

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL IN MEANINGFUL CULTURAL FORMS IN MELANESIA

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Introduction

The art of communication is a fundamental part of human existence. We thank God for His plan concerning mankind. He did not create us to be robots. He created us to have a relationship with Him. He made us to have a relationship with our neighbours, and with our environment. He gave us the ability to be creative in the art of communication. Because of this ability, there is great diversity in cultures and in communication.

It is interesting to learn about the richness of our cultural heritage. However, it is also difficult, because diverse cultural forms are applied in different ways in transmitting messages to particular people groups or cultures. It is a broad topic, in its theory, and practical sense. Therefore, the content of this article will be narrowed, and focus on the Gula'ala culture. However, the principles presented will be relevant to other people groups within Melanesian countries, because there are similarities in communication methods.

Motivation

I was challenged by my lecturers at the Christian Leaders' Training College with this question, "How effectively do Melanesians communicate the gospel in their cultural context?" I tried to ignore this question, but it kept coming back to me. I responded to the challenge with another question, "Are there helpful forms in my culture, which I, or the church, can use for communicating the gospel message?" It took me a long period of thorough reasoning, seeking guidance, and doing research, to find answers to the questions. Finally, I am convinced that God is within the reach of every

culture. In order for the gospel message to be understood, and become relevant to Melanesians, it has to be communicated in the cultural framework of a Melanesian context. The book titled *The Gospel is not Western*, by G. W. Trompf¹ has contributed to my motivation.

Aims

1. To elucidate meaningful cultural forms, as vehicles for getting God's message across to the illiterate and the semi-illiterate people in the church.
2. To provide guidance for indigenous ministers of God to make good use of their meaningful cultural forms, as they proclaim the word of God.
3. To make the gospel message simple and relevant to the people, so that this may lead them to Christ.
4. To educate the indigenous church about applying the gospel to their context, and not to look outside for foreign methods, which are irrelevant to the Melanesian context.

1. Understanding the Gula'ala People and Culture

In this first section, we will look briefly at the history of the Gula'ala people and their culture, which, in turn, forms the foundation for this article.

1.1 Definition and Location

The term Gula'ala has two components: *gula* (place) and *ala* (ahead). So the interpretation of Gula'ala means "a place ahead". The name was originally given to a particular zone on the east coast of Malaita, in the Solomon Islands, by an early native explorer. It lies to the southeast of Papua New Guinea, and to the northeast of Australia in the South Pacific Ocean. Two islands, Ngongosila and Kwai, are located in this particular area. One of the early expatriate missionaries, who worked on the islands, commented, "It was a beautiful place, sheltered by reefs from the full ocean

¹ Garry W. Trompf, *The Gospel is not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

forces. The tiny island of Ngongosila was linked to its twin Kwai by a sandbar, exposed at low tide.”²

There are nine clans living together on the two islands. They came from the north, central, and the southern parts of the main island of Malaita. Each of these tribes has their priest and sacred shrine for worship of their ancestors, and a sea passage for their ancestral agent, sharks, on various parts of the islands. The islanders earn their small income from fishing, and bartering goods with the bush people at the market. They also gain income from fishing and subsistence farming on the main island of Malaita, and from making traditional shell money. They are known for their seafaring, and so the expatriates call them “the saltwater people”.

The animistic practices, and the culture, of the Gula’ala people are similar to those of the people groups of Toabaita, Kwaio, Baegu, and Kwara’ae. The Gula’ala people’s language is different from the mentioned groups. The early settlers incorporated their vernaculars to form a trade language, so the islanders were able to communicate with the aforementioned groups (who live along the east coast of the main island of Malaita). This is one of the ways God has prepared the Gula’ala people to receive communication of the gospel message.

In relation to church growth on the islands, the story is incredible. God, in His sovereign plan, led the pioneer missionaries to discover this area. They established a mission base on the island of Ngongosila before they reached out to do missionary work among the bush people on the east coast of the island of Malaita. The power of God’s word turned the animistic islanders to Christ, and now there is no fear of the spirits on the islands, everybody now has the freedom to worship the true God.

1.2 Gula’ala Worldview About Communication

Now we will look at the way in which the Gula’ala people view the world around them. It has to do with their basic assumptions, premises, and values that underline and integrate their culture, and their understanding of

² Alison Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands*, Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1977, p. 49.

their world, and their relationship to it.³ This will help us see the Gula'ala perspective about the reality of cultural communication.

The concept of a cultural communication network is a complex issue to fully explain. It means more than a mere conversation. It is a relational aspect of life that involves and affects people. It is a cultural art of life to the society. In reality, we are dealing with two worlds, the dead and the living.

These two groups are inseparable. They are integrated, are part of each other, and are actively involved in the communication network. It may be described as the link for a supernatural reunion with the ancestors. We believe that the ancestral spirits draw closer to the people during the observation of the traditional ceremonies. They are watching over our lives and our properties. They are listening to our daily conversations. They are monitoring our movements. They have a special knowledge about the people. They are responsive to our cries of desperation, and they are the source for living and survival.

Our communication link with the unseen world helps us to relate to our neighbour, because it works to enhance the relationship between us, and makes us feel responsible for one another. Some questions may naturally arise in one's mind. Is it possible for everybody to communicate directly with the ancestral spirits, or does the role have to be delegated to one particular person in the tribe? How does knowing about communication with the unseen world help us in our communication between people and with God today?

Depending on the situation, the ancestors' prerogatives are displayed. This implies that the spirits can communicate with the fisherman, who call them for help from the ocean, or with the *Fata'abu*⁴ in the *Bae*.⁵ As an illustration the following case is presented.

³ Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 52.

⁴ *Fata'abu* is a title for the custom priest.

⁵ *Bae* refers to the sacred grove.

Case one: Aruiasi was a native of Ngongosila, who was kidnapped while on a fishing trip during the blackbirding era of 1870-1880s.⁶ As the boat sailed out into the ocean, the crews opened the dock so that the natives could take fresh air from the sea breeze. Aruiasi took advantage of the opportunity to escape. He silently communicated to his ancestor for a way out. Then, he called on their ancestral agent, a shark named *Bobo*,⁷ and jumped into the water. Immediately the shark grabbed hold of him, and took him home. Even today, this shark is still alive and active on behalf of his tribesmen.

The above case is to clarify that, on special occasions, the Gula'ala tribesman can communicate with the ancestral spirits, apart from following the traditional procedure.

