

# SYNCRETISM IN THE MILNE BAY PROVINCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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## **Introduction**

The gospel has been around Milne Bay Province in Papua New Guinea for nearly 110 years. Many people profess to be Christians, and are members of a church. They are expected to attend Sunday services, to listen to the sermons, work for the church, and to have their names registered in their church common roll.

However, the reality is many of these people still employ magic in their daily work: gardening, hunting, and fishing. They acknowledge the use of magic as authentic. They blend elements from traditional religion with Christianity in their everyday endeavours. These people think it is all right to pray to God, the source of power, before employing their magic.

What has the church to offer? How can the clergy involved accept this practice without it seriously colliding with God's righteous will? Can God work in agreement with what He has resolved to destroy? In other words, how can the church clergy help such people experience true conversion, and be transformers in their culture, without being totally immersed in their society.

## **Motivation**

The above questions are a result of a living reality that the writer has seen and experienced in his own area, the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. He grew up with the belief that God approves magic. He even was a recipient of a magician's healing charms. After his conversion experience, he saw God's power repel the powers of the

traditional practices – in other people’s lives, and his own life. This call is for the church to scrutinise its own faith and practice among its followers. Nevertheless, the call involves a better understanding of the people’s worldview and culture, before one can successfully reach them with the gospel.

### **1. The Spiritual Beliefs and Cultural Practices of the Milne Bay People**

The evening clouds drifted slowly over the dense forest to hide the retreating sun. It was time for my mother and me to hasten home from the garden. Every time we came across a track that led into the deep woods, she would stop and sprinkle ashes over the track with these words, *Natudee . . . daked kadewene-ee, kum tayum oo*, which literally means, “my child, this is our track, come with me to our home”. She adhered to this ritual, believing that the spirit of my younger sister, still an infant, whom we had left at home, was following us.

Such awareness and interaction with the spirit world was, and is, part of the pre-Christian culture of Milne Bay. It is the result of the people’s perception of the universe. This perception of the universe is what anthropologists call “a worldview”.

#### **Worldview of the Milne Bay People**

It is necessary to know people’s worldviews. A worldview carves out appropriate, and meaningful, belief systems, norms, and values that are activated in an acceptable behaviour of a culture.<sup>1</sup> For cultural transformation to take place with minimum negative effects, the missionary must be aware of the influence his culture had upon the gospel, and learn more about the people he wishes to reach, so that he can successfully communicate the gospel.

The Milne Bay people view the universe as a living blend of two worlds, the empirical and the supernatural. The physical world is the world of humans, which includes the environment, geography, plants,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kraft defines worldview as, “the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/allegiances underlying a people’s perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions”. C. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 52.

waters, land, animals, fish, and man, with his communities and structures. These communities and structures are governed by norms, value systems, and principles, generated from people's perceptions of reality. The functioning of these elements, in an acceptable level of human behaviour in a community, is called culture. All their physical elements, the nature, and the systems that regulate a human community, belong to the empirical world. This world owes its origin to the spirit world. For this reason, "much of their life is spent maintaining and promoting that spiritual order".<sup>2</sup>

The supernatural world is the world of the spirits. The people believe that these spirits dwell in some physical abode. People promote this view through legends, myths, songs, and dances, and their vivid expressions of pragmatic interaction with the spirits. In this, people find meaning and substance in their cosmos. As Ketobwau wrote, "Nothing happened without the spirits, and nothing was possible without their powers. Their total being and existence depended entirely on the spiritual order that was born in and with them from the very beginning."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the world of the people has its meaning and existence from the spirit world. Everything that happens is a result of the spirit world. Moreover, whatever is done in the physical world will affect the spirits. The border between the physical and the supernatural is "blurred",<sup>4</sup> because the universe is not closed to them.

### **Beliefs in Spirits and Their Powers**

The Milne Bay people believe in three categories of spirits: the pre-existent spirits, the spirits of the dead, and the spirits of the living people. The pre-existent spirits are unborn, metaphysical beings. These spirits are departmentalised, because they are confined, and operate in their own geographical locality. Ketobwau wrote, "traditionally there were many different spirits responsible for different

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<sup>2</sup> Simeon Namunu, "Spirits in Melanesian Tradition and Spirit in Christianity", in *Melanesian Theology Course Notes*, Banz PNG: CLTC, 1999. See also James Knight, ed., *Christ in Melanesia: Exploring Theological Issues, Point* (1977-1&2), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius Ketobwau, "Tuma: The Trobriand Heaven", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1997), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers*, Eastbourne UK: Monarch Publications, 1992, p. 19.

departments within the spiritual sphere”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, these spirits exercise their powers within their own locality, when they are called upon, through chants and rituals. They not only exercise their powers in a limited sphere, but they are also confined in their locality<sup>6</sup>. Hence, it is important to know the spirits, and learn how to interact with them. The more informed a person is about the spirits, the better the chances of avoiding disruptions.

The ancestral spirits are spirits of their deceased relatives. These spirits leave at death, to reside in their paradise.<sup>7</sup> However, the spirits still return to their physical families to help, protect, and bring luck for success. They communicate with them in dreams, visions, and audible voices, when the spirit enters into a relative to reveal a message.<sup>8</sup> The ancestral spirits are venerated and worshipped by the people of Milne Bay.

Thirdly, there is the spirit of a living person. This spirit, which lives inside a person, is the true essence of life. Without it, the person will cease to exist, and the person will die.<sup>9</sup> This intrinsic nature of a person is the very core of life and moral judgment. The spirit of a person can leave his body and move. They can move a great distance, and accomplish things, when empowered by supernatural powers. This is

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<sup>5</sup> Ignatius Ketobwau, “The Trobriand Understanding of Gods/Spirits Compared with the Christian Concept of God”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 9-1 (April 1993), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> The spirits are believed to be owners and original occupants of their abode. The term *totowoho*, a reference to these spirits, has its semantic roots from the word *towoho*, which literally means, “the original owners”. The people of Woodlark Island call them *Legw tanuges*. Those people, who own land, in which the spirits live, usually associate and align with them. The people’s magical powers are believed to be from these familiar spirits.

<sup>7</sup> The Trobriand Islanders call it *Tuma*, and the Misima people call it *Bwebweso*.

<sup>8</sup> Usually, the person who was possessed by the spirit will fall unconscious, sometimes crying. A diviner would use magic to cause the spirit to speak audibly to the relatives.

<sup>9</sup> On Woodlark Island, this intrinsic element of a person is called *Mwayon*. This is the very essence of human life. This understanding can be equated with the Hebrew terms *Ruach* (רוח) and *nephesh* (נפש), which can be used interchangeably to mean, “the very element of life in a person” or the “inner man”. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984, pp. 1615 and 1637.

the very element of a person, who is initiated into, and engages in, activities, such as magic, sorcery, and witchcraft.

Apart from these spirits, the people also believe in a supreme being, and many names are attributed to him, which are given to none of the other spirits. He is the creator and sustainer, and is powerful and everlasting. When all spirits fail, people always turn to him as the last resort.<sup>10</sup>

The spirit world is the source of life and success in everyday endeavours. If spirits are not venerated, then a taboo is broken. The spirits would bring punishment to the communities. The observance of rites, and the offering of sacrifice, are important to manipulate or appease the spirits, for a good cause. At other times, incantations are used to call for power, or to repel disruptions caused by supernatural forces. In this way, people maintain order, bring wealth, fertility, protection, and production into their society. This pragmatic system of beliefs is very much part of people's lives. They are born in, and will live with it, until death. But that does not mean that people are without a rational outlook, and mastery over their environment, as Malinowski acknowledged about the Trobrianders.

