

EDITORIAL

EVANGELISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Melanesian Association of Theological Schools held its students' conference in June, 1988, at Popondetta. The hosts were Newton Anglican Theological College, and guests stayed at the nearby Christian Training Centre. The theme of the conference was "Evangelisation and Development". The conference generated a strong sense of fellowship, and a wish to act together to address current issues of development. At the time of the conference, pollution was a particular concern.

In evangelisation, we proclaim that Jesus is the personal Lord of each of us, and, at the same time, Lord of all creation and history. So He unites all particular beings within a community of love. This love is the power of the Holy Spirit, which is active and organic, promoting growth or "development". As Lord of all, and Lord of each, Jesus Christ redeems us from domination by any power within the world, including the tendency of any society or culture totally to determine the life of its members. Both village-based subsistence societies, and technological nation-states, can smother the identities of its members, for the sake of the society's claim to be totally right in all things. If nothing in the society can be challenged or criticised, then its members are prey to every disturbance that occurs, with no right to take personal control. Hence, both traditional and modern societies can be haunted by fear and superstition of nameless powers. Therefore, it is the gospel of personal salvation from evil that opens the way to true development. It affirms the possibility of personal control, within the overall control of God.

The West has taken the idea of detachment from control by social and natural powers and turned it into an ideology of rampant individualism. Human beings have asserted their right to control social and natural relationships, and have ignored the truth that control is a gift from God, through Jesus Christ. They have turned the means of salvation, release from bondage, into a trick for picking out from life the bits they want, and ignoring the rest. Instead of life as a whole being a gift from God, it is an inert mass of things, from which we extract and consume, like shoppers in a supermarket. The things, the people we cannot make use of are cast aside, like rubbish, waste, and pollution. Hence, the concern for pollution at the conference. Take

the example of a plantation, such as, that for oil palm. The features of plant life, which can be extracted and manipulated for human consumption, are kept and everything else in the “bush”, indeed, every feature of village life that does not serve that end, is removed. Then we are surprised to read in the papers (*Times of PNG*, September 15, 1988) of pollution seeping from the edges of the plantation.

We need the gospel to remind us that the incarnation shows us that all life is a sacrament of God’s love for us, and needs to be contemplated reverently in prayer, and cared for responsibly in action. Development is about the control of their lives by each particular person, but such control is only possible if we recognise the overall control of God.