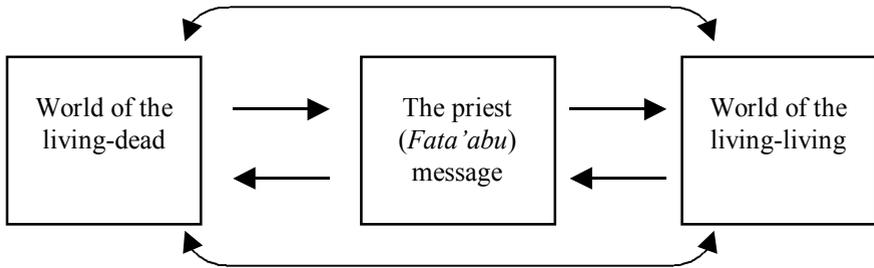
Case two: A man and his son from the Kwailalo tribe went out on a fishing trip. Unfortunately, they drifted far away from home. This incident brought confusion to the people. So the chief made a pledge of a high reward for any searching party who might find them. One particular priest heard about the appeal, and consulted the ancestral spirit for guidance, as he launched their mission. He placed a bow and an arrow on top of the mast of the canoe, and instructed the team to keep following the course of the instruments. At last, they found the fishermen on a small island called Sikaiana, and brought them home.

The *Fata'abu* plays the role of a sender and messenger in the traditional communication network. The people send their message via, the *Fata'abu*, to the ancestral spirits, and the ancestral spirits respond to them in various ways: audibly, visually, through nature, through special revelation, and

⁶ David Hilliard, *The Journal of Pacific History* vol 4, R. H. E. Maude, ed., London UK: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 41.

⁷ *Bobo* means "call to me in times of desperate need".

through divination, via the *Fata'abu*. He is the mediator between the dead and the living.



When we make a comparison between the Gula'ala concept of communication and the Hebrew concept of communication in the Old Testament, we can see the parallelism, especially with the mediatory office of the priest. The priesthood was chosen, or elected, by God, from the line of Aaron of the line of Levi.⁸ They acquired their position by hereditary right. Their occupation of the office was a full-time service.⁹ The priests had to be sensitive to God's instruction concerning their ministry.

In the New Testament, we learn that God was incarnated in human form in Jesus, who has perfectly fulfilled the mediatory office for all believers. Jesus is the great High Priest.¹⁰ He has chosen all believers to be a royal priesthood.¹¹ This is a new implication of the mediatory office, because His dwelling in the believer's life has granted them ability to communicate directly to God, and for God to communicate directly with them. Both direct communication, and communication through a priest, are only shadows of the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament to the church.

2. Towards Effective Communication of the Gospel in Gula'ala

We have seen that communication is a cultural art that has been in place since the primitive era. But, how can we communicate the gospel message

⁸ Num 18:1, 2.

⁹ Num 18:23, 34.

¹⁰ Heb 4:14-5:1-10.

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9.

in meaningful cultural forms in the Gula'ala context? We need to know that communication within the Melanesian culture takes on many forms.¹² However, not all cultural forms are suitable for us to use in the ministry of preaching and teaching. Some of the cultural forms have bad meanings and evil connotations that are inappropriate to contextualise.

Contextualisation of cultural form, with a Christian meaning, is something more than taking the historical and cultural context seriously, it is letting theology speak in and through the context.¹³

Indeed, this is a sensitive issue that needs more consideration, because we need to be aware of the danger of syncretism. It can cripple the true indigenisation and contextualisation of the gospel message. Therefore, we will be specific in our discussion concerning the use of cultural forms in this section. That means focusing on the meaningful form of communication, and evaluating the forms, according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness. "We must know that the cultural forms must always be tested and judged by the scripture."¹⁴

We will discuss the Gula'ala cultural forms in two categories: the audible forms and the visual forms.

Category 1: Audible Forms

This first category covers the activities that can be heard clearly by the sounding instrument, and the linguistic forms that make up a spoken language.

1.1 Praying

Praying is the action of making solemn requests to God or gods. Traditionally, it was the sacred role of the priest to intercede on behalf of the people of the clan, in good times, and in times of crisis. He was regarded as the mediator between the people of the clan and their ancestors.

¹² Darrell Whiteman, "An Introduction to Melanesian Culture", in *Point 5* (1975), p. 56.

¹³ John M. Hitchen, "Culture and the Bible: the Question of Contextualisation", a paper presented at the SPABC Biennial Conference, July 1-5, 1991.

¹⁴ John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, Minneapolis MN: World Wide Publications, 1975, p. 6.

According to the religious practice, he performed the duty in the sacred grove, in reverence, and he called on the ancestral spirits systematically to the prayer liturgy, which consisted of the name of the former priests and the tribal warriors. If he mentioned them incorrectly, or irreverently, the consequences would be serious, even bringing death to him. Therefore, he has to be mindful of this, as he recites the prayers. After calling all the ancestral spirits, he pauses for a while in honour of the mythical supreme father, whom he believes to be superior to the ancestors. There is no specific name rendered to him, yet the priest and the tribesmen acknowledge him as the unseen father.

Oe na wane Dudufa, A'abu, Totofiri, kasi suana lamadua la'a
(You are Transcendent, Holy, Immutable one who lives from everlasting to everlasting)

Oe na wane ta Manu kasi lofo i fafomu
(You are the one, where no bird can fly above you)

Oe na Aofia ne amelu mouri osunamu
(You are our Saviour, in whom we find true comfort)

Oe na wane Kwai fa mouri amelu
(You are our Redeemer)

Oe na wane ni Kwaiofea lea amelu
(You are full of compassion)

Nau Fo'oa anitai i aemu
(I plead with my need at your feet)

The Gula'ala concept of prayer is much like the Africans. Mbiti comments, "Realities include God, who is supreme over all various types of spirit personification of natural phenomena, and objects are regarded as manifestations of God."¹⁵ We believe that when the priest prays, he is communicating to the whole party of spirits.

Traditional prayer can be used as a teaching aid, to show people how to approach our heavenly Father, who is invisible, and is more powerful than the ancestral spirits. This philosophy of praying seems ridiculous to the intellectuals of this world, but to the believers of Christ, prayer is essential

¹⁵ John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion*, London UK: SPCK, 1975, p. 3.

to life. It is one way Christians can communicate with God. It is talking to God and listening to Him.