The success in their agriculture depends . . . upon their exclusive knowledge of the classes of soil, of the various cultivated plants, of the mutual adaptation of these two factors, and, last, but not least, upon their knowledge of the importance of accurate and hard work.<sup>11</sup>

### **Cultural Practices**

Culture is a product of beliefs, thoughts, actions, and will. All these are formulated into an integrated whole. These elements distinguished man, as a cultural being, from animals. Milne Bay people have developed their culture into an acceptable level of behaviour, to

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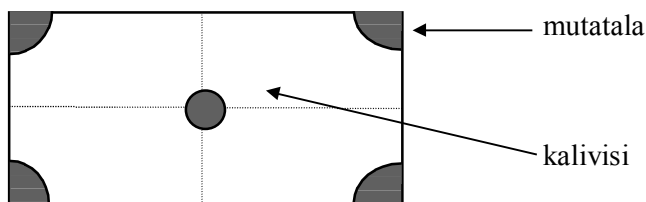
<sup>10</sup> Ronny Tomilesi, CLTC student, May, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic Science, and Religion*, New York NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955, p. 27.

maintain order, and promote human dignity through their value systems.<sup>12</sup>

The Trobriand Islanders have complex gardening rituals. They use herbs and incantations to call their ancestor spirits to come and bless their gardens. From the first clearing of the bush, the burning of it, the division of plots, the planting of seeds, and up until the harvest time, all are blessed with rituals, symbols, and chantings. The magic is performed and buried at the *mutatala* (corner) and *kalivisi* (centre) of the garden. The *tolibagu* (owner of the garden) will continue to incite power for fertility, productivity, and protection from curses until the harvest time.<sup>13</sup>

#### A garden map



The Kula trade expedition involves a lot of time of preparation. The greatest one is canoe preparation. From the cutting down of a tree, to its shaping and finish-off touches, the whole process is vested with incantations for protection from dangers at sea, and witchcraft. At the actual departure, the *toliwaga* (canoe owner) employs more magic for extra measures. Taboos are placed over the canoe for every *usagelu* (passenger) to comply with. The traders would fast, and call upon their ancestors, or other supernatural powers, for successful trade results. The extremist even abstains from sex with his own wives. All these are

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<sup>12</sup> “Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of, and for, behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically-derived and selected) ideas, and, especially, their attached values; the culture system may, on one hand, be considered as a product of action, on the other, a conditioning elements of further action.” Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> M. Kadamwana, Vice-principal of Fatima school, Fatima, PNG, April 2000.

performed to ensure safety, bestow courage, and to provide appeasement, or repel the power of evil forces. Everyone, going on the expedition, one way or another, takes part in communal ritual performances. The magicians always take responsibility in this respect.<sup>14</sup>

Their daily and special vocations, even from a simple woman's chores to a complex man's job, are all interwoven with spiritual meanings. Their belief systems are programmatically activated, to acknowledge, venerate, and worship that spiritual reality. In return, these spirits give power, knowledge, wisdom, wealth, healing, and so forth, to the people. When they are angered, they cause social disruptions that can only be repelled through sacrifice. Thus, the peoples' work and relationships are strongly influenced by this cosmology. Their knowledge and technical skills are second only to their understanding and dealings with this myriad of spirits. To promote a relationship with them is to maintain sociality, stability, and morality, at least according to the belief systems within a society. Thus, the people seek to acquire extra powers from magic, sorcery, and witchcraft to obtain that desired end. However, these arts demand a certain degree of influence from, and obedience to, the spirits that one deals with.

### **Magic**

Magic is a universal phenomenon, defined in many ways. We will take it, here, to mean using herbs, symbols, and incantations to acquire supernatural powers to accomplish missions and work. People use these magical elements and chants to call down spirits and ancestors, to bring forth good. Magic is seen as having individual and communal benefits to a society. Hence, it is passed down from generation to generation, through their lineage.<sup>15</sup> The incantations are verbally transmitted, and the herbs and other elements are introduced to the initiate. The spirit associated with a particular rite or spell is introduced to align with the apprentice. The magic, described above, is common in

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<sup>14</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the West Pacific*, New York NY: E. P. Dutton, 1961, pp. 334-337.

<sup>15</sup> This is further exemplified in the comparative study between Trobriand magic and the Azande of Africa. E. Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 185.

Milne Bay. Without it, gardening, hunting, and so forth, would never be satisfactory. As Malinowski puts it: “All important economic activities are fringed with magic, especially such as simply-pronounced elements of chance, venture, or danger.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, magic is a matter of blending activities between the two worlds, to bring about results, and avoid disruptions, because any activity from man affects, and ignites, repercussions from the spirit world.

### **Sorcery**

Sorcery is a bad magic. A person uses words and objects, invested with supernatural power, to harm others. A sorcerer’s power depends upon his ability to control the powers, to which he has access. They can transmit evil powers into objects, with incantations and activation. When the victim receives the object, like *buai*, he or she will die after consuming it (in the process of imitating the same action cursed by the sorcerer).<sup>17</sup>

Sorcerers can also move, in a metaphysical form, to execute evil, and even visit relatives in distant lands. They possess totemic objects, stones, and hairs of a deceased, to consult spirits, to cause harm and healing.<sup>18</sup>

These people live in a strictly-ordered, yet fearful, life. To break a taboo would mean sickness, and even death. Both the human agent and the spirits interact on daily basis, through chants, rites, sacrifice, and fasting. Sometimes the spirits enter into the agent, as the protagonist in evil activities. Their transfer of power to their next of kin is similar to magic, but with strict taboo. Sorcery is used for accumulating wealth, through bribes, and as protection from supernatural powers and enemies.

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<sup>16</sup> Malinowski, *Magic Science, and Religion*, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup> M. Kedamwana, April 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Yodyod, a sorcerer from a village next to my village, has a walking stick that he used to consult spirits, to kill, and also to heal. He used his powers to control and move the stick independently, and, with it, he called spirits into his house, and, as Simeon Namunu would say, “he owns the spirits”. Namunu, “Spirits in Melanesian Tradition”, p. 111.



## Witchcraft

Witchcraft is notable for its malevolent activities, derived from jealousy, hatred, greed, pride, etc. Witches, who are usually women, use supernatural powers, and evil will, to kill. They move through great distances in their non-corporal bodies, to harm, and even rescue, witch victims.<sup>19</sup> They also meet in coven, to engage in gross immorality, having sex with celestial beings.<sup>20</sup>

Their powers are transmitted from mothers to daughters during infancy. The *Misima* witches take their infant girls into deep bushes by waterfalls. They throw the girl up and down, and, in the course of that action, powers are spiritually transmitted. When the girl grows up, and gives birth to her first child, then the power would be manifested in her. She can see through her spiritual eyes, and move invisibly through great distances.

Witchcraft is invested with evil, to do harm, to lust, and to adulterate with other spirit beings. Their activities are evil in intent, influenced, and controlled, by spiritual forces of evil.<sup>21</sup> They move freely to kill, or even rescue. Witchcraft is considered dangerous. However, at other times, the activity is useful, when used to counterattack others, to rescue witch victims. Finally, not all Milne Bay women are witches; the same with sorcery and magic; only some people practise the arts, and people tend to use them by paying bribery.

To conclude, the Milne Bay people have a pragmatic belief system that is enhanced through rituals, symbols, and chants, to cause the spirits to act on their behalf. Their knowledge and skills, however important, are

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<sup>19</sup> J. Taruna tells of a small girl's soul being removed by a witch, in an attempt to kill her. Another witch went in and rescued her soul. Joseph Taruna, "God's Power Exceeds Melanesian Powers", B.Th. thesis, Banz PNG: CLTC, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ronny Tomilesi said that the *Misiman* witches meet with *Tamudulele*, and other spirits on Walay Island to have sex and coven. In this way, the witches align with many spirits to kill. *Tamudulele* is renowned for his killing activities through Milne Bay area. Tomilesi, May 2000.

<sup>21</sup> My cousin's wife, who was a witch, travelled invisibly from her island to ours, to kill her husband for not visiting her. A sorcerer saw her and learned of her plans, came and warned my cousin. He was angered, and told the sorcerer to kill her, and he did it. A couple of days later, the news of her death reached us.

