

MY EXPERIENCE WITH MATS

FR WALTER SIBA

*Newton Theological College,
Popondetta*

For the last six years, I have been involved with the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, on its Executive Body, and also in attending many of its Study Institutes. Through its Study Institutes, I have come to realise that all churches in Melanesia are facing and struggling with the same issues and problems, and, through many discussions, involving both staff and students, the Institutes were aiming at addressing them together. This then taught me that we need to work together as one member of the body of Christ, in order to deal with some of our endless problems. This shows that the churches in Melanesia will have to work together in theological education, to prepare our young men to go out and deal with these issues together, in order to be successful. It shows that we are not only preaching unity from our different pulpits, but that we are putting what we said into practice. MATS also helps students in different colleges see that “ministries” is a corporate ministry, and that they have to work together, in order to deal with the issues of today.

MATS makes churches realise the richness of working together in areas of development that Melanesian countries are facing today. Our respective governments will only listen to us if we get together and voice our common stand on particular issues that affect our people today. MATS, as I see it, has to perform the prophetic role in its work and plans in order to provide education that will be relevant to our different societies in Melanesia for many years yet to come.

MATS, through its publication of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, enables many people to know that theological education in Melanesia is developing, and not just secular education. It does encourage Melanesian theologians to rediscover the richness of Melanesian religion and theology that it has, which begins to get lost and forgotten by our people, because of secular education and development, which are being imported from overseas.

I can see that the future of our churches' cooperation in all areas of ministries lies in the hands of our Melanesian theologians, and I want to encourage our young pastors and priests to think seriously, and support this Association, if we want to stay relevant to our countries, not only through our respective governments, but through small sects; and our theological education must be that of having vision to prepare our men to handle them in years to come.

I have experienced, and learnt a lot, from this Association, and I believe that it will continue to provide high theological education for our young people of tomorrow.