It is not only a religious rite that must be fulfilled, it is not the utterance of words, it is not the feeling of desires alone, but it is the advance of our desire to God, the spiritual approach of our nature towards the Lord our God. It is the conversing of the soul with God. It is the opening of the heart to God, and it is the turning of the mind to God. Prayer is a spiritual business from beginning to end. Its aim and objective reaches to God himself. Charles Spurgeon said,

If prayer were of the lips alone, we would only need breath in our nostrils to pray. If prayer were of the desire alone, many excellent desires are easily felt, even by natural man. But, when it is the spiritual desire and the spiritual fellowship of the human spirit with the Great Spirit, then the Holy Spirit Himself must be present all through it.¹⁶

Indeed, the Holy Spirit prays for us, and prays with us, as we communicate with our Heavenly Father.¹⁷ All believers need to have the right understanding in our minds as we pray.

Prayer teaches us to learn about giving reverence to God, and praying conscientiously, because we are communicating with a living God, who is holy, loving, and more powerful than the ancestral spirits.

1.2 Sacrifice

Sacrifice refers to the religious practice of offering animals, pigs, possums, and fish to the ancestors. It is a religious obligation for the well-being of the Gula'ala community. "It is an avenue that the ancestors communicate directly with the living-living, and the people with them."¹⁸ This is the only way for purification and expiation of the person's guilt, and to maintain a

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *The Power in Prayer*, Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1996, p. 120.

¹⁷ Rom 8:26, 27.

¹⁸ Roger Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society*, New York NY: Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 140.

harmonious communion with the ancestors, similar to the African. Cornelius Olowola writes:

When in good relationship, the offerer expresses gratitude to the ancestors, seeking favour from them all, through gifts, offering communion, and thanks offering. When the relationship is bad, it is hoped, through sacrifice, to ward off evil and danger.¹⁹

In such cases, traditional sacrifice served as the means to enhance the relationship between the people and their ancestors. To fail the responsibility, means failing the ancestor. Traditional sacrifice is an activity that calls for loyalty to the ancestors and the clan.

Indeed, traditional sacrifice is a meaningful allegory to explain the drama played out at Calvary. It has a rich message to teach mankind the two aspects relating to the work of Christ. Firstly, it shows Christ's obedience for us, in which He obeyed the requirement of the law in our place, and was perfectly obedient to the will of God the Father, as our representative. Secondly, it shows Christ's suffering for us, in which He took the penalty due for our sins, and, as a result, died for our sins.²⁰ If it wasn't for the death of Christ on the cross, there is no remedy for man's salvation. We deserve to die, as the penalty for our sin. But, we thank God for His plan concerning mankind. By His love, grace, and mercy, He initiated our salvation, and demonstrated it, by sending His only Son to fulfil it.²¹ We have been justified and sanctified by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God.²² We are called the children of God.²³ Communion is no longer with the ancestors but with the true God, who redeemed us. We are members of a new family, extended beyond our clans. We no longer need an animal sacrifice to expiate our sin, because Christ has done it on our behalf. We

¹⁹ Cornelius Olowola, *African Traditional Religion and Christian Faith*, Achimota Ghana: African Christian Press, 1993, p. 47.

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrines*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 580.

²¹ Rom 3:23-25, 5:9-11, John 3:16.

²² John 1:29, Heb 9:26.

²³ John 1:12.

have access into God's presence, because the precious blood of Christ has purified us, a Lamb without blemish or defect.²⁴

Furthermore, the sacraments portray the significance of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ for mankind. Firstly, Christian baptism is the ceremony of marking a person's admission into the Christian church, either by dipping him in water, or by sprinkling him with water. It is a sign of new life through Jesus Christ, participating in Christ's death and resurrection.²⁵ Those who are baptised are pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ, and are given a new ethical orientation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They publicly confess that they have a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are brought into union with Christ, and with the saints. It may be interpreted as Christian initiation because the person has publicly declared that he has moved to a new society of faith.²⁶ He has a new master and new tribe. He has changed from his old lifestyle to now walk in the Christian way. Christ has transformed the life, and the act of immersion baptism explains the message to the people.

Since baptism is intimately connected with the corporate life and worship of the church, it should normally be administered during public worship, so that the members of the congregation may be reminded of their own baptism, and may welcome the newly-baptised believer into the church.²⁷

Indeed, the observation of this rite has a part to play in the life of the Gula'ala church today.

Secondly, the eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, is the feast of remembrance of Christ's redemptive work for the church. It is a meal, in which all believers participate, and celebrate their salvation, through Christ. It portrays the same message about the Passover festival for the Israelites

²⁴ 1 Peter 1:19.

²⁵ Rom 6:3-5, Col 2:12.

²⁶ Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Culture*, Techy IL: Divine Word Publishers, reprinted South Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1975, pp. 165-168.

²⁷ World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry", *Faith and Order Paper* 111, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1982, p. 2.

from the power of the Egyptians.²⁸ In the New Testament, it is a festival of a new covenant that Christ gave to His disciples. The Lord's Supper was a liturgical meal, employing symbolic words and actions about Christ's sacrifice.²⁹

To retell the gospel message in the context of this form is very important for the church. This ministry will avoid any false teaching about the sacrament, such as the doctrine of transubstantiation.³⁰ The Lord's Supper is symbolic of Christ's sacrifice for us that has a spiritual meaning for the church. William Barclay paraphrased the message:

Jesus said, this bread stands for My body, which is going to be for you. This cup stands for the new relationship between man and God, made possible by the death, which I am going to die.³¹

The elements that were used in the eucharist don't have magical power. They are only symbolic. Therefore, it would be helpful to use a dry coconut to explain the eucharist in the churches in Gula'ala. This natural fruit is in their context, because the coconut fruit has the two elements together in it. The coconut juice symbolises the blood, and the coconut meat symbolises the bread. This is one of the methods used to present the message of the eucharist, in the frame of the indigenous church in Gula'ala.

1.3 Worship

Worship is the act of approaching God, with great respect, and giving allegiance to Him. In the traditional religion of Gula'ala, the concept of worship is a sacred ceremony, like prayer and sacrifice. They are part of each other. Thus, worship is an acknowledgment of one's dependence on the supernatural being, together with a certain emotional attitude. It is a practical activity in life. It is an activity involved out of man's inward devotion to the ancestral spirits, or man's way of adapting himself to the supernatural. It involves feasting, singing, dancing, working, etc. The

²⁸ Ex 12:1-42.

²⁹ 1 Cor 11:17-34.

³⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, "Eucharist", in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1991, p. 236.

³¹ William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, London UK: SCM Press, 1967, p. 107.

common people had knowledge about how to worship the spirits. They knew that the priest had to walk on his knees, as he worshipped in the *Bae*. Those, who were actively involved in the traditional ceremonies, had to perform with their whole being, to please the ancestral spirits.