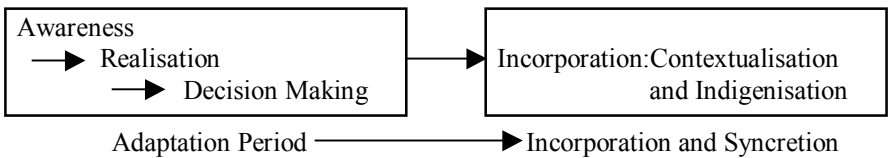
second to these belief systems. They grow up with this knowledge, and to promote, venerate, and worship, the spirits, for success and meaning to life. Others are aligned with the spirits, like the magicians, sorcerers, and witches, and are greatly influenced, and even possessed, by them. However dangerous it may seem, these are considered important associations for them and their well-being, at least from human point of view.

To reach them with the gospel in a powerful and meaningful way, one has to know this. They cannot be converted easily, through demythologising them, but by allowing the gospel, with its surpassing power, to challenge the very core of their pragmatic belief system. As Tippett correctly observed; “Western missions might do well to face up to the statistical evidence that animists are being won today by a Bible of power encounter, not a demythologised edition.”<sup>22</sup>

## 2. The Gospel’s Impact Upon Milne Bay Culture

This section discusses the interaction and impact between the gospel and Milne Bay culture. What changes have, or have not, occurred? Has spirit worship been eradicated, and the culture transformed? The answer is not a straightforward “Yes” or “No”. Many professing Christians are still syncretistic. They have not experienced true conversion. Their inclusion in the church, as members, is only through adaptation, and not genuine saving faith. Power encounter is an ideal religious phenomenon to precipitate a true conversional experience.

Model One: Typical Milne Bay Christian Experience



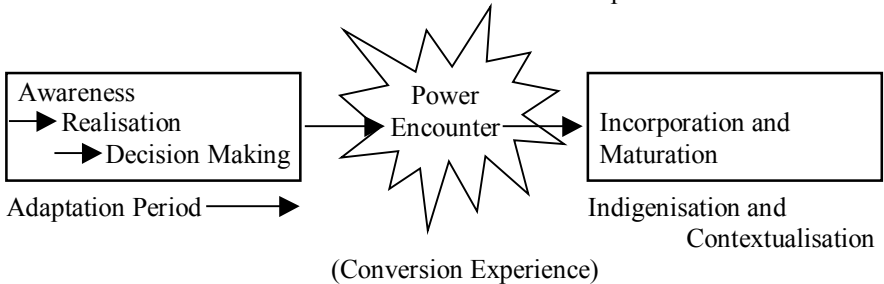
Many Milne Bay people are incorporated into the church membership through this process model. They have not had a true religious

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1987, p. 312.

experience, through a power encounter, to precipitate genuine conversion. Thus, they end up syncretistic.

Model Two: The Ideal Christian Experience



Some, or even just a few, have gone through this process. They have adopted the faith, after receiving it. At their conversion experience, they were challenged to lay down their cultural goals, worldview, and allegiance, to take on the goals of the gospel, and to change their worldview, and allegiance, to Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

### Adaptation

The adaptation period is when missionaries, through their evangelism attempts, their Christian presence, and their Western benefits, introduce the receptor culture to Christianity. Both the Western Christian culture and the receptor culture (in this case Milne Bay) had met to establish a dialogue for acculturation.<sup>24</sup> In accommodating the Western Christian

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<sup>23</sup> David Price, "The Protestant Understanding of Conversion: and its Implications for Missionary Obedience", Ph.D. dissertation, Pasadena CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979, pp. 396-408.

<sup>24</sup> Acculturation is a process of accommodation by any one culture when in confrontation with another culture. Effective acculturation will allow the people of the receptor (and the incoming) culture to maintain their own principles, values, norms, beliefs, and allegiances, while coping with the challenges and opportunities of the incoming culture, with minimum strain. Marvin. Mayers, and Stephen Grunlan, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1979, p. 85.

culture, the primitive<sup>25</sup> Milne Bay people maintained their cultural goals, while trying to benefit from the counterpart.

The missionaries administered peace, and supplemented the people's traditional tools, clothing, medicine, and education with their Western ones. With these benefits, and the enforced rule of the colonial government, the people of Milne Bay were drawn into accepting the missionaries, and adapting their religion. Later, the missionaries reported that, within two years, they had a following of 5,790 attending Sunday services, but they also wrote, "this was first merely the adopting of the external forms of the new religion".<sup>26</sup> The missionaries realised this, and were working hard to convert the people. It was, and still is, not enough, at this adaptive point, to assume a genuine conversion.<sup>27</sup>

It was said that the church was planted, and bloomed, because of a woman, who had died, and came back to life.<sup>28</sup> This event precipitated the first conversion of the Milne Bay people, after years of evangelistic attempts. Many such *ad hoc* experiences had furthered the growth of Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Without these experiences, people would have continued in their superficial adaptation of Christianity. It is possible that some lived and died without this true conversional experience.

There are reasons why not everyone in the church has had a true conversional experience.<sup>30</sup> For example, Dian said that many of the

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<sup>25</sup> I used this word to mean the virgin, unexplored people, and not to be the negative extreme of ignorant barbaric people.

<sup>26</sup> R. Williams, *United Church Papua New Guinea and Solomon Island*, Rabaul PNG: Trinity Press, 1972, p. 187.

<sup>27</sup> J. H. Bavinck said, "Adaptation of customs that are not necessarily essential to the gospel will scarcely lead to anything other than a syncretistic entity." J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, Philadelphia PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960, p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Simeon Namunu, in his paper, "Spirits in Melanesian Tradition and Spirit in Christianity", pp. 109-112 and 118, argued that the Melanesian need for religious experience should be legitimised by a guided Christian experience, in order for the people to wholeheartedly embrace Christianity in a deeper meaningful way, other than observing the liturgy of the church at a superficial level.

<sup>30</sup> This includes all denominations existing in Milne Bay area.

United church members in Suau were brought into the church through its catechism programmes. They did not have a meaningful conversional experience.<sup>31</sup> As a result, many are leaving to join the Pentecostals.<sup>32</sup> This implies that the church must help those “unconverted members” change their allegiance to Christ alone. It is not enough to bring people into the church, through mere observance of the church programmes and liturgies. To do this, without meaningful individual, or communal, religious experience, is to bring more unconverted members into the church. The unconverted members will result in a less-pure church, liberal doctrines, and other kinds of unbelief practices.<sup>33</sup> People should be led from this misconception, into a true conversional experience, through a power encounter.

### **Power Encounter**

A power encounter involves ministry of the word, counteraction by the Christian’s life, and manifestations of power by the Holy Spirit, against the evil forces, in order to rescue people from the dominion of darkness.

Power encounter is the demonstration by God’s servant of God’s incomparably great power for us who believe (Eph 1:19), based on the works of Christ (Col 1:15), and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), in confrontation with, and victory over, the works of Satan and demons (Luke 10:19) . . . resulting in the glory of God and the salvation of the lost.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “We are clear that the fundamental meaning of conversion is a change of allegiance. Other gods and lords . . . idolatries, everyone . . . previously ruled over us. But now Jesus Christ is Lord. The governing principle of the converted life is that it is lived under the Lordship of Christ, or the kingdom of God.” “Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture”, in *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation: The Willowbank Report*, Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee, 1978, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> H. Dian, “Encounter with the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 13-1 (1997), pp. 12-14.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, p. 980.

<sup>34</sup> K. Baker, “Power Encounter and Church Planting”, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 26 (1990), p. 310.

In the Milne Bay area, churches have been planted, and now flourish, because of God's manifested power, and continuous ministry of the word, and authenticating actions of the believers. In the past, power encounters have led to conversions. In the contemporary church, there are also examples of power encounters that have resulted in spiritual renewal.<sup>35</sup> However, the point is that a power encounter precipitates a true conversion for a Milne Bay person.<sup>36</sup>

A power encounter authenticates the claims of the gospel; it also affirms, and correctly debases, the Milne Bay people's perception, and spiritual pragmatism. To demythologise them, is to forcibly submerge their pagan practices. As a result, we will bring more unconverted members into our churches. "A power encounter is the natural outcome of a correctly-gear'd ministry."<sup>37</sup> It challenges, and changes, people's allegiances from spirits to God, in Jesus Christ. Without this conversion, people cannot, and will not, be able to know God, and experience a true transformation and maturation in Christian life.<sup>38</sup>

### **Indigenisation and Contextualisation**

These two terms have the same purpose: to meaningfully incarnate the word of God into a given culture, to bring about growth, to address

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<sup>35</sup> A local church in Divinai experienced spiritual revival through power manifestations during camps and crusades. In 1993, the church in Woodlark bloomed, when the power of God moved to heal, reconcile people, and challenge the power of darkness. Many such reports can be said about other areas within the province.

