DREAMS IN TRADITIONAL THOUGHT AND IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY IN MELANESIA

John M. Hitchen

John is a Senior Lecturer in Mission Studies at the School of Mission and Ministry at Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School, Laidlaw College, New Zealand. This article is a previously-unpublished paper, first presented to the Postgraduate Seminar, Religious Studies Department, University of Aberdeen, Winter Session, 1980. John holds a Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, in which he focused on Mission in the Pacific.

[In this article, reference is made to the Kuma and the Kuman. They are the same tribal group. – Revising ed.]

INTRODUCTION

In Melanesia, dreams have always been thought of as a way of communicating between the unseen spiritual world and the world of humans. Papua New Guinea's first Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, in his 1975 autobiography, refers quite naturally to a recurring dream, which advised him of the deaths of near relatives. He gives specific details of its coming at the time of his father's death.[1] Many anthropologists have written articles focusing on dreams, or have given considerable attention to them in their studies of ethnography, and the traditional religions of Melanesia.[2]

[1] Michael T. Somare, *Sana: Autobiography of Michael Somare*, Port Moresby PNG: Niugini Press, 1975, pp. 20-21.

[2] See Bibliography, particularly works by Meggitt, Reay, Wagner, Burridge, Firth, Malinowski, and Blackwood, and the article by Michelle Stephen. This paper was written before Stephen's paper became available, thus only footnote reference has been made to her important work.

In the churches, while most Christians are deeply interested in, and concerned about, the significance of dreams, little official attention has been given to this part of the traditional heritage, and its place in present-day religious experience. Following calls by Matthew Kelty for a fresh consideration of the pastoral significance of dreams, and by Harold Turner for a new look at the phenomenon of dreams in Melanesian religions,[3] this paper looks briefly at the place of dreams in traditional thought, their place in the encounter with Christianity, and in new religious movements. We then raise some of the theological and practical pastoral concerns arising in any discussions of dreams in the church in Melanesia today. The study is in no way meant to be an exhaustive treatment, but, rather, seeks to open up the issues for continuing discussion.

DREAMS IN TRADITIONAL MELANESIAN THOUGHT

We shall explore the common explanation of the phenomenon of dreaming; some common kinds of dream; some general beliefs about dreams; characteristics of dreamers; and make some comments on dream interpretation.

THE COMMON EXPLANATION OF DREAMING

The common, if not universal, explanation of dreaming is that the dreamer's soul or spirit leaves the body during sleep, and actually experiences the events in the dream. As in so many aspects of Papuan ethnography, missionary James Chalmers could possibly claim to be the first to draw attention to this characteristic belief in Papua. In 1886, he wrote,

> All natives are great believers in dreams. In sleep, the spirit leaves the body and wanders, and, if it meets with those that are dead, it is that it has gone to spirit-land, and, if the living, it may have seen something of use, heard something likely to take place,

[3] Matthew Kelty, "Dreams, Visions, and Voices", in *Christ in Melanesia: Point* (1&2/1977), pp. 7-12; Harold W. Turner, "Old and New Religions in Melanesia", in *Challenges and Possibilities for Religion in Melanesia: Point* (2/1978), p. 17.

> and so returns to the sleeping body. Such are dreams, and are often noted upon.[4]

The early Pacific missionaries, like John Williams, were familiar with this understanding of dreams, and Chalmers' missionary contemporaries, in other parts of Melanesia, like Robert Codrington and Lorimer Fison, wrote about it before Chalmers.[5] But to restate it in a more modern setting, as Wagner explains:

> Daribi say that the soul leaves the body during sleep, passing out, as at death, through the *borabe* or coronal suture (or, as some informants maintain, through the nose), and travels about experiencing the action that we perceive as dreaming. The later return of the soul causes the sleeper to awaken, and, if awakened beforehand, he [sic] will be dull and drowsy until it arrives.[6]

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[4] James Chalmers, "On the Manners and Customs of Some of the Tribes of New Guinea", in *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* vol XVIII (1886), pp. 57-69; and *Pioneering in New Guinea*, London UK: Religious Tract Society, 1887, pp. 169-170. For Chalmers' contribution to Papuan ethnography, see John M. Hitchen, "Training 'Tamate': The Formation of the Nineteenth-century Missionary Worldview: The Case of James Chalmers of New Guinea", Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen UK: University of Aberdeen, 1985, pp. 97-109, 795-813.

[5] John Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*, London UK: John Snow, 1837; Lorimer Fison, "Notes on Fijian Burial Customs", in *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* vol X (1881), pp. 146-147; Robert H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1891, pp. 249, 266. Both John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man: Mental and Social Conditions of Savages*, 2nd edn, London UK: Longmans, Green & Co., 1870, pp. 143-146; and Edward Burnett Tylor, 2 vols, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, London UK: John Murray [1871] 5th edn, 1913, pp. 1:441, had documented the same belief from many parts of the world at an earlier date.

[6] Roy Wagner, *Habu: The Innovation of Meaning in Daribi Religion*, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 68; cf. C. G. Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 734; W. J. V. Saville, *In Unknown New Guinea*, London UK: Seeley, Service & Co., 1926, p. 28; Mervyn Meggitt, 1962, p. 218; Glasse, 1965, p. 30; Dawn Ryan, "Christianity,

Meggitt shows that, among the Mae Enga, this idea has been thought through in depth, so that they:

> do not regard the dreams simply as a kind of "thinking", or as a process going on "inside" the individual, his heart, or his spirit. Rather the individual (or, more accurately, his spirit) is thought to be "inside" the dream, behaving *in* a situation, just as he does in waking life. That is to say, the dream is taken to be essentially a context of action, not simply its cognitive accompaniment or content. Nevertheless, people have no doubt that dream events also differ qualitatively from waking events. It is not that they think the former are more or less real, but they recognise that dream events may lack the "veracity" of waking events, that, in some way, situations in dreams are often redefined, so that their outcomes are more compatible with the desires of the dreamer.[7]

At the Christian Leaders' Training College, Papua New Guinea, students are often reluctant to wake sleeping fellow students, lest their souls may be travelling somewhere in a dream. It is commonly held that to awaken them at such a time may be harmful.[8] We also find the activity of the dead ancestors closely connected with this common dream explanation. Beatrice Blackwood, for instance, received the following explanations:

Cargo Cults, and Politics among the Toaripi of Papua", in *Oceania* XL-2 (December 1969), p. 99-118; Raymond Firth, 1934, p. 65; Michelle Stephen, "Dream, Trance, and Spirit Possession: Traditional Religious Experiences in Melanesia", in Victor C. Hayes, ed., *Religious Experience in World Religions*, Bedford Park SA: Australian Association for the Study of Religion, pp. 27-28; Walter G. Ivens, *The Island Builders of the Pacific*, London UK: Seeley, Service & Co., 1930, p. 230. For African parallels, cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1937, p. 136; Taylor, 1963, pp. 58-59; for Chinese parallels, Berthold Laufer, "Inspirational Dreams in Eastern Asia", in *Journal of American Folklore* 44 (1931), p. 210; and Indian examples, Elwin, 1955, p. 506.

[7] Meggitt, 1962, p. 215; cf. Firth, 1934, p. 66.

[8] Cf. Tylor, 1871, p. 1:441.

> "When we dream, the people who are dead come and talk to us." "In dreams, we go and stay with people who are dead." "I think, when we dream, our *abin* go and stand up with all the men who fought in the old days" (*abin* is the word used for a man's shadow, his reflection in a glass, or in a pool of water, or his "spirit", while he is alive, but never for the spirits of the dead, the word for which is *urar*).[9]

There has also been a more pragmatic recognition of the relationship between overeating, or eating of certain foods, and dreaming,[10] but the primary explanation has focused on the soul leaving the body during sleep.

FOUR CATEGORIES OF DREAMS

Without trying to give an exhaustive list of the many different kinds of dreams, trivial, humorous, or what might be called "significant", I would like to draw attention to four broad, overlapping categories of dream.