To contextualise the form into a Christian context, would be an avenue for introducing the truth about worshipping God, in spirit and in truth. We must lead people to believe in something, or in someone, who is true, so that they can give their allegiance to Him, because, what we believe, will and must, govern our worship. Our faith in God educates us in approaching Him, and enhancing our relationship with Him.

The form of worship speaks of the seriousness of people's devotion and commitment to God. It helps people to express the reality of their religion, and benefits the life of the community. If we are to teach the subject to the indigenous church of Gula'ala, these aspects need to be considered.

Firstly, it is very important to explain the difference between traditional and Christian worship, so that the people will not carry the traditional mentality into the church. They need to be freed from picturing God as their ancestral spirit. The old mentality that their reverence of God is out of fear, believing God will punish them, like their ancestors, for misconduct in worship. If we are not careful, this will lead the church towards syncretism, and weaken its growth. Secondly, it is helpful to encourage the people to express their faith in worship, as their obligation to God. He is worthy of worship, and deserves to be worshipped.

The gospel call is the call to worship, to turn from sin, and call upon the name of the Lord. . . . In our Christian worship, we approach the throne of God, the judge of all. We enter the festival assembly of the saints and the angels. We gather in spirit, with the spirits of just men made perfect. We enter the assembly of glory, through Christ our mediator, and the blood of His atoning death.³²

In fact, traditional forms of worship have paved the way for the people to understand that worship is a serious activity in life, because it creates the

³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1004.

vision for us to be mindful of our attitudes. It is not optional for the church of God, rather, it is the very being of the church. Worship is the life of the church that works to build the relationship stronger. We should take up the challenge to bring the concept of meaningful worship into the church, and in our daily works of life.

1.4 *Storytelling*

This is another effective medium in the field of oral communication. In the so-called primitive society of Gula'ala, the art of storytelling can be integrated with parables, proverbs, drama, and in songs. It was included in their traditional education, in various situations.

Firstly, storytelling occurred at home, in their *luma*,³³ around the fire, while the meal was being prepared, and before the children went to bed. The parents carried out their responsibility of teaching their religion, their history, and the ethical standards of their society. Sometimes, the parents did this when they took their children out into the field. We may call this practical storytelling. It means bringing out the abstract lesson into a concrete form. This method has helped the children to see the reality of the stories, especially some important elements, in relation to their land and sea boundaries that were regarded necessary for their livelihood, and their moral behaviour.

Secondly, storytelling occurred in the *beu*,³⁴ a venue outside their houses. At this stage, the parents passed on their responsibility to the elderly in the community. The elderly were obligated to take turns in telling stories, parables, or reading a poem, because their skill in this area was more highly developed than the young folk. This denotes passing on their faith to the young generation. Young people were indoctrinated with their religions, and their cultural ethical standards, from the early ages of life. The young women stayed under the authority of their mothers at home. This method really helped the children, in their education, and their community life.

³³ The term *luma* refers to the living house that belongs to the whole family.

³⁴ The term *beu* refers to the men's house.

What lessons can be learnt from this traditional form of storytelling? We can see the importance of passing on faith to the young generation. It must begin at home, in the family.³⁵ We need to apply the principles of storytelling in our preaching and teaching of God's word. It is a simple method of relating the message to the whole church, and it provides genuine participation between the storytellers and the receptor. Kevin Hovey comments on the use of storytelling,

1. It permits a relatively-whole message in a simple form.
2. The narrative form permits us to meet the demand of cultural relevance, in both form and content.
3. It prevents serious and harmful restructuring of the new message.
4. The narrative simplicity offers a personal encounter, with a challenging, and already-cultural-accepted relevant message.
5. It provides a form of the message that so closely paralleled their own legends that everyone could immediately begin retelling and sharing the good news with others.³⁶

If we are concerned about making a spiritual impact on the life of the church, we can learn to be creative in our preaching from biblical narratives. We need to present the gospel in a concrete form, because the learning capacity of illiterates and the semi-illiterates using hearing and seeing has a higher percentage than hearing without seeing.

The art of storytelling has been recognised as a helpful activity to communicate the biblical truths. So, the pioneer missionaries, who worked among the Gula'ala people used it.

Jesus has set a platform for our preaching and teaching of God's word, through storytelling. He used to communicate the gospel in parabolic forms, by using simple stories, within the culture of the people. Jesus used

³⁵ Deut 6:4-9.

³⁶ Kevin G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions: A Manual for Cross-Cultural Christians*, Brisbane Qld: Harvest Publications, 1986, p. 216.

the natural environment as a metaphor to illustrate biblical truths, and common objects, such as, light, salt, etc. He presented the gospel at the level of His receptors, and helped them to explore the truth of God's word.³⁷

We should rise up and take the challenge of using this form in the Christian church. Drama and stories make it easier to comprehend spiritual teachings and theology. In reality, the Gula'ala Sunday School, and the youth ministry, have revived this method of dramatising biblical stories, the teachings of Jesus about discipleship, and the theology about the eschatological event. For example, our church youth group dramatised two powerful messages from the Bible with these themes "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:11-27) and "The rapture day, Jesus is coming soon" (Matt 24:36-51, 2 Thess 4:13-5:11). Through these dramatised stories, enacted throughout the Solomon Islands, Nauru, and Australia, many people came to know the Lord.

1.5 Music and Songs

These forms were described as the vehicles that the people use to convey important messages among them, and also to the ancestral spirits. They play an important role in oral communication, because they express the language of the heart to other hearts. The Gula'ala people have their style of music and singing. They make instruments out of bamboo, split wood, and the fruit of a *Falake* tree, from which they construct their rattles. Thus, in relation to their songs, the song composer has to be sensitive to the ancestral spirits. We believe the lyrics of the song are the product of having a special revelational insight from the spirits, transmitted into the mind of the person. As a result of the supernatural revelation, there is music and song for various occasions. The funeral dirges for death give comfort to the family during their bereavement. The war song of victory encourages the warriors, as they prepare to go and fight against their enemy. The love songs about human relationship express love, the dancing song adds joy to celebrations during the annual traditional ceremonies. Music and the songs give the people the emotional freedom to express their inward feelings of what they believe about themselves, and their relationship to the world in which they live. Andrew Midian comments,

³⁷ Luke 10:25-31; Matt 5:13-16; 13:1-43.

