.

Influenced by the Second Vatican Council, Bishop John Chisholm attempted to introduce liturgical reforms in Melanesia in the late 1960s and early 1970s by simplifying the language of the Prayer Book and “reducing the ritualistic content”<sup>199</sup> of the liturgy. However, John Chisholm did not get the support of the Melanesians. Some “claimed that the weakness of the Church today was due to the changes introduced in the liturgy”<sup>200</sup> by Chisholm.

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<sup>198</sup>White, 201.

<sup>199</sup>Whiteman, 336.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., 336.

Melanesia should consider seriously the principles of the Second Vatican Council to integrate "the liturgy to the culture and tradition of the people."<sup>201</sup> Cultural aspects should be incorporated into the liturgy as long as they are truly liturgical and are not superstition.<sup>202</sup> According to Chupungco, the Christian elements which must be present even when cultural aspects are introduced in the liturgy are: the paschal mystery of the event that is celebrated in the liturgy, the climax of the celebration, the participation of all people and that the celebration belongs to the Church and not a private function.<sup>203</sup>

However, I am fully aware of the difficulties involved in making appropriate inculturation. Just to include cultural aspects into the liturgy and worship rituals on adhoc basis is not inculturation. Inculturation is the process in which the gospel and culture are in continuous dialogue. The expression of faith and worship by Christians in a given cultural locality should be a show of deep cultural realizations and not merely superficial inclusions of selected cultural aspects. Inculturation involves a thorough understanding of culture in which faith is appropriately expressed and understood.<sup>204</sup> Inculturation is not merely

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<sup>201</sup>A.J. Chupungco, Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation (New Jersey: Paulist Press), 9.

<sup>202</sup>Chupungco, 29.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>204</sup>Victor R. Atta-Bafoe and Philip Tovey, "What does inculturation mean?" In David R. Holeton, Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion. (Bramcote, UK., 1990), 14.

a Christianization of traditional worship practices. That would be a syncretistic expression of faith. Rather it is a process of breaking down cultural alienation in worship so that socio-cultural values of a given community become part of their Christian faith.<sup>205</sup> A particular cultural tradition wherever it may be has values to contribute in liturgy and worship. Inculturation means touching the deep feelings of the people in their cultural values and heritage that is appropriately expressing Jesus, the gospel and the truth of God. To attain true inculturation requires an understanding of the culture so that what is compatible with the gospel is incorporated into the liturgy and worship and, what is contrary is eliminated. The process would involve encouraging local creativity to engage in innovation and experimentation with the task of continuously assessing each stage of the process. Failing to do so could lead to syncretism and distortion of the gospel.

The criteria for inculturation is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the methodology that is to be adopted is systematic innovation and experimentation. This requires a clear synodical statement from the Church with provisions for its own office, budget and personnel. The personnel would include experts in liturgy who are willing to study liturgical history so that changes do not deviate from authentic expressions of the gospel. But the task of pursuing inculturation

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<sup>205</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

should not be restricted to a few people. Since the liturgy is the work of the people, leaders and those who have shown interest in promoting appropriate inculturation must work with the ordinary Christians to work out what has to be done and why it has to be done. The content of what is to be incorporated must be carefully assessed to identify where culture and the gospel converge. A good liturgy that is designed by the people forms the basis of their understanding of God, and that lays the foundation of the mission of the Church in the society and culture it serves.

However, there are theological principles which must be used as guidelines to provide a system of checks and balances to ensure that a cultural adaption is in harmony with the gospel. Only cultural elements which harmonize the Christian faith and which can be translated into worship are to be incorporated into the liturgy. For instance, language, singing, dancing, arts, rituals and gestures could be used in the liturgy to worship and praise God, but not head-hunting, cannibalism, infanticide, polygamy, widow strangling, sorcery and other cultural practices which exhibit violence and immorality. To take the life of innocent people and to be entertained by activities that oppress and victimize others could not be considered as appropriate, regardless of their significance in a culture. To honour and respect the genealogy of ancestors as part of God's creation is appropriate but to worship them as the sources of power and

authority and as equal to God is not in harmony with the gospel because only God can save humanity. To use herbs, plants, roots and barks of trees as medicine is creation-centred and is in harmony with the Christian faith, but to offer the plants and herbs to ancestral spirits and other deities before taking them is an act of superstition and syncretism.