Prophetic

Prophetic dreams have some predictive interpretation. While Meggitt hints that the Mae Enga may, at times, use dream interpretation as a general kind of fortune-telling,[11] the more normal prophetic dream foretells of impending danger, death, or awesome occurrence – or, perhaps, even just the coming "danger" of a visit from the patrol officer or anthropologist! Among the Enga, these are regarded as especially significant, when dreamed by youths involved in initiation rites.[12]

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[9] Beatrice Blackwood, *Both Sides of Buka Passage*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1935, pp. 546-547; cf. Stephen, 1980, p. 28; Fortune, 1932, p. 181; and, for Hawaii: Handy, 1936, p. 120; for Africa: Taylor, 1963, pp. 58, 61. Again, Tylor, 1871, pp. 1:442-445, had made much of this explanation found in several societies.

[10] Blackwood, 1935, p. 546.

[11] Meggitt, 1965, p. 108.

[12] Wagner, 1972, p. 68; Meggitt, 1962, pp. 220, 223; R. N. H. Bulmer, "The Kyaka of the Western Highlands", in Peter J. Lawrence, and Mervyn J. Meggitt, *Gods,*

Within this group, also, are dreams that are regarded as advising on a particular course of action, such as the right time to go on a hunt, inspect a trap, hold a feast, or set out on warfare.[13]

Communicatory

Communicatory dreams are ones in which spirits or ghosts of the recent dead communicate with the dreamer. This kind of dream is widely attested in both highland and coastal areas of Melanesia.[14] It may be that the spirit of the deceased comes to indicate the cause of death, and thus assist in retaliation. Or a group of the recent dead may be seen as encouraging a sick person. There may be a more-vindictive purpose to warn of the consequences of neglecting the dead, or to give prophetic advice, such as that mentioned in the previous section, or even to teach a song commemorating the dead person.[15]

Fison records a standardised dream experience by the peers of a young chief, or girl of high rank, who dies. The young people slept in a certain house, and observed the progress of the spirit of their dead friend on its way to *Mbulu*, the abode of the dead. There was no direct

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Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia, Melbourne Vic: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 152-153; Teske, 1978, p. 83.

[13] Kenelm O. L. Burridge, "Cargo Cult Activity in Tangu", in *Oceania* XXIV-4 (1954), p. 246; "A Note on Tangu Dreams", in *Man* 56-130 (1956), p. 122; *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium*, London UK: Methuen, 1960, p. 179; "Tangu, Northern Madang District", in Lawrence, and Meggitt, 1965, p. 241; Bulmer, 1965, pp. 152-153; Ivens, 1930, p. 230; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sexual Life of Savages in North West Melanesia*, 3rd edn, London UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1932, pp. 327ff; Blackwood, 1835, p. 548; Seligman, 1910, pp. 653-654.

[14] Ronald M. Berndt, "The Kamano, Usurufa, Jate, and Fore of the Eastern Highlands", in Lawrence, and Meggitt, 1965, p. 86; Burridge, 1954, p. 246; 1956, p. 122; Glasse, 1965, p. 30; Peter Lawrence, "The Ngaing of the Rai Coast", in Lawrence, and Meggitt, 1965, p. 207; Meggitt 1957, p. 51; 1965, p. 110; Malinowski, 1932, pp. 327-329; Blackwood, 1935, pp. 553-555; Parratt, 1976, pp. 44-45; Seligman, 1910, pp. 173, 190, 192, 734-735.

[15] Glasse, 1965, p. 30; R. F. Salisbury, "The Siane of the Eastern Highlands", in Lawrence, and Meggitt, 1965, p. 58; Meggitt, 1962, pp. 223-224; Burridge, 1960, p. 241; Ryan, 1969, p. 104.

communication between the spirit of the dead person and the dreamers, but this standardised "incubation" dream assured the living of the safe arrival in *Mbulu* of the spirit of the deceased.[16]

Explanatory or Divinatory

These are dreams, in which the people deliberately attempt to gain hidden knowledge – be it the whereabouts of a lost pig, the cause of a persistent illness, the identity of the person responsible for a death, or the name of the sorcerer, who is believed to be troubling the person or their family. As Burridge puts it: "For Tangu, dreams are not simple fantasies, woven from sleep. They are a normal technique for finding a way out of a dilemma."[17]

For Mae Enga "big men", some expertise in this kind of dream is an accepted part of the normal qualification for leadership. Such dreams were often linked with careful, practical investigation of the situation, and were sometimes accompanied by sacrifice, or payment, to the dreamer. On occasion, a potion might be taken, or other ritual followed (such as rubbing with special leaves or lime), to help induce the divinatory dream.[18]

Among the Ipili of the Western Highlands of New Guinea, a few men and women, on the basis of proven ability, are believed to be capable of foretelling, by dreams, the misfortunes of other unrelated people.[19] Another common divinatory dream advises of sickness, or other calamity, befalling a relative, while the person is absent on a fishing trip or trading expedition.[20]

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[16] Fison, 1881, pp. 146-147.
[17] Burridge, 1960, p. 179; cf. Burridge, 1965, p. 235.
[18] Meggitt, 1962, p. 217; Parratt, 1976, pp. 44-45; Codrington, 1891, p. 20; Stephen, 1980, p. 30; Seligman, 1910, p. 182; Ivens, 1930, p. 230; Saville, 1926, pp. 283-284; and, in Hawaii: Handy, 1936, pp. 119, 120-122.
[19] Meggitt, 1957, p. 51.
[20] Seligman, 1910, pp. 113, 653-654.

Creative

Creative dreams are ones, which impart a new skill, or set the stage for some kind of innovation. Traditional tribal skills, rituals, and myths were often believed to have been given to tribal founders, through dreams.[21] Wagner shows how new skills were often attributed to dreams:

> The talents and skills involved in a number of craft specialities, including the decoration of arrow shafts, the making and playing of bamboo flutes, and the weaving of belts, armbands, and string bags, are all thought to be acquired in dreams. Of course, anyone can try to learn these techniques, but real talent, like hunting luck, can only represent something additional to ordinary effort, and must be obtained through a dream.[22]

This category includes dreams which teach a new charm, or new *singsing* song;[23] dreams which confirm or authorise a person's appointment to a new position;[24] and especially, dreams, which have precipitated, or provided, the spark for *cargo cults.*

Gunson's account of one early such movement in the Pacific, the Mamai'a Heresy, leaves no doubt as to the importance of dreams.[25] Turning to an arbitrary sampling of such movements in Melanesia: the dreams of Pariakenam stimulated a new wave of cargo activity among the Tangu;[26] Philo Asia's dreams enabled her, an insignificant teenage girl, to become the focal point of the Inawai'a Movement among the Mekeo;[27] at least some explanations of Etoism see dreams as a

[21] Cf. Lawrence, 1965, p. 208.
[22] Wagner, 1972, p. 74; cf. Malinowski, 1932, pp. 328-329; and Laufer, 1931, p. 212, for Chinese parallels; and Elwin, 1955, p. 499, on India.
[23] Burridge, 1965, p. 246; Teske, 1978, p. 87.
[24] Meggitt, 1962, p. 221; Stephen, 1980, p. 31.
[25] W. Neil Gunson, "An Account of the Mamai'a or Visionary Heresy of Tahiti, 1826-1841", in *Journal of the Polynesian Society* LXXI (1962), pp. 214, 218-219.
[26] Burridge, 1954, p. 244; and, for further elaboration, 1960, p. 218.
[27] Fergie, 1977, pp. 147-173.

significant factor in the movement;[28] and Kai Fo'o's dreams were integral to his preparation for cult activities among the Toaripi.[29] For an example from the Highlands, where many other features, common to millenarian movements, were not present, we still find dreams involved both in the conception of the Ain cult, and at key points in its transformation.[30] So, we could go on, as the last footnote shows. But we have shown sufficiently that dreams have played a significant part in a majority of the new religious movements in Melanesia.

THREE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

From anthropological writings, we can note the following general characteristics of dreams in traditional thought in Melanesia:

Revelations from the Supernatural World

Dreams are widely accepted as *revelations from the supernatural world*. To quote Burridge again: "Dreams are considered to proceed from the divine . . . both myths and dreams, as entities in themselves, may be considered to belong to the divine".[31] Whether or not an ancestor ghost appears in it, the dream is, as a dream, endowed with authority as being supra-human in origin. While most societies differentiate between the trivial and meaningful dreams, those in the

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[28] Alan R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, London UK: Lutterworth Press, 1967, p. 226; Esau Tuza, 1977, p. 145.