The music of the people is valuable. It heightens the consciousness, and awareness of the spirit presence, and creates in them faith to cope with life's challenges. It is both genetic and intentional. . . . Music and songs were inspirational, because they denote some connection with the spirit world.³⁸

Therefore, it is helpful to encourage the church in Gula'ala to make good use of this cultural heritage in music and songs. They are vehicles for effective communication of the gospel message to the indigenous congregations of Gula'ala. They also provide a sense of true freedom for self-expression, where the indigenous church is able to worship God in their cultural style in praise and worship to God. It is encouraging to see that the people are reviving these forms with the Christian gospel. They composed a variety of songs to replace the traditional songs marked out for various occasions.³⁹ The purpose of this action is to bring the gospel to the heart language of the receptors. However, the trends of Western music and songs, flooding into the indigenous church, have an influence on the young generation. This is a challenge for the churches in Gula'ala.

The author recommends that the church have balanced teaching on this topic. We should consider the need of our receptors. We must encourage the song composers, or writers, to provide balanced teaching on biblical doctrine. In this way, we are communicating the full gospel, in music and song to the people, and the indigenous and Western musical instruments, for the glory of God.

1.6 Using Names

In a paternalistic society, like Gula'ala, it was the father's prerogative to give names to the children. It is a traditional practice in the Gula'ala community, because the name of the person communicates a message. It is a cultural art of educating the younger generation about genealogy, about the possession of oral history, about cultural status, and about cultural

³⁸ Andrew Midian, *The Value of Indigenous Music of the Life and Ministry of the Church*, Port Moresby PNG: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1999, p. 21.

³⁹ Timothy Anilafa, one of the prominent indigenous leaders, translated the English sacred hymn book into the Gula'ala language.

trade. We believe that the form of using traditional names makes us feel more secure, because the ancestral representatives are with us. The name can also testify on behalf of the people. This is one of the very important areas, because in the so-called primitive society of Gula'ala, there are a lot of disputes over land and sea boundaries. Therefore, the parents must name their children according to the traditional family tree pattern. This practice is also true for other Melanesian societies.

In the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea, people are named after very prominent leaders of the clan, or even land, to show their role in the society. The name *Katumapula Guyau* denotes that the person would be the next kin by right to be the clan's leader.⁴⁰ . . . This personal identity, for Melanesians, not only binds the living with the living, it also binds the living with the living-dead. It is this ongoing identity that allows Melanesians to relate to their ancestors, through such concepts as history, time, and space.⁴¹

If indigenous names connect to our cultural heritage, how can we use this form to communicate the gospel in the church today?

We need to carefully consider this important question, if the church is intending to adopt the use of meaningful names today. Some indigenous names simplify the gospel message to the level of the receptors, and convey spiritual truths.⁴² It reminds the Gula'ala community about the One who delivered them from physical and spiritual plight. We also learn that biblical names do communicate spiritual messages.⁴³ It speaks about the character of the person.⁴⁴ It gives new insights to the church to reflect upon God's salvation for them. It assures the people, because God is near to them. Thus, the concept of using indigenous names works to enhance the people's relationship with God. Therefore, indigenous names, with biblical

⁴⁰ Ledimo Edoni, informant of Trobriand culture (student of CLTC, PNG, 2000).

⁴¹ Joshua Daimoi, "Hebrews course notes", Banz PNG: CLTC, 2000, p. 47.

⁴² The Gula'ala name *Aofia* means a "saviour" to the salt-water people, and the Kwara'ae people, of Malaita.

⁴³ The biblical name "Peter" means "rock", a prophecy about Simon Peter's faith and ministry (Matt 16:17-19).

⁴⁴ 1 Sam 25:25, Ruth 1ff, Acts 11:26.

meanings, need not necessarily be replaced by biblical equivalence, unless a person chooses to, because of the evil connotations of his/her indigenous name. This is one of the meaningful forms God used to communicate the gospel to the whole world, and to every culture (Is 7:14).⁴⁵

1.7 Blowing Conch Shells, Hitting Wooden Gongs, and Beating Paddles

These three objects were used in Gula'ala culture for community gathering. Although they were used on different occasions, they all have a connection. They all help to signal to the society to do the right things, at the right time, and move to the right place, at the right time.

Firstly, the blowing of the conch shell calls for a fishing trip. Whenever the saltwater people hear the sound, they pick up their fishing gear, and move toward the person, who sent the message. To the islander, fishing together is necessary, and helpful, because it benefits everyone in the community, including the fatherless, and the weak ones. So, as they prepare to set off for a fishing trip, it is necessary to give the signal by blowing the conch shell. This is to avoid bad feelings from those left out of a successful catch. The object can also be used in a marriage ceremony. On such an occasion, it echoes a public invitation for the whole community to the marriage celebration.

Secondly, the hitting of wooden gongs is another cultural instrument to call the community together for special meetings. The people communicate the message by the different rhythm of beating of the wooden gong. We use it to communicate a message about someone who has died, or dancing ceremonies for welcoming visitors. Sometimes, the hitting of the gong, or the sounding of a conch shell, warns of an approaching danger.

Thirdly, the beating of paddle against the canoe conveys a message about the result of a turtle-fishing trip. When the people hear the sound, they gather together to welcome the fishermen. It is a time of great celebration

⁴⁵ "Immanuel" means "God is with us", and refers to Jesus as the Saviour of the world (Matt 1:23).

for the whole community. For the people of Gula'ala, these objects were very useful, because they played a role in communication.

In today's context, they can be useful to give a signal to the people for different church activities. They could work in parallel to the trumpets and horns, which were used by the Hebrew community in the Old Testament.⁴⁶ The priests were appointed to sound the trumpet in worship.⁴⁷ We see that the sender of the message has to be a reliable leader in the community, because the purpose of the forms is to benefit the whole community. Therefore, if we narrow our discussion to the church, the pastors or elders in the indigenous church of Gula'ala are in the better position to use the objects, especially to blow the conch shell, or to beat the wooden split gong, for Christian meetings.

It is good for all the churches in Gula'ala to use them, because we know that not all the people in the church have the money to own a wristwatch, or the ability to read the time. Since the instruments have a part to play in the church, it is better for the church to use them, along with the instruments of today's technology. The two are necessary to give a signal for the illiterate and the semi-illiterate people to come together, and help them to arrange their programmes in such a way as to suit everybody. If we firmly believe that the Christian gospel is for everybody, and is beneficial for everybody, then it is very important to give a signal to remind the people to come and feed from the word of God in the church.