<sup>36</sup> In stating the place of a power encounter in conversion, the *Lausanne* papers quote, "A number of us, especially those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, have spoken both of the reality of evil powers, and of the necessity to demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus over them. For conversion involves a power encounter. People give their allegiance to Christ, when they see that His power is superior to magic . . . and the malevolence of evil spirits, and that His salvation is a real liberation from the powers of evil and death." "Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture", p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions*, Brisbane Qld: Assembly Press, 1986, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> In 1998, a family told me that my own village pastor had advised the family to seek healing for their teenage girl from a witch doctor. Evidently, many clergy are holding to this compromised view, and they are denying any such need for conversional experience to many of the incorporated, yet unconverted, members of the church. However, there are others, who are enjoying fullness of life, because of their personal, or even communal, experience with God.

each culture's issues, and to reach spiritual heights, in all spheres of life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both coexist in this frame of reference.

Indigenisation, a term used first by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, means, "a national church has been produced, which shares the life of the country, in which it is planted, and finds within itself the ability to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself".<sup>39</sup>

Contextualisation, which has its roots from incarnational theology by Karl Barth, and ethnotheology,<sup>40</sup> seeks to recover an effective communication of the gospel, and endeavours to extricate the gospel from Greek epistemology, and Western scientific thinking, into a specific cultural context.<sup>41</sup> The pioneering missionaries employed these two disciplines in Milne Bay.

We aim at saving Dobu (another island in Milne Bay), not by restrictions from without, but regeneration from within; we sought not to abolish, but to redeem. Native customs, not, in themselves, essentially debasing, were to be made points of Christian contact and instruction, and the older order, where possible, the vehicle of the new spirit.<sup>42</sup>

Down through the generations, faithful messengers and believers have shared the gospel, and lived a godly life. The matter of concern is for those who have not made a clear break from past spirit worship and magic. They profess to be Christians, and, at the same time, show compatibility with the old religion. Thus, indigenisation and contextualisation, especially for those who are ministering God's word,

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<sup>39</sup> Melvin L. Hodges, "Why Indigenous Church Principle?", in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles Kraft, and Tom Wisley, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Richard L. Heldenbrand, *Christianity and New Evangelical Philosophies*, (Indiana: Words of Life, 1989, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Chan, "Second Thoughts on Contextualisation", in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9-1 (1985), p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *United Church Papua New Guinea*, pp. 91-92.

are never successfully achieved. It is a polluted exercise, a compromised hermeneutics, and a syncretistic faith.<sup>43</sup>

If this is the common view of many of the people within the Milne Bay churches (and I believe it is), how can the church address the issue? If contextualisation is aimed at addressing contemporary issues, then the church is in a right position to be prophetic, to call people back to the word of God, and to challenge, and change, the situations it is in now. If the church calls for, and precipitates, a turn away from traditional religion, and a turn to God, then the church would become a true witness in faith and in action, then indigenisation and contextualisation is authenticated. To ignore this, is to be ineffective, compromising, and syncretistic; at least for those who are unconverted.

### **Syncretism**

Syncretism is an attempt to reconcile two or more opposing elements of religion, in hope of creating a new one. It denies any unique revelation, thus blending traditional religion and Christianity, as ways from and to God. It is the adding of traditional elements, and leads to the watering-down of the uniqueness of Christ.<sup>44</sup>

Syncretism in Milne Bay is an addition, and accommodation, of traditional elements with Christianity. They acknowledge God's work, supremacy, salvation, and even His lordship, through Jesus Christ. That is why people pray to God, before employing their magical powers. They believe that good spirits, and their powers, are from God, the people see it is fitting to seek power from spirits, and get affirmation from the true source of power. However, people's eschatological hopes are still upon God, whom, they believe, will determine all things.

Thus, we see that people are seeking pragmatic powers, to necessitate the desired ends. Their worldview has programmed such a belief and

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<sup>43</sup> An informant said that magic is not totally bad, there is good magic that must be maintained and used for gardening, fishing, and healing. The people should pray first to God before employing the good magic. But the bad magic, used to kill or harm others, should be totally eradicated. Kadamwana, April 2000.

<sup>44</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name*, London UK: SCM Press, 1963, p. 10.



practice. As animists, they see it as fitting to consult all sources, for power, and to avoid angering any that might disrupt the physical society.<sup>45</sup> All these are a result of wrong teaching, ineffective witnessing by those, who, themselves, are immersed in that depravity, suppression, and blinding of sin by Satan, with his demons, who are directly capitalising on these practices, to keep people in this abyss.<sup>46</sup>

For a century now, the gospel has been in Milne Bay. We acknowledge that God has done great things throughout this history. People have been converted, and they have impacted their culture and society, through their words and actions. That is why the light of such faithfulness is still existing and impacting now. But it shows here that there are still unconverted people within the church, whose allegiance and beliefs are divided.

The call now is more than just urging people to turn away from their pragmatism – their traditional beliefs and practices. It is not a call out of culture, but a call for people to let go of their intermingling with spiritual forces of darkness. It is a call to total allegiance and love to God. To be in their own culture and society, impacting it by the power of the Holy Spirit, and not be immersed in its antagonistic lifestyle.<sup>47</sup>

### **3. Biblical Answers to the Above Challenges**

To begin this discussion, we will examine the relationship between Christianity and culture, according to Richard Niebuhr. It gives us an understanding of where to start. Then we will deal with the problem of syncretism in the Milne Bay area.

#### **Christ and Culture**

Richard Niebuhr suggests five models, in an attempt to try and describe the relationship between Christ and culture.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Bruce Blowers, *Religious Syncretism*, a paper, Kudjip PNG: Nazarene Hospital, March 1972, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hinton, "Cross-Cultural Communication Course Notes:.

<sup>47</sup> Visser 't Hooft, *No Other Name*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York NY: Harper Brothers, 1951. (1) Christ against culture is a position that denies any relationship between the two, pp. 45ff. (2) Christ of culture is the opposite of the above view, the two are totally immersed in each

### **The Syncretic Milne Bay Christians' Position**

It may seem that this particular people interchangeably hold onto the third and the fourth views. However, it is impossible to determine this presumption without any adequate primary data. It is evident that this particular group has held, and are holding, to the fourth view – Christ and culture in paradox.

Being informed basic biblical truths, the people are aware of the tension between their cultural beliefs and practices and the biblical faith. There are some parts of their culture that they do realise as good, and worth preserving. The art, skills, knowledge of work, social systems and values, that promote communal relationship and morality, are all worth holding on to. On the other hand, the reality of the tension that Christianity is in conflict with some of the Milne Bay practices does not compel the people to abstain from such practices. There is very little preaching against such practices. People either react negatively, or submerge the practice,<sup>49</sup> when there is a mention about these malevolent acts.

Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are practised within Christian circles. These are done, either in secret, or openly, where certain clergy speak well of such things, especially good magic. A person prays to get some kind of affirmation in practising his own magic for healing, gardening, or so forth. Protective magic is used in guarding one's property (called *silami*). These are commonly practised in many parts of Milne Bay, and especially by those mere churchgoers.

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other, pp. 83ff. (3) Christ above culture is a synthesist position, which recognises the need to obey both as requirements, pp. 116ff. (4) Christ and culture in paradox realises the tension between the two, but live in obedience to both Christ and culture, pp. 149ff. (5) Christ the transformer of culture is a conversionist, and the traditional church view. Culture is tainted by sin, but it can be redeemed by a redeemed man, pp. 190ff.

<sup>49</sup> Premarital sex is allowed in many parts of Milne Bay, and young people get married in this way. Very little is said against such practice that really is an important truth that links with the sacredness of sex only within marriage circles. People obtain magical portions for love to lure the opposite sex into premarital sex. In 1998, I was confronted with a case, where a young girl, who was faithful in her Christian walk, was involved in premarital sex. This gave me a chance to speak strongly against such practices with a gentle, but firm, private rebuke.