[29] Trompf, 1976, Part 3, Option I, Topic 19, "Dreams, Visions and Healings"; Part C, Option III, Topic 16, "The Diffusion of Cargo Cultism along the Papuan Coast", p. 60; cf. Ryan, 1969, pp. 112-113.

[30] Meggitt, 1973, pp. 20, 25, 31-32. For examples of the role of dreams initiating and continuing cargo movements, see: John G. Strelan, *Search for Salvation: Studies in the History and Theology of Cargo Cults*, Adelaide SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977, pp. 15 (Mansren Movement), 28 (Anggita), 37 (*Skin Guria* Movement), 38 (Isekele on Goodenough Island), 40 (*Tanget* cult, 41 (Paro of Toaripi, and the Upper Asaro Movements), 43-44 (the Story cult), 51-52, for a summary of the role of such dreams in cargo movements.

[31] Burridge, 1965, p. 242; cf. Ryan, 1969, p. 103; and, for Africa: John S. Mbiti, "Gods, Dreams, and African Militancy", in J. S. Pobee, ed., *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976, pp. 38-47.

latter category carry value as "signs", or communications from the unseen world.

In some societies, there is a direct link between dreams and magic. Malinowski shows that, for some Trobriand Islanders, dreams were believed to be caused by magic, either directly or indirectly:

> The natives have a definite theory of magic acting through dreams upon the human mind. . . . All true dreams are in response to magic, or to spiritual influence, and are not spontaneous.[32]

Generally, however, the characteristic belief that the visible and invisible worlds interpenetrate each other to form the whole experience of reality is so much taken for granted that there does not seem to be any need for theorising about "how" the dream communicates. Though, as we shall see, when considering the interpretation of dreams, some peoples do have well-developed ideas of analogy, and a metaphoric correspondence between the dream images and the real world.

Cause for Action

Arising from this aspect of the divine in dreams, the next characteristic is that they are a *cause for action.*

> Whatever the dream may be, it appears patent to Tangu that a man cannot lie down and dream what he might like to dream; and that, when he does dream, it is up to him to take notice. He must act on the dream. For a dream carries an imperative, is never experienced for nothing, and tends to realise the future.[33]

[32] Malinowski, 1932, pp. 330, 332; cf. also, Codrington, 1891, pp. 208-209; Meggitt, 1962, p. 219; Burridge, 1960, p. 179; and Evans-Pritchard, 1937, p. 135, for the link between witchcraft and bad dreams in an African society.

[33] Burridge, 1965, p. 242; cf. 1956, pp. 121-122; Blackwood, 1936, p. 547.

Or, as Meggitt emphasises, in a reference already quoted, "the dream is taken essentially to be a context of action".[34] Even when the dream is resorted to as a formal means for problem solving, or is deliberately induced, it still brings this motivating pressure for action.

Evil Connotation

In many societies, dreams have *an evil connotation.* In Meggitt's study, he shows that, of 28 standard dream symbols used in interpretation, 21 are associated with unfavourable circumstances, and only seven with favourable.[35]

In Marie Reay's brief, in-depth analysis of Kuma dreams, *The Sweet Witchcraft of Kuma Dream Experience*,[36] she explains that:

> The Kuman's term for "dream" is *wur kum banz*. *Wur* is "sleep", *kum* is "witchcraft", and *banz* is "honey". We can translate the phrase freely as "sweet witchcraft as you sleep". The idea they have of witchcraft is very far from being sweet. Witchcraft is the only real crime, and the grossest of evils – a danger may strike at the community, or a poison, which may seep into it, through the traitorous agency of one of its members. So, the designation of "dreams" as "sweet witchcraft while you sleep" carries an incongruous implication of evil, which is sugar-coated.[37]

She goes on to show that the standard dreams, experienced by most Kuma men, are, in fact, "sugar-coated evil", and are experienced as nightmares, which Reay sees as an accepted way of dealing with the

[34] See note 7, above; cf. Handy, 1936, p. 119, "In the old native culture, dreaming was a controlling and directive influence in the Hawaiian's life, particularly in fishing and planting, in house and boat building, in love and war, in relation to birth and naming, to sickness, and to death."
[35] Meggitt, 1962, p. 226.
[36] Marie Reay, *The Sweet Witchcraft of Kuma Dream Experience*, 1962, pp. 459-463.
[37] Reay, 1962, p. 460.

personal strain of social tensions. Beatrice Blackwood also showed that, for the Buka, dreams, which made a person feel frightened or ill, most dreams about the dead, and any dream, in which a mother dreaded of her children, were all considered very bad.[38] An Ipili, likewise, takes striking dreams to signify anger aimed at oneself, or one's family, by a related ghost.[39] The evil aspect of the dream may be seen in connection with some other evil power. We have already noted the relation between dreams and magic in the Trobriands. Codrington noted the power of a ghost was, in one case, associated with certain stones, which, when placed under the head of their owner, can cause the death of the persons, of whom the owner dreams.[40]

But, as we have noted, this is not a universal feature, as many societies regard many dreams as trivial or amusing, or as a standard way of useful divination.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DREAMERS

Some groups, such as the Kuma, already referred to, expect all male adults will have significant dreams from time to time.[41] Among the Mae Enga, while all "big-men" are expected to have some routine experience in divinatory dreaming, and "every adult is potentially a producer of significant dreams, in fact, the range of people, whose dreams are consistently accepted as significant is limited".[42] These tend to fall into the following categories:

- Young men, while undergoing ritual seclusion;
- "Big-men";
- Married women of strong personality (e.g., wives of "Big-men");

[38] Blackwood, 1936, pp. 577-578.
[39] Meggitt, 1957, p. 51.
[40] Codrington, 1891, p. 184.
[41] Reay, 1962, p. 460.
[42] Meggitt, 1962, p. 219.

- Elderly male diviners;
- Widowed female diviners; and
- "[O]ne or two, otherwise nondescript, men, whose dreams, for no easily ascertainable reasons, have often proved significant in the past, and continue to be given weight."[43]

In other societies, particular people may be recognised as having skills in particular kinds of dreaming, e.g., divining the name of the sorcerer who is causing illness.[44] Or, it may be, as among the Daribi, where:

> certain individuals are recognised . . . as good dreamers (*na-iai-bidi)*, persons gifted with a talent, through the perceiving of power. Some of these are specialists, who possess a particular skill, revealed to them in dreaming. . . . A man, who has seen in his dreams, where a dog has hidden an animal it has killed, is selected to hold the pole used in divination for *kebidibidi* sorcery, for the pole first leads to the place of killing, and the ability to trace the route of the carnivore in a dream is believed to confer a particular efficacy in following the trail of a human killer. Other *na-iai-bidi* (good dreamers) . . . are felt to have a more generalised ability to foresee future potentialities in their dreams.[45]

Wagner notes, however, that he did not find, among the Daribi, a correlation of dreamers with "Big" or elderly men. Thus, each society has its own criteria for recognising, authorising, and thus controlling, the social influence of their dreamers.[46]

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[43] Meggitt, 1957, p. 51; 1962, p. 220; cf. Firth, 1934, pp. 67-68, for the greater significance of chief's dreams; and Shorter, 1978, p. 285, for African parallels.
[44] Burridge, 1965, p. 235; cf. Codrington, 1891, pp. 108-109.
[45] Wagner, 1972, p. 73.
[46] Cf. Meggitt, 1962, p. 221, for a would-be dream expert, who was ignored, even after some consistently "true" dreams.

THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Within each of these societies, there exist accepted ways of interpreting dreams. One basic form of "interpretation" takes place as soon as the dreamer decides whether or not to share the dream with others. For, while the individual may receive personal motivation and guidance from a private dream, as soon as it is shared, a much wider interpretation procedure commences.[47]

At this level, as Meggitt shows,[48] sometimes dreams are not communicated to others, because the meaning is patently obvious and trivial, and sometimes, because they are too confused, or fragmentary, to have significance. No doubt, too, the individual's own suspicions about the possible meanings, and their acceptability, or otherwise, in the society is a major interpretative factor.