Category 2: Visual Forms

The traditional communication network does not only channel information, through audible forms, but works effectively through visual forms. "This means that the message has been passed, encoded and decoded, putting the message into a form that the respondent can understand."⁴⁸ The signs that we use will depend on the person with whom we are communicating. Thus, the encoding process, and the decoding, must be compatible, that is, they must be able to agree with each other. If they don't, then a wrong message is conveyed, and it causes misunderstanding between the sender and the

⁴⁶ Judg 3:27; Num 10:2; Neh 4:18-20; 2 Sam 15:10; 1 Chron 15:28.

⁴⁷ 1 Chron 16:6; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:35, 41.

receptor. These are some of the meaningful visual forms in the Gula'ala context: fire, small sticks, and decoration. These forms pass on the message to the receptor, by action or sign, rather than spoken words.

2.1 Fire

Fire shows the way, by giving direction to lost fisherman in stormy weather. It is a sign used to call people for help with transportation. It conveys a message to the neighbouring village along the main coastline about a dead person in the community. It is also a sign of a terrible crisis in the community. In regard to the different messages, the saltwater people have marked out certain areas on the island for such occasions. We are still using this visual form of communication today.

Therefore, as we consider the use of fire, we see it has contributed to the art of communication. As well as being used for things, such as, cooking our food, providing light and warmth, and for preserving food by smoking it, fire is also used for reviving a drowned person, one who has suffocated by submersion in water.

There are certain elements of truth in this visual form, which we can use in our preaching and teaching of God's word in the church. Fire has been used in various ways in the Bible, and communicates different messages to the receptors.

We can see that the theophanies of God were sometimes accompanied by fire (Ezek 3:2; 13:21-22; 19:18; Deut 4:11). We see that the image of fire is used to symbolise God's glory (Ezek 1:14), God's protective presence for His servant (2 Kgs 6:17), God's holiness (Deut 4:24), God's cleansing for His servant (Is 6:7), and God's wrath against sin (Is 66:15-16). It is also used for the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11, Acts 2:3), and, in other contexts, the form is used as a literary symbol of sin (Is 9:18), lust (Hos 7:6), and affliction (Ps 46:12).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ David J. Hesselgrave., *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communications*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 31.

⁴⁹ I. H. Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1997, p. 368.

In such cases, it is very important to present balanced teaching of the gospel message. We need to explain how the form symbolises God's attributes, and also how it relates to God's judgment. The Bible teaches us that God loves us, and by His grace He offers us His great salvation.⁵⁰ Those who believe in Him have experienced the blessing of God. He will show His glory to them, and lead them. His presence will be with them forever.⁵¹ But God is against sin, He will turn His face against those who ignore this great salvation. He is preparing a judgment of fire for the evildoers that will never be quenched.⁵² In this context, we are communicating the full gospel to the whole person, and the person needs to make his own decision. We can use this form as an object lesson. It will draw the Gula'ala people to learn more about the message of God's salvation, and help them to be mindful of their relationship with God. The visual form provides a deep theological insight for the preaching and teaching of God's word.

2.2 *Small Sticks*

This method of communication is commonly used for travelling on bush tracks. Whenever the people of Gula'ala want to follow a bush path on the mainland, the leader needs to put small sticks at crossroads. In this way, they are passing on a message to the next group. The small sticks give this message, "Don't follow this path." Sometimes, they put small sticks along the right path. So, it is very important for the leader to explain the code of communication for the team members, as they prepare to go on the mission.

This form is used in the Melanesian region, but it may communicate different messages. "In Vanuatu, if a relative is approaching another, and throws a small stick in front of him, this action communicates sad news, especially the death of a family member."⁵³ In the Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea, the form is used for traditional bride price, as described in this case.

Case three: Kevin Hovey was a missionary, who worked among the Sepik people of Papua New Guinea. One day, the

⁵⁰ John 3:16.

⁵¹ Matt 28:19-20.

⁵² Matt 9:48, 25:41; Jude 7; Rev 20:14.

⁵³ Roy Yosef, informant of Vanuatu culture (student of CLTC, PNG, 2000).

people invited his family to a traditional bride price ceremony. As they were observing the ceremony, his wife saw a bundle of small sticks, and how the people used them to share the price according to the tribe's genealogy. She was impressed about the cultural form, and suggested that they should use the concept with biblical teaching about the genealogy of Christ from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Thus, the theory of the sticks that talk was born. As they used this method of communication, they found that the older people understood the message, so the fame of the ministry spread far and wide in the Sepik province.⁵⁴

One can see how important it is for the church to use this form. For the Gula'ala people, the message of this is to give guidance, or direction, for the people. It can be contextualised to speak about the authority of the word of God, because it gives guidance for them to "Do" certain things, and also a direct "Don't", to stop us from going along that path, or doing that thing. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will help us to discern these things, and to be mindful in our walk with God.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the people used small sticks to make the symbol of the cross. It is meaningful, because the cross reminds the people of Gula'ala about God's salvation for the whole of humanity. It portrays the believer's identity, status, and faith in Christ.⁵⁶ In reality, the symbol of the cross communicates a powerful gospel message for the whole world, about God's love, redemption, reconciliation, peace, and triumph.

The spiritual and physical realms have acknowledged that the cross is the foundation of Christianity, the emblem, which speaks of God's grace, and is the starting point for the Christian walk. Therefore, it is appropriate for the churches in Gula'ala to put the symbol of the cross on the front of, or inside, the church building. It is a public testimony of their identity, status, and faith in Christ, and what He has done for them.

⁵⁴ Hovey, *Before All Else Fails*, p. 156.

⁵⁵ John 16:12-15; Rom 6:11-14.

⁵⁶ Gal 6:14.

2.3 Decoration

As far as the Gula'ala tradition is concerned, there are certain occasions, where people dress up to communicate a message. In a wedding ceremony, the bride will be decorated with the traditional shell money (*tafuliae*). In time of death and bereavement of a loving husband, the widow will dress poorly for 100 days as a sign of mourning (*to'oboni*). For dancing, they will put on traditional costumes, to celebrate the annual festival (*maoma*). This form is practised in the Melanesian world. I have seen this in Papua New Guinea, and I am convinced that it is a cultural heritage in Melanesia.

Though the younger generation tends towards the Western fashion of decoration, they are meaningless in the Melanesian context, because they are not our cultural decoration. I am aware of the trend of civilisation that has affected the culture. However, the way people dress speaks of their identity, and is part of the whole concept of communication. Therefore, we should encourage the people of God to dress modestly,⁵⁷ to please God, and not to offend their neighbours. Let us be mindful and considerate to others.⁵⁸ It is better to understand that God's standard for decorating His church is an inside-out activity. It consists of the spiritual qualities of life.⁵⁹

These visual forms help us to learn that the art of communicating the gospel is an effective educational activity. They create a point of reference for the indigenous church of Gula'ala, to help them understand the gospel message, and to gain theological insight.