Another theological principle which must be considered in view of the liturgy is that, the liturgy is the work of the whole community of faith. In this regard, a theology of the baptismal ministry which excludes other members of the community of faith because of gender, race or age cannot be genuine. That is, the position taken by Melanesia to exclude women from active participation in all levels of baptismal ministry in the Church and the exclusion of children from communion could not be seen as authentic. As Stephen Bevan says, "a theology that justifies an oppressive status-quo would be as wrong as a theology of liberation that calls for violent action against oppressors."<sup>206</sup>

To test that a theological principle is compatible with the gospel, it must be allowed to be in dialogue with other contextualized theological expressions. A theology that is defensive of its position is not an indication of an orthodox expression of the Christian faith. In view of this, for Melanesia to continue to

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<sup>206</sup>Stephen B. Bevan, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 19.



defend the inherited missionary tradition without offering positive theological explanations hinders the development of contextualized theology, thus appropriate adaptations and inculturation. Bevan quotes Michael Taylor that, "what we believe and decide to do must be exposed to what others believe and decide to do. Real heresy is not getting it wrong but getting it wrong in isolation."<sup>207</sup> A true expression of a genuine theology is seen in its openness to a dialogical process and allowing itself to be questioned by theologians who come from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>208</sup>

The Church in Melanesia has strongly adhered to the missionary tradition and Melanesians have claimed it to be their own tradition. The irony is that with its local leadership, the Church has been very passive in responding to the culture. This is opposite of what Selwyn and Patteson had intended when they founded the Melanesian Mission. Their aim was to build the Church in the Melanesian context. In the 1970s, John Wallace Chisholm, the last missionary bishop also took the initiative to pave the way for inculturation but lacked the support of Melanesians. Melanesians have failed to see that the missionary tradition which they claim as their own is in fact based on the ethos of the western culture. By failing to respond to change in the liturgy, the Church in

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<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 19.

Melanesia might miss new revelations for the mission of the Church. A “good liturgy grows and changes organically and always has rich marks of its stages of historical conditioning upon it.”<sup>209</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Church in Melanesia must, in time, leave behind its resistance to change. A responsible Church is one that is interested in addressing issues with which its members are grappling. A Church that is insensitive and passive has out-lived its relevancy and is slow in responding to change, may lack a sense of direction. A church, wherever it may in the world, has the primary objective of proclaiming the gospel afresh at all times, in the society it serves, but at the same time, it must recognise that it is part and parcel of the worldwide community of Christians. As the saying goes, ‘act locally, think globally’ and that link must be clearly expressed in words and actions. If the Church of Melanesia wants to move forward, it must show its capability in relating to issues which are not only affecting the local Church but the world-wide Anglican Communion.

However, because of the passive attitude of the people in general, changes will be very slow in coming from them. This leaves us with no option, but to look on the leaders to set the pace in identifying and initiating responsible and

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<sup>209</sup>The York Statement, ‘Down to Earth Worship’. In David R. Holeton, Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion. (Bramcote, Nottingham, 1990), 11.

appropriate changes. If we have leaders who are committed to reform, the whole process will begin to activate and even if there is traditional or hierarchical resistance, it will fall in place eventually. It may only take one leader to initiate changes as long as that person sees that the Church needs transformation because the Kingdom of God must be preached beyond the parameters on which the Church had concentrated on. Jesus said, "my father is always working" (John 5:17). That message shows that God continues to do things that are new and that we are to adhere to those new insights.

In October 1997, I was invited to attend a clergy conference of the Diocese of New West Minister in British Columbia and one of the leaders of the conference, the Rev. Don Brown was talking about the need for paradigm shift in the Church today. He said that when a particular paradigm becomes the only paradigm, there is a paradigm paralysis. That is exactly what is happening in the Church of Melanesia today. However, one of the statements he said that stuck with me was, "what is impossible today may be the norm for the future." I am hoping that one day Melanesia will come to accept the changes that it is currently opposing. Leaders and people in the Church must listen to the voice of God and respond with an open mind so that freshness in the message of the gospel and newness in approach may be recognised as the mission of the Church in the contemporary time.