But, where the dream is shared (and as it is further interpreted privately), there are often standardised procedures for interpretation. Such interpretation can perhaps be analysed into two main categories. There are some dreams, in which the dream experience is taken as a direct prediction of events, which will happen to the dreamer. The second category is those dreams, in which some symbolic reinterpretation is necessary to explain the meaning of the dream.

It is interesting to note that Evans-Pritchard uses this same two-fold analysis in summarising the place of dreams among the Azande in Africa:

> There are stereotyped explanations of dreams. These are generally straightforward affirmations that, what happened in the dream, will later happen in waking life, but, sometimes, dream images are regarded as symbols, which require interpretation.

[47] Firth, 1973, pp. 216-223.
[48] Meggitt, 1962, p. 219.

> Nevertheless, in such cases, the interpretation is often traditional, and it is merely necessary to find someone who knows it.[49]

Straightforward Interpretation

In the first kind of straightforward interpretation, we would put the kind of dream, to which Burridge refers:

> When Tangu dream of pigs, they go hunting, optimistic for a kill. When a man digs a deep hole, and covers it with leaves and branches, or if he builds a more-complicated trap above ground, a dream will tell him if either stratagem has been successful, and it will provide the directive to go and look. . . . When Tangu dream of sorcerers, they waken, and take precautions, because the dream has come as a warning.[50]

Symbolic Reinterpretation

When we turn to the second, symbolic reinterpretation kind, our Melanesian material offers many examples. I shall refer to the interpretative systems mentioned by Reay, Meggitt, and Wagner as three increasingly-complex patterns of interpretation. In the examples given by Reay, the Kuma have a small number of recurring dreams, in which there is a close link between the thing dreamed and its meaning. In Meggitt's examples, there is a wider range of standard symbols, and the relation between symbol and interpretation is less direct. With

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[49] Evans-Pritchard, 1937, p. 379 [1976, p. 174]; Handy, 1936, p. 120, uses the same two-fold analysis for Hawaii, but Seligman, 1923, pp. 186-188, suggests a three-fold analysis.

[50] Burridge, 1960, pp. 179-180; and 1956, pp. 121-122, for examples; also Blackwood, 1936, pp. 547-548. For African parallels: cf. Calloway, 1868-1870, pp. 228-246. Calloway records another kind of straight-forward-but-opposite dream, where, e.g., the dream experience of a wedding feast would signify a coming death, and that of a funeral would signify the person will recover. Rattray, 1927, pp. 195-196, notes both straightforward and opposite interpretations among the Ashanti. Seligman, 1927, p. 20, comments on the same Ashanti dreams. Tylor, 1871(i), pp. 121-123, discusses such "straightforward" and some "symbolic reinterpretation" principles of dream interpretation.

Wagner's examples, a much more sophisticated pattern of metaphoric symbolism is involved.

According to Reay, there are certain apparently-recurrent dreams, which most Kuman males are expected to dream from time to time. The *Dream struggle*, where the individual fights a great crowd single-handed, signifies the common fear of being left alone by the tribe to try to struggle on unaided – an unlikely, but very fearful, possibility in actual life. In the *Dream of pork*, the eating of pork signifies robbing a grave, and eating human flesh, which is the symbolic way of referring to witchcraft among the Kuma. In the *Dream of the strange girl*, there is a direct link with the fear of conflict with *masalai*, or evil spirits, masquerading as a strange lover.[51]

The next level of interpretation is seen in Meggitt, who notes, "The Kara clansman's immediate and unanimous interpretation of the various dreams suggests that the people construe at least some dream events in a consistent way, that they have some kind of accepted vocabulary of dream symbols."[52] He then goes on to list 28 standard dream symbols, and their accepted interpretation, e.g.:

- The dreamer plucks or breaks a gourd on a vine: he will suffer misfortune;
- The dreamer sees lightning: there will be a violent quarrel within the clan-parish;
- A sick man dreams of plucking *imperata* grass: he will recover from his illness (he will live to thatch or build another home).[53]

Meggitt suggests these common symbols refer to a limited range of common cultural activities – exchanges of wealth, frayed tempers, and

[51] Reay, 1962, pp. 460-462.
[52] Meggitt, 1962, p. 224.
[53] Ibid., pp. 224-226.

sudden violence in disputes, and attacks by ghosts – all distinctive features of Mae Enga culture. Thus, the people have their own way of attributing latent content to the manifest content of the dream. Meggitt would want to go beyond this, and account for the absence from their dreams of certain other culturally-significant features, such as father-son and male-female tensions, by suggesting a third level of "true latent content" underlying the Mae Enga's own explanations of the latent content. However, when the investigator begins to reinterpret the accepted interpretation, they run the risk of revealing, through their suggestions, more about their own presuppositions and psychological predilections than about the dreams they are analysing.[54]

When we turn to Wagner's description of Daribi methods of interpretation, we find, however, something akin to this multilevel-meaning approach, with Wagner's use of a system of metaphoric explanation. Wagner sees the importance of dreams in the way they enable the Daribi to gain a new power, or, as he calls it, "capacity", "capability", or "affinity", through proper interpretation of the dream. He sums it up thus: "A dreamer is valued because of his ability to perceive power, or capability, which is revealed to him through a metaphoric link between two experiential areas, and would, otherwise, remain unknown."[55] It is worth following this through more fully in Wagner's own words:

> The actions performed by the soul, while it is out of the body, indicate . . . a kind of capability or affinity for certain undertakings, which need only be interpreted correctly, after waking, to bring results or knowledge. The ultimate origin of this affinity is obscure, an irreducible fact. Like the dream itself, the important thing, insofar as man is concerned, is its interpretation.

[54] Meggitt, 1962, pp. 226-229.
[55] Wagner, 1972, p. 74.

> This interpretation, moreover, must take place, if the dream is to be of any help; a literal acceptance of the content of the dream would be useless . . . the interpretation of a dream must involve some transformation of its content, and yet, Daribi insist that the content of a dream itself represents the actual experiences of the soul, and not some distortion of them.
>
> The seeming paradox is resolved when we realise that Daribi interpret their dreams metaphorically . . . the correct interpretation of a dream reveals a metaphoric link between the action experienced in the dream and the successful performance of some other activity, such that the affinities and capacities, shown by the soul, in accomplishing the former, can be successfully brought to bear on the latter.[56]

Wagner then gives a table of "a series of standardised formula (sic)" for the interpretation of dreams, in which he gives examples of the way in which the subject of the dream links together two areas of activity, which, through an interpretative metaphor, refer to a power or capacity in everyday life. To cite just four examples:

Subject of Dream	***Separate Areas***	***Metaphoric Link***	***Capacity***
Intercourse with a dark woman	Hunting/sex	Skin colour/male act	To kill a black pig or cassowary
Cleaning cordyline leaves	Human/plant	Preparing male rear covering	To beget a son
Cleaning reeds	Human/plant	Preparing female rear covering	To beget a daughter
Being given a pearl shell	Animal/cultural	Curls around neck	To kill a constricting snake

While these, and the 22 other examples Wagner gives, are standard ways of linking the dream experience with ability in real life, Wagner points out that these standard interpretations are not inflexible:

[56] Wagner, 1972, pp. 68-69.

The practice of dream interpretation allows improvisation, and here, too, the standardised formulas provide models. Specifically, the interpreter uses his skill in metaphorical construction to discover new hidden "meanings" in the content of a dream, along the lines of existing interpretative paradigms.[57]

While Wagner's explanation may be influenced, as Victor Turner suggests,[58] by the "symbolic system" mode of analysing symbols, he, like Meggitt, has given clear evidence of the rationality and meaningfulness of both the dream, and its means of interpretation, within the local culture. Thus, the dream's dynamic and motivational power for action within these Melanesian societies is abundantly clear.

Dreams and Myths

Kenelm Burridge shows the close relationship between dreams and myths. They are both regarded as revelatory and truth bearing.[59] They are both "experienced, irrespective of particular intentions", and so are not regarded as the direct result of the will and purpose of man.[60] But Burridge particularly links dreams with what he calls the "myth-dream" of a people:

> As a concept, "myth-dream" dos not lend itself to precise definition. Nevertheless, myth-dreams exist, and they may be reduced to a series of themes, propositions and problems, which are found in myths, in dreams, in the half-lights of conversation, and in the emotional responses to a variety of actions and questions asked. Through this kind of intellectualisation, myth-dreams become "aspirations".[61]

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[57] Ibid., p. 70.
[58] Turner, V. W., 1975, p. 148; Turner cites Wagner as one of many scholars influenced by the theoretical approach to symbolism championed by David Schneider of the University of Chicago.
[59] Burridge, 1965, pp. 226 [quoted above at note 31] and 240; cf. 1960, p. 219.
[60] Ibid., p. 240.
[61] Ibid., p. 148.