3. God and the Cultural Forms

In this section, we will discuss the relationship between Christ and culture. If Christianity has any influence at all, it should touch culture every time it speaks. It is important, then, to have a biblical view of Christ, and also of culture. We have to understand that every culture has elements of divine order, and satanic rebellion. Each has the potential for revealing God's truth, and for concealing, or destroying, it. This issue has created a dilemma that has caused a lot of confusion for the church in Gula'ala.

⁵⁷ 1 Tim 2:9.

⁵⁸ 1 Cor 8:12; Eph 5:15.

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 3:3-4.

Thus, some of the prominent church leaders have raised similar questions as the famous anthropologists,

Is God negative toward human culture? Is He positive? Is He neutral? Does He have a single sacred cultural ideal in mind, such as Hebrew culture? Is He grieved, because we have departed so far from this ideal? Is He in the process of leading the church to produce an ideal Christian culture, or doesn't He care?⁶⁰

If we, the church, affirm to use the cultural forms as the milieu for preaching and teaching of God's word, these questions need to be answered. The church of God will then be balanced in its teaching concerning God's relation with mankind, and God's relationship with creation. People will grow in their understanding of the core purpose for using cultural forms, when to use them, and to whom they belong.

To answer, the controversial issue, H. R. Niebuhr has categorised five views of the relationship between Christ and culture, taken by various theologians.

1. Christ against culture – i.e., Christ is the sole authority; the claims of culture are to be rejected.
2. The Christ of culture – i.e., the Christian system is not different from culture in kind, but only in quality, the best culture should be selected to conform to Christ.
3. Christ above culture – i.e., the reception of grace perfects, and completes, culture, though there is not a smooth curve, or continuous line, between them.
4. Christ and culture in paradox – i.e., both are authorities to be obeyed, and the believer, therefore, lives with two tensions.
5. Christ and transformer of culture – i.e., culture reflects the fallen state of man, in Christ, man is redeemed, and culture can

⁶⁰ Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: a Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 103.

be renewed, so as to glorify God, and promote His purpose.⁶¹ In addition, C. H. Kraft has described the “relationship between God and culture that sees God as above culture, but as using culture as the vehicle for interaction with human beings.”⁶²

These categories are not a rigid area of belief, but are representative of thoughts that have been suggested. Thus, from a biblical point of view there are certain values in one, four, five, and maybe three.⁶³ In the context of this proposal, the author is convinced of the validity of the fifth point for three reasons.

Firstly, we cannot put God and culture in one category, to be treated as equal. God is infinite, and culture is finite. God is holy, and culture has been tainted with sin. If we put them together, it leads to the same disastrous end, in which the church-produced culture tends to be absolutes, while the infinite is reduced to mere finiteness, and the true dynamic of the Christian faith is lost.⁶⁴

The Bible teaches that God communicates to people through Jesus, who portrays His attributes.⁶⁵ The Holy Spirit indwells the hearts of all believers,⁶⁶ and the holy scriptures reveal God’s revelation to us.⁶⁷ We learn that God is sovereign over culture, yet He chooses a simple way to communicate His message. He chooses the cultural milieu, in which humans are immersed, as the arena of His interaction with people.⁶⁸ We cannot put God down to the Gula’ala culture. He knows the right way to reach the heart of the people. The account of the incarnation of Jesus Christ has provided a biblical reference to this argument.⁶⁹ God sent His Son, to

⁶¹ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*, pp. 79-81.

⁶² Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 113.

⁶³ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*, p. 81.

⁶⁴ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69.

⁶⁶ Eph 2:7.

⁶⁷ Hebrews 1:1-4.

⁶⁸ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 114.

⁶⁹ John 1:1-5; 1 John 1:1-5.

immerse into the Hebrew culture, to reach the people with the gospel message.

Secondly, we must know that God is the originator of culture. In Gen 1:31, we read that, after having created the world and mankind, God pronounced that everything was very good. This was the summary of God's relationship to mankind and the environment. He gave mankind a cultural mandate of control over the environment. However, God did not remove Himself from the scene. He continues to have fellowship with His creation, and provide for them. God is sovereign over the whole of creation. But this relationship was interrupted by the fall of man.⁷⁰ Satan took advantage of the situation to manipulate mankind. This caused people to abuse the form of communication, for his purpose, and not for giving glory to God, the Creator. Yet, the story does not end with the fall of man. It continues to show us the grace of God, because God desires to communicate with His people. The fall did not change God's passion for mankind. He demonstrated His love for the whole world by sending Jesus, to come into the world to redeem mankind from the power of Satan.⁷¹ The blood of Christ cleanses our hearts, and by His power, transforms our minds, so that we can use this form of communication for the honour of God.

The church in Gula'ala needs to understand that sin is conceived within the hearts of people, and not in the form of communication. "Culture is not sin, nor, of itself, either an enemy or a friend to God or human. It is, rather, something that is there to be used by personal beings, such as humans, God, and Satan."⁷²

The problem lies in the people's doubt of God, and the people's creation of other images and systems to replace God. Acts 17:16-34 shows us searching for God, like the Gula'ala people during the pre-Christian era. Now, the light of God's word has come, and shows us that we must give our allegiance to the Creator. Kevin Hovey says, "Christianity is comprised of primary allegiance not cultural forms."⁷³ He does not disqualify the

⁷⁰ Gen 3:14-19.

⁷¹ Rom 2:23, 24; 5:8; Eph 2:8.

^{xx}⁷² Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p. 111.

⁷³ Hovey, *Before All Else Fails*, p. 79.

value of using cultural forms, but he wants to emphasise the point that it is important to whom we give our allegiance, as we use the forms. Therefore, we need to be clear-minded, and use the forms for the glory of God.

Thirdly, we know that God is superior, but He is working through culture. The concept of “through culture” is not an event of life, but a process that involves the transformational work of Christ, because we are living in a changing world. “The transforming work of the gospel must begin with its active challenge to the existing cultural system or worldview, which is carried by each individual.”⁷⁴ It is a fact that we should grab hold of it, because it prepares us to communicate the gospel message to others cross-culturally. If we, ourselves, do not experience the transforming power of God in our lives and culture, then we cannot easily preach about this concept to others.