The Bible clearly teaches that these antagonistic practices (against God) should not be held, hand in hand, with Christian beliefs and practices. People go to Sunday services, they embrace and acknowledge the Lord Jesus and His works, and they try to please God by being obedient to the requirements of the church, and by working for the church. However, they still hold on to the other tension. Moreover, the result is that church life is dwelling in a grey, obscure area, regarding faith and practice. The allegiances of the old are not transferred, in their entirety, to Jesus Christ. There can be no real transformation in the culture without this change of allegiance. As the Lausanne papers contended:

once Christ has taken His rightful place, everything else starts shifting . . . this new, liberating allegiance leads inevitably to a reappraisal of every aspect of our lives, and, in particular, of our worldview, our behaviour, and our relationship.<sup>50</sup>

The people of Milne Bay cannot, and will not, experience the real power of God, a transformed life, if they continue to hold on to this paradoxical faith and allegiance.

### **The Ideal Model for Milne Bay People**

Christ, the transformer of culture, is a conversionist view, which recognises that culture was good, but now it has been tainted with sin, and some of it is evil. God created man a cultural being. The fall has brought about the distortion of God's image within a man, and evil effects upon his culture.

The problem is not the cultural forms, but it is within man himself.<sup>51</sup> Man's allegiance changed from God to Satan, and self, right from the fall. As a result, the focus of culture has deviated, and is immersed in sin. However, Jesus' death paved the way for man to be reinstated to his former allegiance with God,<sup>52</sup> and to transform his culture, to the glory of God, by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' incarnation is the undeniable fact of a redeemed person living within the corrupt world, yet not be part of its evil practices. This same God can empower

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<sup>50</sup> "Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture", p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, pp. 103-106.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Cor 5:17-20.

all, who are redeemed, to be salt and light of the world.<sup>53</sup> When the heart is in its right place, then the words and actions will be right.

The skills and knowledge of work is important for survival. Trading, feasting ceremonies, and singing are places for the expression of joy, sorrows, and a time of building of relationships. Such cultural practices should be retained, modified, and used to the glory of God. The people of Milne Bay need only to transfer their primary allegiance, in the course of these practices, from the myriad of spirits to God. The change of allegiances does not mean eradicating, or explaining away, the awareness of the spirits, and the spirit world. The knowledge and awareness of the spirit world should be corrected and enhanced by Christianity.<sup>54</sup> The sense of the spirit world should be used as a point of counteraction between the Christian worldview against an animistic worldview, to bring people to salvation in Christ. This will be elaborated upon later. However, with their changed allegiance, the people of Milne Bay will be led by the Holy Spirit to live transformed lives in their own society. Ketobwau said:

For only a Trobriand Christ can change the Trobriand culture. His spirit, which indwells Trobriand Christians, will enable them to bring forth reformation and change to their own society.<sup>55</sup>

However, there are other practices within the Milne Bay cultures, which cannot be redeemed at all, because they are morally and ethically wrong. In the Kula trade expedition, there is the practice of *Buyavin Kuwsilay*. In this, the traders are involved in celebrations, and immorality, that is believed to be the result of the successful working of the magical charms for the Kula trade. This kind of immorality is to be renounced, and destroyed. Such practices are biblically condemned as immoral, and as pervasive acts. God hates sexual sin, such as

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<sup>53</sup> Matt 5:13.

<sup>54</sup> Morris Inch may have had the same thought when he quoted C. S. Lewis' idea of sensing God (nominous). He wrote, "we may sharpen our recognition skills by reflecting on the fear we experience concerning wild animals, introduce a supernatural aspect by substituting ghosts, and finish off with a sovereign Spirit, who controls our life and destiny". M. Inch, *A Case for Christianity*, Wheaton IL: Tyndale House, 1997, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Ketobwau, "*Tuma*", p. 35.

fornication and adultery. When a person joins his or her body in sexual sin, the person is sinning against God, and himself (1 Cor 6:18-20).

### **Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft**

The Bible is explicit about God's condemnation against practices, such as magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. The Lord warned His people, the Israelites, to be completely free from all such practices. Anyone found practising such things should be stoned to death.<sup>56</sup> He considered such practices as an act of spiritual adulteration, because He is a jealous God, and tolerates no rivals.<sup>57</sup> God desires His people to be completely loyal to Him (Ezek 13:23).

The New Testament advanced these directions, showing antagonistic confrontations, and condemnation, towards such practitioners.<sup>58</sup> God's word never made distinctions between good and bad magic, both are considered magic, and are, therefore, an abomination to Him. There is no compromise between light and darkness, between God and Satan. The Bible shows this is an irreconcilable difference. Satan is the source of every evil, and God is the source of every good. To think that praying, before administering magical charms, is all right, is to try to reconcile Satan and God.<sup>59</sup> How can God work together with what He will destroy in the end? It is either God, or the people of Milne Bay, who are falsifying the truth about reality. In all matters, "let God be true, but every man a liar".<sup>60</sup>

Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are powers, derived from the spiritual world. The Bible identifies these as from deceiving spirits. Christ came to set the people free from their bondage.<sup>61</sup> He came to deliver people from the influence of these spirits. The influences of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft bring about false hopes and fears. However, the influence of the Lord Jesus Christ is one full of true hope and love.

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<sup>56</sup> Deut 18:10-12; Lev 20:6, 27; Is 2:6; Jer 27:9; Ezek 13:18-20; Mic 5:12.

<sup>57</sup> Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 6:15.

<sup>58</sup> Acts 8:9-24; 13:16-ff; 16:16-18.

<sup>59</sup> Gal 5:20; Rev 21:8b; 22:15.

<sup>60</sup> Rom 3:4.

<sup>61</sup> Col 1:13-14.

The true transformation of culture occurs when Christ comes into one's life, and delivers the person from the powers of the beguiling spirits, and their false notion about life. Then the Holy Spirit will instil the mind of God<sup>62</sup> into the person, to live in accordance with God's will and glory. Any part of a culture that does not bring glory to God, or promotes immorality and knowledge against God,<sup>63</sup> is of the enemy. It should be challenged, and people must be rescued from the devil's grasp.

#### **4. Deliverance Ministry in Focus**

Deliverance is a form of power encounter, because it involves counterattacks by the servants of God upon the grip of the enemy, with the aim of freeing the people from malevolent spirits, allowing them to be open to Christian faith and practice.<sup>64</sup> To engage in such ministry, one has to be well prepared.

#### **Preparation for Deliverance Ministry**

Jesus' words, in Mark 9:29, stress the importance of committed prayer and fasting. Earnest prayer involves confession of sin, and a genuine seeking of God's mind, for answers to problems and situations. Jesus' earthly life was soaked with prayer,<sup>65</sup> so that He was able to minister with authority and power. His authority and His power were always authenticated by healing, exorcism, and many other signs and wonders. Prayer accomplishes great things for God. Down through the centuries, great revivals, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, have occurred, because of prayer.<sup>66</sup> Ronald Dunn writes,

Prayer is not a religious exercise, it is a human necessity. . . . I discovered that prayer is the secret weapon of the kingdom of

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<sup>62</sup> 1 Cor 2:15.

<sup>63</sup> 2 Cor 10:4-6.

<sup>64</sup> Power encounter is more than just a challenge between two deities, or religions it is a challenge between two worldviews, two belief systems, and two cultures. The weaker side will always sway towards the victory side (see Ex 7-10; 12:29-36; Josh 1:8-13; 1 Kings 18). David Burnett, *God's Mission: Healing the Nations*, Bromley UK: Send the Light OM, 1984, pp. 84-88.

<sup>65</sup> Heb 5:7.

<sup>66</sup> P. Yonggi Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival*, Milton Keynes UK: Word Publishing, 1984, pp. 8-10.