In other words, a "myth-dream" is some basic aspiration or aspect of the worldview of a people, which focuses their hopes and desires; "a community day-dream, as it were".[62]

Burridge uses this "myth-dream" concept as a key to interpreting the power of dreams in a cargo cult. Insofar as the cargo dream stirs up, or seems to fulfil, basic desires of the "myth-dream", so it will carry effective power in the community:

We have seen something of the pragmatic nature of dreams in Tangu, and there is no evidence to show that the dream that triggers a cargo cult should be thought to be of more, or less, pragmatic value. A cargo dream takes place within a context set by the notions regarding dreams in general. Unlike everyday dreams, however, a cargo dream is not a private communication. It concerns the community. It is made public, and it finishes by being effective for all. It is effective, one may hazard, because it echoes the myth-dream.[63]

Burridge also hints that the myth-dream may be a causative, as well as an interpretative, factor in Tangu dreams: "The dreamer is, in fact, the vehicle of a collective dream – a communication for the direction and benefit of all, and not for the individual alone. It comes, and is acted upon, because the community concerned wants it to come, and wants to act upon it."[64]

Means of Ascertaining the Interpretation

Some societies have standard ways for someone, troubled by a dream, to ascertain the interpretation. Meggitt's summary of the three ways, used by the Ipili, may be regarded as representative.[65] These people of the Pogera Valley may interpret the dream themselves. In that case, they will seek to verify the interpretation by some other form of

[62] Ibid.
[63] Burridge, 1960, p. 218.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Meggitt, 1957, p. 51.

divination, such as the flicking of an arrow into the ground, and, if it impales certain things, they have a standard meaning – e.g., an earthworm means death, while white tree moss means bearded old age. Or the dreamer may enlist the assistance of a diviner, who, for a fee of pork, will indicate which ghost needs to be placated by a pig offering. The third approach is to consult a medium, who, by contacting her "control" ghost, can confirm which ghost is troubling the dreamer, and how he or she should restore a right relationship – again, normally, through a pig offering.

Thus, at least in Ipili society, the methods of ascertaining a correct dream interpretation are closely interrelated with other aspects of divination.[66]

Validating Dream Interpretation

Several of these writers also comment on the question of the validation of dream interpretation, and what happens when the expectation is not fulfilled, or the interpretation is manifestly wrong.

A tentative interpretation of a dream may be corrected, or confirmed, retrospectively. As new events come to pass, they may be seen as the key to explaining a previously puzzling dream.[67]

The fact that a particular interpretation proved wrong does not undermine the general belief in dreams, as Burridge shows clearly:

> The fact that sometimes a dream is misleading . . . does not detract from the general efficacy of dreams as guides to the future, and future activities. Such particular exceptions are of small importance when ranged against the dogma of a general truth. When a dream is not realised, it is considered to have been

[66] Stephen, 1980, shows the relation of dreams to other forms of divination, and to trance and possession states.
[67] Meggitt, 1962, p. 219.

> a trick: "*Bengemamakake*", say Tangu, "It is a trick. We are deceived."
>
> The information and direction, bequeathed through a dream, may be deceptive or misunderstood, but this confirms, rather than denies, that dreams can inform and direct. Tangu have sufficient evidence of the efficacy of dreams to support them in their contention that dreams are not experienced for nothing.[68]

Others attribute such wrong interpretations to the activity of deceptive spirits, or simply to the fallibility of the human interpreter, but, in both cases, the general validity of dreams is confirmed.[69]

SUMMARY

In summarising this section on the place of dreams in traditional thought, we can note that anthropologists tend to draw attention to four possible functions of dreams in these societies:

- For some, like Meggitt, and Reay, the dream is seen as an expression of tensions, inherent in the social structure of the group;
- For some, they are also, and perhaps at the same time, a way of confirming the expected social behaviour;
- For others, like Wagner, they are an expression of the symbolism and metaphoric explanation, inherent in the cosmology of the people;
- For some, like Burridge, they can stimulate, reflect, and explain basic communal aspirations in a dynamic way.[70]

[68] Burridge, 1960, p. 181; cf. pp. 218-219; and 1954, p. 246.
[69] Firth, 1934, pp. 71-72, 74; Saville, 1926, p. 284.
[70] Stephen, 1980, pp. 31-32, 43, develops this emphasis of Burridge to describe dreams as a basic mechanism (along with trance and possession states, etc.) for cultural innovation.

Dreams have thus been motivational, explanatory, and deeply meaningful experiences of traditional society. The church must take seriously these aspects of the significance of dreams in its teaching and practice. We shall return to this, after considering the place of dreams in the encounter of traditional thought with the coming of the Christian gospel.

DREAMS IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANITY

As we turn to consider the place of dreams, in the encounter of traditional thought with Christianity, we note, firstly, the lack of documented study of dreams in the churches. Apart from the significant attention to dreams in the adjustment movements, or "cargo cults", and discussions, such as Firth's on the place of dreams in conversion experiences of chiefs in Tikopia (see below), there seems to have been very little serious attention to the place of dreams in the experience of Christians in Melanesia.

We shall draw attention to a number of classes of dreams, of which we are aware, and then make general comments on the characteristics of dreams in the growing church situation.

SOME KINDS OF DREAMS OCCURRING IN THE CONTACT AND CHURCH SITUATION

Dreams of Preparation for the New Age

In some areas, dreams have been attested, which have created an expectation for a new age soon to arrive. Such dreams can be seen as belonging to the traditional "myth-dream"-type, expressing the deep longings of the community. As Lacey shows in his discussion of the way different groups responded to the coming of foreigners, dreams have been influential in deciding whether the strangers were welcomed as returning spirits, or whether some alternative method of adjusting to the changed situation was followed.[71]

[71] Lacey, 1978, pp. 194-197.

To give just two examples of this kind of preparatory dream, let us look at the way James Chalmers' arrival in Iokea in the Gulf of Papua in the 1880s, and the arrival of Baptist missionaries at Telefolmin in the1950s, were both anticipated by dreams.

Diane Langmore records an oral tradition about Chalmers' arrival at Iokea:

> Long ago a man dreamed about a white man. In that dream, a man said to him, sometime you will be watching on the beach and a man will come to you. He will bring you good tools to use for the garden, and to change your minds with. His skin will be different to yours. Then, in the morning, he got up from the bed and told the Eravo people about his dream. The man's name was Koete Lorou. The first one came to our village, we called his name Tamate . . . some of them said to one another, "This is not a true man, he is the spirit of a dead body." Then Koete said to these people, "No, this is the man I dreamed before." So that man made a good friend to Mr Tamate.[72]

In Telefolmin, it is claimed that, before there had been any contact with Europeans, a respected leader had a quite specific dream indicating that a light-skinned, different kind of person would appear carrying something in his hand, from which he instructed the people in a new way – the new way for which the people had yearned for many generations. When missionaries arrived, teaching from the Bible, they were welcomed as fulfilment of this dream.[73]

Similar preparatory dreams have been recorded for various parts of Africa.[74] Such expectations, though not always associated with dreams, have been influential in many "mass movement"-type conversions to Christianity in various parts of Melanesia. For

[72] Langmore, 1974, p. 58.
[73] Informant Wesani Iwoksim, while a student at CLTC.
[74] E.g., Davis, 1966, pp. 240-241; Cotterell, 1973, pp. 114-115.

example, the expectation of *Nabalankabalan,* or eternal life, was a major factor in the conversions among several groups of the Dani in the Baliem Valley of Irian Jaya.[75]

This class of dreams brings into focus the communal longings and "search for salvation" (to use Strelan's phrase[76]) of a people. It is an important index of their self- and communal-evaluation. We have already cited references to a number of records of dreams with a similar "preparation for the new-age" significance in initiating cargo cults.[77]

This kind of dream also highlights the question of the gospel of Christ, as the fulfilment of the heart-longings of men and women worldwide, and the question of the continuity, or discontinuity, between previous aspirations of Melanesian peoples and the gospel announcement of Christianity. These issues cannot be discussed further in this paper, but they represent the wider context for a Christian appraisal of dreams in Melanesia.