Jonathan Edwards, with his sensitive and profound view of creation, sin, and justification, with his understanding of the way of conversion, and his millennial hopes, became, in America, the founder of a movement of thoughts about Christ, as the regenerator of man in his culture.⁷⁵

I believe this is theologically correct, because Christian conversion is an inward revival within man’s heart. The result of what is happening inside will be reflected outside, through his attitude towards God, his neighbours, and his culture. He is no longer the same person.⁷⁶ He has a new worldview, and the knowledge to take possession of the cultural forms for communication and make them new. Thus, we should know that conversion must also result in new attitudes and relationships, and lead to a responsible involvement in our church, our culture, and our world.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ S. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1995, p. 208.

⁷⁵ David Hoekema, and Bobby Fong, *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 5.

⁷⁶ 2 Cor 5:17.

⁷⁷ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, *The Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee, 1978, p. 22.

God is able to redeem humankind and his culture. He is able to renew a person's mind (Rom 1:1, 2) so that he/she can use meaningful cultural forms for communicating the gospel. Although this is true, the early expatriate missionaries, who worked among my people presented the gospel with their Western culture, because Christianity and civilisation came together. They forbade my people from using traditional instruments. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, He revived the church in 1986, and gave our indigenous leaders a new understanding of our cultural heritage. Through new insights, the musical instruments were reclaimed, and used to accompany Christian worship to the Supreme Creator (Ps 150:1-6).

4. Recommendation and Conclusion

So far, we have learned about the significance of meaningful cultural forms, and their relevance for Christian ministries in the church. As J. H. Bavinck states,

Christ must take possession of heathen forms of life and make them new: Christ takes the life of the people in His hands, He renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated, He fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning, and gives each practice a new meaning, and gives it new direction.⁷⁸

Therefore, I want to make the following recommendations to the South Sea Evangelical church:

1. We are responsible for the work of communicating the gospel in the cultural frame of reference, because God has set an example for us to follow. "For when God speaks He chooses to employ the cultural and linguistic frame of reference, in which those, to whom He speaks, are immersed."⁷⁹ The Bible tells us that God communicated to the patriarchs (Gen 3:9; 4:9; 6:13; 12:1-12; Ex 3:1-4; Num 13:1-4), to the prophets (1 Sam 3:1-21; Jer 1:1-9; Is 6:1-9; Ezek 2:1-10), to the kings (1 Kgs 3:5; 2 Kgs 20:1-11), to the apostles (Acts 1:7-8), and to

⁷⁸ David J. Hesselgrave, *Counselling Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Theory & Practice for Christians*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1978, p. 229.

⁷⁹ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, p.171.

individuals, whom he called to serve Him (1 Sam 3:1-21; Acts 9:1-6). These are but only examples for us to see that God is a God of communication.

Therefore, the church must take up the ministry of preaching and teaching God's word to all men in every culture (Matt 28:19-20), either at home, within its culture, or further away, in another culture. We are Christ's ambassadors for our generation today (2 Cor 5:20,21).

2. We should imitate the life examples of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our model for the ministry of communicating the gospel meaningfully, in the cultural frame of the people. "His teaching was conducted entirely within the philosophical, cultural, and sound orbit of the recipients."⁸⁰

These principles will guide us to communicate effectively, as we learn from our Master. Jesus used parables to explain deep spiritual truths, and uphold the norms of their society. He reached out to meet people's felt need, and identified with His recipients.

3. If the South Seas Evangelical church firmly claims to be an indigenous church, meaningful cultural forms must be part of the church's worship and ministry. Klem comments:

In a predominantly oral society, the church ought to minister and teach, primarily through indigenous oral media. . . . If a denomination, which has a predominantly-oral society, depends primarily upon written material for most of its Bible study and teaching, then, at the heart of its ministry, such a denomination is not indigenous.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Herbert Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1982, p. 86.

⁸¹ Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture*, p. 180.

An indigenous church is precisely one in which all its practices take place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and fulfil the meaning of that society, and not any outside group.⁸²

We should encourage the church to use the forms. If we ignore them, then the claim of indigenisation is invalid.

How can we implement indigenisation more effectively? We should introduce the concept to the leaders of the church in a better way. It should be included in a seminar for leaders. I believe, if the leaders understand the message, and the different hypothesis about Christ and culture, then they will help us to transplant the idea into the church.

In addition, the subject should be taught in the Bible schools. In this way, we are educating the new generation to learn about their cultural heritage. I believe they will discover more insights about this broad subject. We should encourage the ministering of God's word in the mother language of the people, and by using meaningful cultural forms to suit the level of the indigenous people. Harry Box comments, "In order for the gospel message to be relevant to the churches in Melanesia:

1. The message must meet the receptor's felt needs.
2. The message must provide a sensible explanation in terms of the receptor's worldview.
3. The message must communicate clearly, in terms of the receptor's linguistic context.
4. The message must be compatible with traditional values and beliefs.
5. The message must be able to handle all the conflicts between Christian faith and the receptor's worldview.
6. The message demonstrates a relative advantage.

⁸² Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 2nd edn, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1992, p. 152.

7. The message can be validated, in terms of the receptor's culture.
8. The message must be presented through a medium relevant to the receptor.
9. The message must be presented by a communicator, who is respected and accepted by the receptor.”⁸³

To conclude, I want to make it clear that the proposal is workable, only if the indigenous church would put these meaningful forms of communication into Christian ministry, because they are the indigenous media for reaching the illiterate and the semi-literate people in the church. While we are facing the trends of Western civilisation, the church needs to reconsider its role of communicating the gospel meaningfully. The Bible does not disqualify the concept of using the forms. It is very important that we use meaningful communication to help our people understand and grasp the gospel message. The Lausanne Covenant says:

The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures, according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. We wish to endorse this, and to emphasise that, even in this present age of relativity, moral absolutes remain. Indeed, churches, which study the scriptures, should not find it difficult to discern what belongs to the first, or direct encounter, category. Scriptural principles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will also guide them regarding the category of indirect encounter. An additional test proposed is to ask whether a practice enhances or diminishes human life. . . . It is essential, therefore, that all churches contextualise the gospel, in order to share the gospel effectively in their own culture.⁸⁴

⁸³ Harry Box, *Central Issues in Communicating the Gospel in Melanesia with Special Focus on Papua New Guinea*, Ann Arbor MI: University Microfilm International, 1982, pp. 109-128.

⁸⁴ Committee for World Evangelisation, *Willowbank Report*, pp. 32-33.

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