God. It is like a missile that can be fired towards any spot on earth, travels, undetected, at the speed of thought, and hits its target every time. . . . Satan has no defence against this weapon, he does not have an anti-prayer missile.<sup>67</sup>

Paul said that true spiritual battles are not won simply by putting on the whole armour of God, but are won by the mighty power of God, drawn upon through prayer.<sup>68</sup>

Fasting is an important ingredient of prayer. When these two are mated together, God's power can accomplish mighty acts. Andrew Murray said that prayer and fasting are like two hands. To fast and to pray is to surrender oneself, and allow Jesus' presence to come down to our situation.<sup>69</sup> Both prayer and fasting sharpen our spiritual vitality, to discern, and to react, accordingly, when engaged in deliverance ministry.

Secondly, a person needs to be grounded in the word of God. Since the enemy does use the word to attack any genuine work of God,<sup>70</sup> a Christian must be thoroughly equipped, and correctly handle the word of God, in order to use it to reclaim the ground, formerly held by the devil.<sup>71</sup> The word of God sharpens the effectiveness of a Christian to discern every pretence and falsehood, within and without. It has the potential, within itself, to remove spiritual bondages and influences.<sup>72</sup> As F. MacNutt says, "The gospel is not meant to merely teach doctrine, but, necessarily, includes the power to free, save, and heal."<sup>73</sup>

Thirdly, a Christian, who desires to engage in deliverance ministry, should exercise love. Compassion must be shown to those who are

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<sup>67</sup> M. Bubeck, *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1995, p. 95.

<sup>68</sup> Eph 6:10, 18-19.

<sup>69</sup> D. F. Kelly, *If God Already Knows: Why Pray?*, London UK: Cox & Wyman, 1995, p. 177.

<sup>70</sup> Matt 4:1-11.

<sup>71</sup> 2 Cor 10:3-6.

<sup>72</sup> A spiritual bondage of infirmity was broken by the power of the word during Paul's ministry in Lystra, see Acts 14:8ff.

<sup>73</sup> Francis MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1996, p. 66.

ministered to. Jesus showed it, and Paul commended it.<sup>74</sup> Love and compassion in ministry will guard against abuse of gifts, and the pride of heart. It also shows a need for guarding people's dignity, when ministering to them. Love helps restore inner healing, especially to those who are emotionally, or psychologically, upset. In deliverance ministry, one must know that the struggle is against evil spiritual principalities and powers. We are waging war, by God's divine power, to help people to receive their full restoration in Christ Jesus.

### **Deliverance and Exorcism: Teaching the Word of God**

The faithful ministry of God's word is important to correct any misconceptions of the people about the truth of God. The Israelites were in total depravity, because the priests failed to teach the Law of God.<sup>75</sup>

The problem of syncretism in Milne Bay is clearly an evidence of the lack of faithful teaching of the word of God. Some clergy cannot teach the truth of God, because they, themselves, are not truly converted. Thus, the members they lead, are compromised in their minds, they are not convinced about the things of God. They still see it fitting to consult many spiritual sources for power and success, and yet maintain some form of allegiance to God. They still use magic, and acknowledge those who practise it. No one, who has gone into serious study of the word, can ever come out with a compromised mind. The word of God is powerful in itself; it can change one's life, and influence those who hear it.<sup>76</sup> As Spurgeon wrote,

Our own reading can have a profound effect on us as individuals. To understand the message of the word of God is, indeed, to let loose forces in our lives as powerful as a lion.<sup>77</sup>

The word had great impact upon many people, because it was accompanied by praying and fasting.<sup>78</sup> The powerful word of God

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<sup>74</sup> Matt 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 15:20; 1 Cor 13.

<sup>75</sup> Hos 4:6.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows*, p. 191.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*



judges the mind and the heart of every person, and corrects all false knowledge, in order to impart the true knowledge of God. The church in Milne Bay must assess its own situation, discern its own problems, and give ear to what the Holy Spirit has to say. The Holy Spirit has the mind of God, and, whatever word He gives, it shall not go unchecked, but shall accomplish what God desires for His church.<sup>79</sup> The word of God, given by the Spirit of God, has its own appealing powers, because it is the message of deliverance from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of God.<sup>80</sup>

### **Deliverance from Spiritual Influences**

Deliverance involves praying to break the yoke of bondage, so that people may be freed from compelling, sinful actions and practices, influenced by the beguiling spirits. Secondly, deliverance also involves exorcism of possessive spirits.

It is undeniable that sin is the result of human weakness. Sinful actions can become an open door for enslavement by the enemy and his evil forces. Hence, people become slaves to that spiritual struggle. Scott Peck says,

there is a struggle going on between an intact human soul and the infesting demonic energy . . . that all causes of what we call possession ought, more properly, to be referred to as partial possession, or imperfect possession.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, the spiritual influences are not from within the people, but rather from without. The spirits that align with the people of Milne Bay, in all endeavours of their lives, continue to imprison the people, to operate in their own defined spheres. The spirits blindfold the people to the truth of God, in order to enslave them in sinful actions against God. The people are consulting their familial spirits, and spirits of the dead,

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<sup>78</sup> Many Milne Bay people had experienced true freedom from spiritual influences, and their compelling forces that imprisoned the people in magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. Some people renounced, and destroyed, all their objects, after listening to the word of God. Others, however, kept them, even when the word was preached to them.

<sup>79</sup> Is 55:10-11.

<sup>80</sup> Col 1:13-14.

<sup>81</sup> MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, p. 68.

for success, and meaning to life, without realising that such activities have contributed to, and resulted in, their own ineffective Christian life. Such people should be delivered from the outside, compelling, and fearful awareness of the spirits that keep the people in their forbidden practices. The people are fearful of possible repercussions, if they desert the spirits and magic.

The Christian minister must show conviction in heart, through the word and Spirit of God, in order to confront, and break, spiritual bondage, in the name of Jesus.<sup>82</sup> The opened door, undertaken through initiating rites, to align with the spirits, must be closed, or totally renounced, and eradicated, by the power of the Spirit, through counselling and prayer. This will help a counsellor to avoid aimless praying and misunderstanding if certain manifestations occur during the prayer, or counselling, session.<sup>83</sup>

We must realise that, no matter whether the person maybe a professing Christian, or even a clergy, if he/she is involved in any spiritualism, he/she must receive deliverance. MacNutt wrote:

Most people we meet who need deliverance seem to be good people, not evil people. Most of them are Christians, and go to church on Sunday, but, in some part of their lives, they are not free.<sup>84</sup>

Deliverance is, in a sense, experienced at conversion, but, if one part of our life is not surrendered, then we need to resurrender it to the Lord. This does not mean only magic, sorcery, and witchcraft practices, it

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<sup>82</sup> Further exemplification of the authority and the power of the name of Jesus can be read in Don Gossett's book, *What You Say Is What You Get!*, Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1976, pp. 87-94 and 97-107.

<sup>83</sup> I was in a counselling team in an evangelistic crusade to my own island. In one particular village, I was asked, with a Christian friend, to pray for recommitment and infilling of the Holy Spirit upon a man. Without further questioning, we went ahead, and half-way through the prayer, the person started to convulse and groan like an animal in pain. We directed our prayer to deliverance, and, after a while, he was free. Later on, we learnt from his wife that he was a magician, who practised white magic. He was a full member of the church.

<sup>84</sup> MacNutt, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*, p. 68.

may be sexual sin, a covetous attitude, hatred, jealousy, theft, and so forth. If these sinful areas are not renounced, and the powers not broken, then it becomes an open door for the enemy to counterattack us, and make us ineffective in our Christian walk. These areas would become the point of attack and intimidation of the people by the spirits.

### **Exorcism of Spirits**

Exorcism is an act to cast out evil spirits that have entered into a person. When an exorcist confronts the person, the person will demonstrate unnatural manifestations, changes in facial expression, and tone of voice. Sometimes, the person will show excessive fear, and may act abnormally, with eyes rolling, unsettled, and staring blankly.<sup>85</sup>

The Christian or clergy exorcist(s) should prayerfully confront the counselled, in order to get relevant information about the nature of the problem that caused, or resulted in, the spirits' intrusion. If it is associated with any of the initiatory rites of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, then prayer should be offered, after renunciation, to reverse the powers, and destroy the legal grounds of intrusion. Then the spirit(s) should be expelled, and sent to a far-away place. We cannot send them to their eternal place of damnation; only Jesus will do that at the end time. Prayer for deliverance binds the spiritual powers, renouncing and destroying any legal grounds the spirits have to continue their influence. Exorcism is an actual confrontation, taking authority over the intruding spirits, in the Name of Jesus.