Dreams Associated with Conversion

The second kind of significant dream in the contact between traditional life and the Christian gospel is the dream, as a factor in a person's or group's conversion. This variety is closely linked to those we have just discussed. Again, however, there seems to be a minimum of documented information.

At the theological college, at which I previously worked for 15 years, students have often made reference to a significant dream as a contributory factor in testimonies about their conversions. It is a

[75] Cf. Hitt, 1962, pp. 216-223, for conversion of the Dani; and Richardson, 1977, pp. 154-157, for the impact of such expectations; cf. Strelan, 1977, pp. 14-15, for the New Age expectations in other parts of Irian Jaya. The early Pacific missionaries recognised the importance of such "Golden Age" expectations in their evangelism; see Hitchen, 1984, pp. 682-683, and the references cited.

[76] Strelan, 1977, pp. 68-70.

[77] See footnotes 25-30 above.

matter of regret that we have made no attempt to collate or document this information.

While it may be debated whether Tikopia can be properly included in Melanesia, or whether it is strictly Polynesian, since Firth's writings give special attention to the kind of dream we are considering, we shall discuss them here. In *Rank and Religion in Tikopia*, Raymond Firth shows that the experiences of dreams in conversions demonstrate that the conversion involved more than simply economic or social motivation:

> Such dreams were often remembered as vivid and dramatic, often disturbing, and often embodying figures of authority, who commended or threatened the candidate, and were interpreted as traditional gods, or ancestors, or representatives of the new order. Often the god, or ancestral spirit, reproached the dreamer for deserting his ancient faith. . . . So conversion, to the Tikopia, involved not merely an act of faith, and a change of a system of practice. It also might involve traffic with unseen powers, confrontation with them, argument between a person and his tutelary spirits, and a final agreement on their part to come to him no more. Yet, even such agreement did not mean always that they passed out of his life: some continued to molest the convert or his family. Thus, in symbolic form, the Tikopia had to work out the change of their religious allegiance. Such were the experiences, particularly of men, who held ritual office in the pagan religious system, or were, otherwise, in positions of some status.[78]

And again, later: "Empirically . . . such dreams . . . followed a fairly regular pattern . . . the 'conversion syndrome', as part of the solution process for the stresses involved in the process of religious change."[79]

[78] Firth, 1970, p. 325.
[79] Ibid, p. 391.

From the testimonies, I referred to above, it is clear that this Tikopian pattern has been repeated in many Melanesian situations. My colleague, Ross Weymouth, in his careful discussion of the factors involved in the conversion of the Gogodala in Western Province, documents the impact of one dream, involving a fearful vision of hell, and cited it as an example of many such dreams, which were influential, as the people discussed their response to the gospel.[80] Codrington, likewise, refers to powerful ghosts appearing to heathen in dreams to threaten the Christians, who desecrated their sacred places at Florida, in the Solomon Islands.[81]

Another more personal example of a dream being the means of the dreamer making a decisive break with a local custom, and thus taking a significant step along the pathway of conversion is recorded of the Vanuatuan, Lomai, and his decision to stop *kava* drinking.[82] Likewise, the crippled Malaitan, Foteware, is helped to a point of commitment through his dream of Jesus Christ.[83]

Sundkler has recorded many conversion-type dreams from Africa, and claims: "The importance of dreams, in the crisis of conversion, is well established from the experience of missions in Africa."[84] He has also shown that dreams are not only significant in turning from traditional religion to Christianity, but also in turning from a Christian "mission-church" to independent churches, such as the Zionist churches.[85] When, in Melanesia, the "mainline" denominations are concerned about

[80] Weymouth, 1978, p. 170.
[81] Codrington, 1891, p. 176.
[82] Paton, 1903, p. 76.
[83] Young, 1925, p. 230.
[84] Sundkler, 1961, p. 267. In this, the modern African churches, like those in Melanesia, are continuing a pattern commonly accepted in the 3rd century, as shown in the writings of Cyprian, Eusebius, and Jerome. See Kelsey, 1974, pp. 18, 121.
[85] Sundkler, 1964, pp. 66-67; 1976, p. 76; cf. Shorter 1978, pp. 282-283.

the attractions and loss of members to charismatic groups, this African experience may have salutary lessons.[86]

Thus, dreams, at conversion, are an indication of the depth of inward encounter and decision involved in the change of loyalty. They also reflect the role of dreams as an arena for resolving spiritual conflict, and for direct communication with spiritual forces. Whether we should expect dreams to continue to fulfil these functions within the church is an urgent issue for Melanesian Christianity today.

Dreams Associated with a Call to Christian Ministry

A common and important dream experience in Melanesian churches is the dream, calling a person to prepare for, or to move into, the ministry of the church.

Again, there is no documented study in Melanesia, comparable to those of Sundkler and Daneel on call-dreams in Africa.[87] The critical and cautious attitudes they found in some churches can be paralleled in Melanesia, as can the widely-accepted respect for the significance of such dreams. There is also a similarity in manifest content. I have heard testimonies of both the "bright-person-calling", and "climbing or struggling-to-the-top" imagery, in dreams, calling a person to equip for Christian ministry. But, to my knowledge, there has been no gathering or analysing of this kind of dream-call material in our Pacific churches. One would suspect that the influence of strong personalities, the ambition of the dreamer, the desire for reward, and compensation for frustration, which Daneel notes, could all be paralleled in Melanesia.

Among the theological students with whom I have worked, written testimonies on application papers sometimes refer to a dream as a major reason why they wish to train for the ministry. For example, one

[86] Cf. Oosterwal, 1973, pp. 41, etc., and 1975, for discussion of the challenge of messianic and new religious movements to the established churches.

[87] Sundkler, 1960, pp. 25-31; Daneel, 1971, pp. 139-167. Cf. Davis, 1966, pp. 166-167 (Ethiopia); Shorter, 1978, pp. 282-283 (Africa, generally).

student, after relating his varied work experience in teaching; in private enterprise, and as an officer in his provincial government, writes,

> Then, one night, the Lord spoke to me in a dream. I saw the Lord leading me in one hand to a shore, and He commanded me, "Go into the deep!" I knew the Lord had a plan for my life, therefore, when asked if I wanted to go to the Christian Leaders' Training College, I truly realised the path, into which the Lord was leading me.[88]

References to such dreams are more common in spoken testimonies, when students are relating how they came to College. They are more freely referred to in personal discussion between students, and with a little less freedom between students and staff. I would safely estimate that over a quarter of the more than 200 theological students, passing through the College in the decade of the 1970s, has had a significant dream in relation to their call to ministry. The willingness or reluctance to discuss such dreams can be directly attributed to the expected response of the hearers – it is expected that Westerners will be less sympathetic than fellow Melanesians.

Such "vocation dreams" fulfil a number of functions for Melanesian Christians. A dream of this kind confirms, and personalises, the individual's sense of call to Christian service. Where churches are rightly concerned to accept their corporate responsibility for selecting men and women for ministry, the call of the group, or group leaders, is both powerful and authoritative in setting a person aside for service. The dream plays a significant role in internalising the group's challenge. Thus, the dream is a strong motivational force for the individual.

Such a dream is also a sustaining and encouraging factor, when the trainee, or Christian worker, finds the going tough. In counselling students, who are struggling with personal or study difficulties, they

[88] CLTC, 1980.

have, at times, referred back to their initial call, and the associated dream, and have been stimulated by this reminder to keep going through the difficulties.

Two other aspects of such dreams are illustrated from an occasion, when, in a time of "revival" in one particular church area in 1976, a particular person was named in another person's dream as a definite candidate for a special training programme, proposed to follow through the enthusiasm of the revival. When, two years later, this person failed to meet the church leaders' entrance requirements for the course, there was considerable concern and ill-feeling. This shows both that such call dreams are not necessarily experienced by the individual concerned, and that the national church leaders, while respecting the "authority" of dreams, do not submit to them, without applying other necessary checks on their authenticity. In the case in point, the refusal showed up other deficiencies, which confirmed the person was not a suitable candidate at that point in time.

