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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology in Melanesia. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians are welcome.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith within Melanesian cultures. The Editorial Team will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians and of general theological interest.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, Assistant Editor, or the member colleges of MATS. All articles have been edited to meet the requirements of the journal.

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REPORT ON MATS 2014

Scott Charlesworth

Scott Charlesworth has an MA (Early Christian and Jewish Studies) from Macquarie University in Australia, and a PhD (Greek) from the University of New England, also in Australia. He has just returned home after six-and-a-half years of teaching Biblical Languages and New Testament at Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea.

The third annual conference and meeting of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools was held July 7-10, at the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC), Banz, near Mt Hagen. Building on the momentum created by MATS 2013, this year's conference again attracted participants from around the country. In attendance were faculty from the following member and associate institutions: Catholic Theological Institute, CLTC, Good Shepherd Seminary, Martin Luther Seminary, Melanesian Institute, Pacific Adventist University, Pacific Institute of Languages, Arts, and Translation (SIL), and Sonoma Adventist College. Also in attendance were a number of overseas visitors: Derek Tovey, from the College of St John the Evangelist in Auckland; Ruben Martello, a Franciscan priest from Sydney; Eckart Garbe, a social and political scientist from Germany; and Wendy Toulmin, Executive Officer of the Langham Partnership Australia.

Another overseas visitor, Ma'afu Palu, from Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga, was the keynote speaker. Ma'afu, whose doctoral studies in Sydney were sponsored by the Langham Partnership, argued that contextualisation, as it is now practised, leads back to culture, and away from the Bible. Jesus was a Jew, not a "Pacifian" (to use Ma'afu's term), and "Pacifians" were pagan "Gentiles", not Jews. That is, pre-Christian Pacific cultures were idolatrous, and contrary to the gospel. Therefore, application of the Bible across cultures needs to be Christ- not culture-centred. Instead of trying to bring the Bible to culture, the Bible must be allowed to criticise and correct culture. In his final presentation, Ma'afu demonstrated how biblical theology might respond to contemporary Pacific

issues, like suicide and sexually-transmitted diseases. It is probably fair to say that attendees were challenged and inspired in equal measure. What stood out, in view of the dearth of Bible-directed leadership in Papua New Guinea, was the potential for courageous Melanesian theologians and biblical scholars to make lasting contributions.

Ten of the 14 papers presented addressed the conference theme of “Gospel responses to vital issues facing the Melanesian world in the 21st century: biblical, theological, missiological”. These included Franco Zocca (MI), “Gospel responses to the growth of Islam in Papua New Guinea”; Thomas Davai Jr. (PAU), “The triangle of ‘Ghora’ killing in the Rigo inland: a biblical response”; Nellie Hamura (Chaplain, UPNG), “The sting of the local response to sanguma sorcery: a challenge for Christianity in Melanesia”; Gabriel Kuman (MI), “A need for providing culturally-appropriate HIV services to people living with HIV/AIDS by contextualising a theology of love, in the context of Papua New Guinea”; Simon Davidson (SAC), “Mission possible in Melanesia: the gospel challenges cultural beliefs, leading to ‘worldview conversion’ ”; Moses Bakura (CLTC), “Redirecting *gutpela sindaun* in Madang Province from the Lord’s prayer perspective for contemporary Kire people”; Robert Jonathan (SAC), “An ‘equipping model’: the answer to the nurturing challenge for Christianity in Melanesia”; Peter Frost (SIL), “The just-war tradition and tribal fighting”; Ruben Martello, “The customary norm of payback: a gospel response, from a Franciscan perspective”; and Peter Korave (PAU), “Towards a Melanesian contextual theology of reconciliation”. The other four papers were in the areas of theology, philosophy, and New Testament studies. They were: Sussie Stanley (PAU), “The problem of evil and suffering in the great controversy context, in view of God’s redemption plan”; Brandon Zimmerman (GSS), “Plato’s argument for celibacy”; Derek Tovey, “Jesus, the stronger one: an intertextual association with Samson?”; and Jose Imona (SAC), “*Angelou autou* in Acts 12: icon of divine protection and deliverance”.

Several things are worth noting about this year’s presentations. (1) For the first time, two women presented papers. This augurs well for the involvement of Melanesian women in theological education. (2) MATS

continues to be a valuable forum for postgraduate students to experience an academic conference, present research papers, and meet other students and faculty from theological institutions around the country. This year, Sussie Stanley and Peter Korave, both MTh candidates at PAU, presented papers, based on their soon-to-be-completed theses. (3) A number of other presenters drew on research completed as part of their master's degrees. Most of these were in applied theology, or missiology, highlighting, once again, the need to encourage more postgraduate students into biblical and theological studies. (4) It is good to see the continuing involvement of staff from MI and SIL, institutions with associate membership of MATS. That involvement will be further extended next year when SIL hosts MATS 2015 at their Pacific Institute of Languages, Arts, and Translation at Kainantu.

In line with a recommendation of the 2013 General Meeting, evenings were set aside for discussion of theological curriculum. After Scott Charlesworth opened proceedings with a paper entitled "The future of theological education in Melanesia: reflections on six years in Papua New Guinea", presentations were made on the curricula of individual institutions by Bruce Renich (CLTC), Scott Charlesworth (PAU), Ulrich Bergmann (MLS), David Willis (CTI), and Brandon Zimmerman (GSS). One point that kept surfacing during these discussions was the significant challenge that poor English skills pose for theological studies. Although basic theological studies are interwoven, several institutions have chosen to dedicate the first (MLS) and second (CTI, GSS) years of study to improving English skills. Given the large bearing that this problem has on the quality of pastors and theological educators, other institutions would also do well to consider how they could address it. Another benefit that might come out of the curriculum consultation is that individual institutions can gauge the deficiencies in their own curriculum in relation to those of other schools. Moreover, changes made to rectify such deficiencies could begin a process of standardising curriculum, as far as that is possible, across institutions. This is one way in which theological schools can engage ecumenically, without undermining denominational emphases. On the subject of ecumenism, in a guest address on the last day of the conference Eckart Garbe told participants that the Institute for Research and Social Analysis (IRSA) in Suva has been commissioned to investigate the current state of ecumenism in the Pacific.

As part of that research, Eckart, who comes to PNG three times per year, will be talking to all of the churches in the Pacific about an appropriate way forward, whether it is advisable to strengthen ecumenism, revive it, or give it a new form.

As usual, the General Meeting of the Association was held on the last day of the conference. Besides agreeing that MATS 2015 can be hosted by SIL, the meeting decided that MATS would revive its accreditation function, develop an audit instrument or manual, and vote on this instrument at the next General Meeting. In order to prepare for that vote at MATS 2015, each evening will be devoted to a discussion of accreditation. It was felt that an accreditation function would encourage cooperation and accountability among member institutions. MATS might also become a resource for weaker schools, through invited consultative visits. With this in mind, it was also decided that the Secretary-Treasurer will send a letter to theological schools, accompanied by reports on MATS 2011, 2013, and 2014, which will say that the MATS president and/or vice president are willing to visit theological schools, in order to talk about the work of the Association and to answer any questions that decision-makers might have. The General Meeting closed with a unanimous vote of thanks for the work of Doug Hanson, William Longgar, and the CLTC team, in organising and hosting another very enjoyable and collegial conference.