Some people cast demons out in a loud voice. But, even with a gentle, yet firm, voice, one can cast out the spirit speaking its identity. Weak spirits will leave easily, but stronger spirits may take considerable time before they can be cast out. This is when team ministry becomes useful. The group should always support the exorcist during the time of ministry by prayer and fasting, to exert continuous spiritual attacks, in the spiritual realm, to demolish the power of evil over places and territories. Furthermore, team ministry can provide relief for each other, in prolonged prayers of exorcism, or even others can use their

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

gifts to discern the problems, in order to deal with it simultaneously.<sup>86</sup> When deliverance is attained, then the person is ready to be mentored in his/her Christian life.

## **Discipleship**

Discipleship is not optional. It is a necessity for Christian growth and maturation.<sup>87</sup> Great potential is realised through discipleship. Obedience, fruition, perfection, and intimacy with God are the results of discipleship. These elements are not acquired through a series of lectures, or Sunday sermons. They are the result of a truly, nurtured and cultivated life. Thus, the church of Milne Bay must realise the indispensable ministry of discipleship. It is the heart of the gospel's ministry, and should glorify the Father.<sup>88</sup> Alice Fryling describes discipleship thus:

The ultimate task of a spiritual director is to help younger Christians find the will of God. In the process, the director may help the person develop disciplined habits of prayer and spiritual reaching . . . and may encourage the growing Christian in many areas of life.<sup>89</sup>

Prayer shows one's trust and dependency upon God, and it also enhances spiritual vitality. Prayer draws one closer to God, to know His will, and to receive direction and empowerment in any daily endeavours. This shows that it involves talking to, and listening to, God. It becomes a merely-manipulative routine, when it is administered in one direction only.

This is the problem with many professing Christians in Milne Bay. Prayer has become a Sunday morning, or a religious, routine. I am not against what we are praying for, but, in the course of our prayers, God should be central in our thinking, and not man. Genuine prayer will

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<sup>86</sup> MacNutt deals with (1) formation of a ministry team (pp. 52-156); (2) how to prepare for deliverance (pp. 57-164); and (3) how to engage in actual exorcism (pp. 167-182).

<sup>87</sup> Matt 28:18-20; Luke 11:24-26; John 15:1-10.

<sup>88</sup> Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Discipleship*, Carol Stream IL: Creation House, 1975, pp. 11-17.

<sup>89</sup> Alice Fryling, *Disciple-Makers' Handbook*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1990, p. 9.

always seek to maintain an intimate relationship with God, and a desire for the actualisation of God's kingdom on earth.<sup>90</sup> Prayer should be exercised privately, behind closed doors, and in genuine, communal fellowship. It can be enriched through meditational reading of God's word to seek His will and purposes in our lives. God speaks through His word.

Secondly, a new Christian should be nurtured through the word of God. The word of God is the bread of life, which exerts growth, and wisdom for godly living. It prepares the mind to be ready for action, and it acts as a spiritual weapon against the enemy's attacks. The disciple should be taught, and encouraged to read, the word, thoughtfully and prayerfully, and submit readily to do its demands. The Holy Spirit must be acknowledged as the true teacher of the word, and the transformer of life.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, the new believer should be brought into a nurturing fellowship. The Milne Bay churches must work towards establishing fellowships that have a heart to encourage, nurture, share, care, and help each other, in love. Many, who have been brought into faith, have missed out, and are more confused and discouraged, in the church than out of it.<sup>92</sup> The Milne Bay church must realise its divine responsibilities, and take serious action against the identified problem of syncretism. Let us take the warning of the Bible to heart, and not share in the failures of the teachers of the Law.<sup>93</sup>

The Milne Bay people must be told of the truth about the reality of the spirit world. The fears and the influences of the spirits must be broken, by the power of God. The aligning and possessive spirits are to be expelled, and exorcised, so that, with total allegiance to Jesus, the people can continue to walk in the light of God's word. "When a

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<sup>90</sup> See Matt 6:33; John 14:13.

<sup>91</sup> John 6:63.

<sup>92</sup> Mark, a convert from a crusade, was told to destroy all his magic portions. Three years after I met him he was a discouraged person. He said that his Christian friends had tricked him into giving up his magic, and now he is unsuccessful in all his trade endeavours.

<sup>93</sup> Ezek 33:7-9; Matt 23:1-33.

believer's allegiance is changed on the inside, his actions in society are different."<sup>94</sup>

The teaching of God's word corrects people's worldviews. It doesn't destroy it. The Bible educates, and puts right, all perspectives about the spirit world. One must understand it isn't the total eradication of such awareness and knowledge of the spirits. There are spiritual entities, such as ancestors, that must be venerated, but not worshipped. God can, and will, use this worldview, which is compatible to that of the biblical worldview, to meaningfully convey the gospel to the people. The need for their religious, pragmatical awareness should now be refocused, then, upon Jesus, with the guiding principles of Paul's word in Eph 2:8-10. With that passion in their hearts and minds, the Milne Bay people, and any persons with this same worldview, can find Col 3:23-24 a fulfilling experience, within their own societal living.

### **Authenticity of Milne Bay Culture**

The attempt to authenticate culture is to suggest, formulate, and/or modify, old practices, giving them new Christian meanings. These suggested forms can either be indigenous, or borrowed from outside, but they must serve as vehicles to express Christianity meaningfully into the culture, to the glory of God.

The attempt to contextualise Milne Bay Christianity will be viewed through Hiebert's critical contextualisation model.<sup>95</sup> This model is a step towards careful examination of the old beliefs and customs, through biblical perspectives, before rejecting or accepting them. After a description of the four steps, Hiebert suggests we take some case studies as examples. Even so, within these examples, not all rites and symbols, within the whole practice of magic, etc., will be dealt with. But, what's given, will serve as examples of contextualisation. Hiebert describes contextualisation according to the four steps.

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<sup>94</sup> Kelly, *If God Already Knows*, p. 143.

<sup>95</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 186-187.

### **To See All Practices from a Biblical View**

This step is for the pastor to do, to view all of the cultural practices, and ask such questions as, “Are such practices important, necessary, redeemable, or evil, and how can it be modified or replaced?” The pastor does this to give him good knowledge of how to answer people when he finally brings people to open discussion. Two things are worth noting. Firstly, the pastor does this exercise for his own knowledge and equipping, not to use it to push it down people’s throats. Secondly, the knowledge about work, music, feasts, trade, and the skills and technology of the people for any physical work, are vitally important, in themselves, for survival and livelihood. These are neutral, and they’ll remain as they are. However, there are others, like magic, witchcraft, sorcery, idolatry, and the like, that are absolutely impossible to adapt. Other forms can be used, after removing pagan influences and meaning.<sup>96</sup>

### **Believers’ Discussions**

The pastor should call all believers into an open discussion. In this discussion, the pastor may only suggest those particular practices that he might have already thought about, and thus see that it is important and necessary to begin with them. He should bring the matters to the believers’ attention, and allow them to openly discuss the traditional rites and symbols. The pastor should ask whether the practices are important for them, and whether they can be redeemed and modified. It is important to note that the people are doing the talking and deciding. The pastor listens, and helps, when they ask him. He shouldn’t criticise, least he closes, and condemns, people’s openness. He acts as a resource person, to give theological advice, or any other advice.

This calls for the church to train, and equip, leaders, for tasks such as this. They should be deeply rooted, and convicted, by the word, in order to correctly handle it, and administer it to others. Unfortunately, many young, educated Christians see God’s work as a second-class vocation. The fact that technology and materialism has failed to solve the problems of injustice, corruption, lawlessness, and immorality, calls for serious thought by all levels of people in society. The church must

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<sup>96</sup> Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, pp. 171-172.

train and nurture people in all levels of life, to stand up and address the issues of the day. This may include problems, coming into the culture through modernisation, and traditional problems, as diagnosed by the pastor.