"Call-dreams" have a direct continuity with the "creative" type of dream, referred to earlier. As a means of challenging, and perhaps authorising, a person for specialised responsibility, on behalf of the community – be it church or village – the dream continues to play an important role.

Dreams of Discernment or Divination

We choose this double description for the next dream type, as they can be evaluated either positively or negatively, from a Christian point of view. We shall explore this more fully later. Here, we simply illustrate another kind of dream in use, openly or in secret, in Melanesia today.

Dreams are regarded as authoritative in *explaining misfortune or sickness*. A well-qualified and carefully-selected theological student had undertaken Bible training against considerable opposition from non-Christian relatives. Soon after commencing study, he began having severe headaches, which did not respond to medical treatment.

Despite personal counselling, special care, prayer and encouragement from the scriptures, by both staff and students, the condition grew steadily worse. He had to return home and discontinue his training. Soon after the headaches began, he had a dream, in which he saw one of the relatives, who had opposed his theological training, threatening to work sorcery against him if he did not return home and "straighten" obligations to his relatives. It took three months of further medical treatment in his home area, after sorting out the obligations, before the headaches disappeared. Without trying to explore all the other factors involved in such a situation, for this Christian young man, and for many of the other responsible church leaders involved, this dream was regarded as authoritative, and there could be no healing until its directives were obeyed. Dreams, at times of sickness, especially if apparently spontaneous, are commonly accepted as important for diagnosis and treatment.

Another kind of "dream of discernment", sometimes linked with other forms of immediate "prophetic revelation", has occurred in *revival movements* among Papua New Guinea Highland churches. Some people have been "gifted" with the ability, through dreams or prophecy, to discern another person's wrongdoings. When this dream information has been made known, it has led to confession and restitution. Local Christians sometimes claim this ability is a spiritual gift, directly comparable to the "gift of knowledge", referred to in the New Testament spiritual gifts, listed in 1 Cor 12. When discussing with sincere Christians the way such a "gift" could be abused, they showed a clear grasp of the dangers of false accusation, the danger of interposing another mediator between the individual and Christ, and the temptation to use such an ability for monetary gain, and they maintained they were constantly on their guard against such dangers. They were also deeply concerned about the responsibility resting on them to use such ability appropriately for the pastoral care of others. They were concerned that, if they had been made aware of some hindrance or evil in another person's life, then they would be at fault to neglect this information, and not to warn and help the person

concerned. In other words, while being sensitive to the possibility of deception in such a practice, they regarded it as a genuine form of revelation, to be administered in love, with deep concern for the spiritual well-being of those involved.

One particularly significant, continuing use of divinatory-type dreams of a predictive nature is in the interesting attempt by one Lutheran congregation in the Enga Province to *Christianise their traditional initiation ceremony* (*Sangai*) for young men. The local evangelist, Masoo, who has been largely responsible for this innovation of a functional substitute for the traditional rite, takes a pragmatic approach to the continuing use of dreams. When asked why they continued the dream practice,

> Masoo's one-line response was, in essence, dreams work, so we keep them. He told how, in the previous *Sangai*, one of the youth had correctly predicted the death of a man, and, also, they had correctly dreamed the outcome of the last council elections. The reaction was that dreams tell the truth, they don't lie, so they retain a place in our *Sangai* rite.[89]

It is not difficult to see the direct continuity between those dreams, in the traditional religions, described above, as "explanatory or divinatory", and these dreams of discernment or divination. One of the questions, this raises, is whether this continuity leads to syncretism, or whether a genuinely Christian understanding and use is being made of the traditional phenomenon.

This kind of dream usage shows the importance for Melanesian churches of a Christian "theology" of both dreams, specifically, and of "revelation" and "divination", more broadly. We shall return to these issues below.

[89] Teske, 1978, p. 93.

Revelatory Dreams – Especially in Revival Movements

By way of introduction to this next group of dreams, the reader will have noticed there is something of a continuum from each of these kinds of dreams to the next, with no clear dividing point between them. For example, the last "divinatory" examples could as well have been called "revelatory". While, theologically, the distinction between revelation and divination is important, in practice, it is often difficult to distinguish the two functions in dreams. A note on the historical interrelationship of some revival movements in Melanesia in the 1970s may also be helpful. "Revivals", in the sense used by Harold W. Turner, as renewal movements within existing churches, have occurred repeatedly in many parts of Melanesia.[90]

Hilliard shows how the "Danielite" movement on Pentecost, New Hebrides, in the 1930s, which was fuelled, in part, by dream revelations, began as a revival movement.[91] If handled more sensitively by the church authorities, it may well have stimulated church life in positive ways. Henkelman and Strelan discuss such a movement on Karkar Island in the early 1940s.[92] Rob Robin, one-time regional psychologist for the Highlands Region of the Public Services Commission of Papua New Guinea, claimed, at a sadly-biased, but influential, public seminar in Port Moresby in January, 1979, to have documented 20 different revivalist movements in the Southern Highlands alone since 1964.[93] His definition of "revivals" would probably include the whole spectrum of Turner's "New Religious Movements".[94]

One significant group of genuine revival movements was associated with movements in the Solomon Islands in 1970 (although these, in

[90] Turner, H. W., 1978, p. 8.
[91] Hilliard, 1978, pp. 285-287.
[92] Henkelman, 1942; Strelan, 1977, pp. 27-28.
[93] Swincer, 1979, p. 5; Robin, 1979, pp. 2-3. The report, referred to in Robin's introductory paper, was not made public at the time, nor was it made available to the churches concerned.
[94] Turner, H. W., 1978, pp. 7-8.

turn, have historical roots reaching back at least to 1935-1936, as Alison Griffiths shows).[95] Following the continuing spiritual renewal in South Seas Evangelical church (SSEC) congregations in the Solomons in 1970-1971, a team of their pastors visited Papua New Guinea in 1972, travelling widely among churches associated with the Evangelical Alliance of the South Pacific Islands. Some of this group joined other SSEC pastors in attending a six-month Senior Pastors' course at the Christian Leaders' Training College of PNG, from July to December, 1973. A second group of SSEC pastors from the Solomons attended a similar course from February to June, 1975. There are direct links between the visits of these Solomon Islanders and, at least, the following documented revivals around that time: among SSEC churches in the East Sepik Province in 1972 and 1976;[96] among Evangelical Church of Papua congregations in the Southern Highlands Province at Kutubu, Orokana, Erave, and Tari during 1974-1976;[97] among Baptist churches in the Baiyer, Lumusa, Lapalama, and Kompiam areas of the Kyaka- and Sau-speaking Engas from 1973-1975,[98] and again from 1978-1980; among Christian Brethren churches in the Koroba area of the Southern Highlands Province during 1975-1976;[99] and among Baptist churches in the Telefolmin and Oksapmin areas of what was then the West Sepik Province during 1978-1979. Sanders documents incidents from a number of these pre-1975 movements.[100] An integrated definitive history of these movements still needs to be written.[101] During the same period, a number of other revival movements occurred (e.g., among United church congregations on Bougainville), which had no direct links with this wave of influence from the Solomon Islands. All of this sequence of movements pre-

[95] Griffiths, 1977, pp. 106-116, 169-204.
[96] Ibid., pp. 199-204.
[97] Robin, 1979, refers to some events, indirectly connected with these movements.
[98] Kale, 1975; Arndell, 1973.
[99] Fountain, 1975.
[100] Sanders, 1978, pp. 113-120.
[101] Orr, 1976, pp. 197ff, does not refer to mainland PNG movements as recent as these, but does refer to the Solomon Islands precedents. Price, 1979, pp. 400-401, refers to the PNG movements only in passing.

dated the more widely-known movements, related to visits by international Pentecostal missionaries in the 1990s.[102]

Within most, if not all, of these revival movements, dreams played a significant part, along with other outward evidences of spiritual life and power. Visions, signs in natural phenomena, physical shaking, speaking in tongues, prophetic utterances, and well-attested cases of healings have commonly occurred. But, those involved, regarded these phenomena as the peripheral evidences, and saw the core of the movements' vitality in the confession and public restitution for wrongs done in the community; the reconciliation of long-standing disputes; the new sincerity and joy in worship; and the new willingness to become involved in spontaneous Christian service to those beyond their immediate tribal communities. Thus, dreams featured as one aspect of movements, which brought in-depth communal transformation.