### **Bible Study by the Pastor**

The pastor now needs to lead the congregation in serious Bible study, related to those issues raised by the believers. The pastor, himself, must be fully informed of the word, and be convinced of its infallible authority. He needs to guide believers, as they, themselves, explore the truths of the scriptures, and apply them to their situations. This exercise is important, because the people will feel responsible for their own decisions in life, and it will also sharpen their ability to discern the truth, and grow in the knowledge and grace of God. In other words, the people need to theologise the gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and apply it to their lives.

### **The Decision and Action**

From the result of their own findings the people will decide which customs to accept and modify, or reject and replace. Again, it's important that the people make their own choice, based on their convictions in the Word. If decisions are imposed on them, they might submerge hidden elements, and remain syncretistic. The people must take on the full responsibility of their own choices, and be ready to stand up for their own beliefs and convictions about Jesus Christ.

### **Case Study 1**

*Silami* is magic, used for protection of property, and is common throughout Milne Bay. The spells are placed on an object, and the object is put in coconut and *betelnut* plantations to guard against thieves. This is done to ensure a large and quality harvest for special social and ceremonial occasions. If anyone trespasses, he will get sick, or even die.

Many parts of the Milne Bay area, especially the people of the Trobriand and Woodlark Islands have incorporated a similar practice into the church, but have given it a new name (*taboo*). *Taboo* is a new direction (pray to God), and a modification of meaning (that God would



both protect and increase its production). The people chose to retain that traditional form, but with the help of pastors, they have worked out how it should be done. The people have not actually followed all Hiebert's steps, but important elements were present in their own contextualisation process. This practice has stood out as an effective counterattack against the traditional *silami*. Many people have turned, and acknowledged God's power, when they witnessed the effects upon those who violated a *taboo* of God. Some of them got sick, while others experienced accidents. If the people modify this practice in the future, they should follow the four steps above.

## Case Study 2

The garden diagram presentation includes a description of continuous employment of magic at the *mutatala* and the *kalivisi*. What would people say about such practices? Is it all right to continue the magic? What's so significant about the *mutatala* (corners) and the *kalivisi* (centre)?

The idea of employing magic at the corners and the centre means total surrender of the garden to guardian spirits. Now, the points can be used, with modified, or new, symbols, to mean a total surrender of a believer's garden to God, for protection and production. This can be done through prayers, as the people would determine. When the gardener comes to these points in the garden, he can be reminded of God, as the true gardener, not only to give physical food, but also spiritual sustenance.<sup>97</sup> The pastor must be discerning and creative, in order for him to weave people's everyday experience into the message of the gospel. Jesus did that in His earthly ministry.

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<sup>97</sup> Prior to the planting of the yam seeds, there is the rite of *Vikak* (cleansing) of the seeds with water, after chanting of magic. It is a rite to cleanse the seed from possible curses by enemies, and exerting power for growth. Again, people would stop from calling the spirits, and turn to God with the same rite, but with prayer and acknowledgment to God. It is up to the people to determine. But, as pastors, we have to help, guide, and give new meaning to people's practices, in the light of biblical principles.

### **Case Study 3**

In Kula, trade people in the past, and now, inquire to their ancestors, through chanting and fasting. This is to ensure success in trade, and protection from storms and spiritual powers during long sea voyages.

Christians need to only change the direction of their practice, and put on a new meaning. The first thing is to maintain intimacy with God. Whatever results are gained, should also be to God's glory. In the past, people acquired wealth, and they kept it for self-glory. In the *tanalele*,<sup>98</sup> the glory must be given to God. All accumulation of food, and even a pig, should be shared (this is always done).

Christians can become the salt and light in such occasions. "Christians ought not to be ready to refuse to take part in harvest feasts and other sort of activities, which bring the whole community together."<sup>99</sup> Many Christians in my area try to avoid such activities, and this has caused condemnation in the peoples' minds. Such Christians think that to be a Christian is to be out of all such cultural practices, and, as a result, they have less chances to witness to others. We must view Jesus' earthly life as the model of ministry. Hesselgrave writes,

Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies, and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand, and turns them in an entirely different context. . . . He fills each thing, each word, and each practice, with a new meaning, and gives it a new direction.<sup>100</sup>

Christians in the church, and in the world, should be transformers of the culture. Wesley said that the dynamic-equivalent church would take the indigenous forms, possess them for Christ, adapt and employ them

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<sup>98</sup> *Tanalele* is a closing ceremony. See Malinowski, *Argonauts*, pp. 207-210 and 374-375.

<sup>99</sup> Bavinck, *Science of Missions*, p. 175.

<sup>100</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, p. 229.

to serve Christian ends, by fulfilling indigenous functions, and conveying into the society Christian meanings.<sup>101</sup>

The rites and symbols, contextualised into Milne Bay culture, wouldn't be a new thing. They are aware of that need to blend their activities, in order to acknowledge, venerate, and worship the true reality – God, in Jesus Christ. This symbolism will serve as a continuous interaction of faith and practice, to be reminded of Christ's holistic involvement in their lives.

The Old Testament is full of symbolism. The Israelites put up stones as “reminders” or “witnesses” that God has acted in their history, and will continue to do so in the future.<sup>102</sup> It was easy for the many, illiterate Israelites to see the symbols planted by their ancestors, and be reminded of who God is.

God understands that the true philosophy of education is: I hear and forget, I see and remember, I do and understand. Therefore, the people of Milne Bay should be ready to incorporate rites and symbols, to express their love and faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

I have argued that the people of Milne Bay should be allowed to weave into their Christian life, meaningful indigenous forms, to serve as Christian witnesses to the society, and to enhance their awareness and interaction with their new faith in Jesus Christ.

However, each generation of believers should be open to go through this process of contextualisation, to modify, or even change, their practices, to suit their changing environment and culture. This is what contextualisation is. It is an ongoing discipline, “each generation has to confront its own problems, and attempt to solve them in its own

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<sup>101</sup> Tom Wisley, “Towards a Dynamic Indigenous Church”, in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, Charles Kraft and Tom Wisley, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 215.

<sup>102</sup> Jacob: see Gen 31:45-54; in Josh 4, the Israelites' religious rites and symbols serve as reminders of God: see Ex 28:29-30, 36-38. Their agricultural life is also full of symbols: see Ex 23:16-19, so forth.

way”.<sup>103</sup> This must be done with careful study of the past history, literature, and present developments, in order to determine a proper action.<sup>104</sup>

Contextualisation is more than just a mental exercise. It is to allow God to act in a particular time and context, meaningfully, to His glory. Price said, “The gospel is, therefore, not a series of abstract ideas. It is dramatic news that God has acted in history.”<sup>105</sup> Therefore, He must also be allowed to act, even in the history and culture of the Milne Bay people.

Many of the reasons for the problem of syncretism are from those, who condemned peoples’ worldview and practices, without thinking seriously of the repercussions of their ignorant approach. Whether in local churches, or in theological colleges, every communicator of the gospel must know that God has left His witness in every culture, through His “common grace”, and that the communicators must appreciate the cultural bridges. Nevertheless, the church of Milne Bay must deal with its problems, through prayer, and seeking God’s will. We must heed Newbigin’s warning:

No one can deny the truth . . . that the growth of the church has often been grievously hindered, because of a failure to recognise, and honour, the differences of culture. The consequences of this failure, is that conversion separates the convert from his own culture, robs him of a great part of his inheritance, and makes him a second-class adherent of an alien culture.<sup>106</sup>

To let the indigenous church attempt all that is said, above, would mean contextualisation and indigenisation is authenticated, for the betterment of the people, for God’s glory. However, the indigenous church must

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<sup>103</sup> P. Perez, “Identification for Evangelisation”, in *Evangelical Mission Tomorrow*, W. T. Coggins, and Eric L. Frizen, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1997, p. 28.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Price, “The Protestant Understanding of Conversion”, p. 381.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

depend on God, and avoid likes and dislikes, from their own cultural perspectives.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Blowers, *Religious Syncretism*.

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