Again, we can note a variety of kinds of dreams in these revival movements. I group them all under the general heading of "revelatory dreams". There have been continuing examples of the *discerning* or *divinatory* dream, to which we have already referred. Griffiths records the example of a senior policeman, who, after wrongly convicting a man of stealing, had a dream, in which the name, face, and house of the true culprit were revealed to him. The guilty man confessed, and the innocent man was released, when the policeman followed through on his dream message.[103] We referred, above, to similar discernment dreams among the Kyaka Enga during revivals in the early 1980s.

Encouragement or *warning* dreams were also commonly attested. Kale saw a woman's dream, concerning her lack of faith, as the spark for the Kyaka Enga movement in 1973.[104] Henkelman had described dreams, warning about sin and half-heartedness, and dreams of encouragement

[102] Ernst, 1994.
[103] Griffiths, 1977, pp. 182-183.
[104] Kale, 1975, pp. 1 and 21, for similar examples.

to persevere in the Karkar movement.[105] Such dreams have often been the catalyst to change a sceptical critic, or neutral observer, of these movements, into an active participant, as in the case of David Irofanua in the Solomons.[106]

Another group of dreams could be described as *prophetic*, or claiming to reveal information about coming judgments or physical catastrophes, or about the return of Christ. The leaders of these movements have commonly shown scepticism about such dreams, and have quickly adopted procedures for testing their validity, along the lines summarised by Kale:

> There was a method for testing the validity of dreams, which included discussing it with others, after having thought about the meaning, oneself. If the dream was consistent with biblical teaching, it was regarded as relevant. If there was no resemblance with the Bible view, it was discounted.[107]

Another dream category, in these 1970s revivals, was dreams *revealing new songs or hymns*. Kale gives examples in an Appendix.[108] Likewise, in the Solomons, in the Koroba area, and in movements in the Evangelical Church of Papua Highland congregations, the singing of songs composed in a dream was a spontaneous and lasting feature. Again, we can note a direct continuity between these and the dream songs referred to by Teske, occurring in traditional initiation practice, but with appropriate transformation of content.[109]

The final group in these revival dreams could be described as those *giving an imperative for decision.* While the same could be said for many in the earlier categories, some dreams have particularly brought the individual or group to a point of decision and action, in the face of

[105] Henkelman, 1942, p. 3.
[106] Griffiths, 1977, pp. 184-185.
[107] Kale, 1975, p. 21.
[108] Kale, 1975, Appendix: pp. 1-4.
[109] Teske, 1978, p. 87.

uncertainty about what to do. Though not in a revival situation, a good example of such a dream was shared with me by a high school student, who had a vivid dream, in which he was involved in starting up a lighting generator in the midst of a storm, together with the appearance of a radiant person in bright clothing. For him, this brought the confirmation and stimulus necessary to start a Christian Bible study group in his high school in the face of considerable opposition and indifference.

In summary, we have seen various categories of dreams occurring in missionary contact and regular church-life situations in Melanesia. We have grouped them under these different categories:

- Preparation-for-the-new-age dreams;
- Conversion dreams;
- Call-to-ministry dreams;
- Discerning or divinatory dreams; and
- Revelatory dreams, in revival situations.[110]

To conclude this aspect of our study, we shall summarise leading characteristics of these categories of dreams, and their significance in Melanesian church life.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF DREAMS IN THE MELANESIAN CHURCH SITUATION

Without repeating the various obvious implications of the above examples, we would draw attention to the following features.

Dreams are Treated with Respect, and are Regarded as Having an Inherent Authority

The traditional reverence, and even awe, of dreams has not been lost in the new age of the church. One senses a reluctance to question, or

[110] Cf. Shorter, 1978, pp. 282-283; and Mbiti, 1976, pp. 44-47, for African parallels.

doubt, the authority of a vivid dream. This authority is assumed as a given by a majority of Christians in Melanesia.

Dreams Stir Up a Sense of Relevance, Immediacy, and Spontaneity in Church Life

Melanesian Christians expect their faith and worship to touch and permeate the central aspects of daily life. Dreams do this in a way some church rituals and formal practices seldom do. Dreams are seen as an active, present intervention by God. They create the interest and excitement, which accompany direct encounter with spiritual reality.

Dreams Personalise Religious Experience and Transcend Significant Divisions in Church Life

Sundkler points out that, in some African Zionist churches, the dream balances the strong communal emphasis of African values with a distinctly-personal involvement: "The dream experience is the individualised and interiorised continuation and adaptation of corporate worship. Here is, of course, 'spirituality' in Zulu or Swazi Zion, in that inner, more-luminous world of the dream."[111]

In Melanesia, this personalising of spiritual experience, through the dream, resolves a number of potential areas of tension. Especially, in the revival movements, the dream experience is not restricted to any clerical or special class of Christian. Here is a way in which any Christian can have direct contact with God. In societies, which have traditionally avoided role specialisation, but which have become subject to much role specialisation, in their encounter with the West, the dream is one way the least to the greatest in the church are on an equal footing. Thus, self-respect, and a personal sense of value, have been restored, in some cases, by the experiencing of dreams.

Kale's observations about the central role of women in the revival movements could be taken further in regard to dreams.[112] We could

[111] Sundlker, 1974, p. I:1.
[112] Kale, 1975, pp. 6-7.

suggest that, through dreams, those on the periphery of social life can find a way of contributing meaningfully in the group.[113]

Intergenerational tension areas have been resolved, or reversed, through dreams. There have often been tensions in Melanesian churches between the older, less-educated church leaders and the younger, biblically-literate graduates of theological and Bible colleges. But dreams are no respecters of persons, or of age. Educated and uneducated, literate and illiterate, old and young, all have equal access to dreams – and to God through dreams. There is no doubt that, in the revivals in the Solomons, and in the Baiyer and Koroba areas, the older and less-educated have rediscovered a sense of personal value, and of the significance of their particular contributions to church life through their dream insights.

The similar distinction between any apparently-superior experience, or knowledge, of expatriate Christians, when compared with local believers, also soon dissolves when God is heard speaking through the local person's dreams. The 1970s revivals, referred to above, came at significant points during the transfer of leadership and responsibility from mission and missionary control to national leaders, and dreams contributed new levels of encouragement and assurance in the transition.

Melanesian Christians Recognise that Dreams Need to be Evaluated and are not Necessarily Self-authenticating

Some missionary writers have recognised the need to reconsider the common, modern Western scepticism towards dreams.[114] But, more often, Western missionaries conveyed, either by direct teaching, or by attitude, that dreams are not to be relied upon in church life.[115] The

[113] Gunson, 1973, makes this point in reference to the "Redcoat" movement in Tonga. Others make similar points regarding other phenomena, such as spirit-possession: cf. Walker, 1971.

[114] Strelan, 1977, p. 94; Osborne, 1970, p. 14.

[115] Cf., e.g., the implications of comments or teachings, such as those recorded in Teske, 1978, p. 93; Henkelman, 1942, p. 16, etc. See Shorter, 1978, p. 283, on

Lutheran church "Statement of Faith to Correct False Ideas about Cargo", circulated before 1964, says categorically in Point 7:

> Sometimes a person says: I have heard the voice of an angel; or he says that a message came to him on the wind, and he heard it when he was praying; or he says that, in a dream, he received a prophetic message, or that he communicated with a spirit. This is a trick of Satan himself.[116]

Some Melanesian Christians may also reject dreams as a valid means of communication from God. Sundkler shows that some East African revival adherents rejected dreams as demonic.[117] But a much more common Christian Melanesian attitude is a willing acceptance of dreams as valid and meaningful communication from God. But, at the same time, dreams demand testing and evaluating against other criteria. The consensus of the church, and the teaching of the scriptures, are the commonly-accepted criteria for such dream assessment.[118]

As we have already shown in our discussion of Malinowski and Firth, Melanesians have always been sensitive to evil, magic forces, and deceptive spirits, working through dreams.[119] This cautious evaluation has not only been retained, but also increased, as Christian leaders have studied the scriptures for themselves. But such study has also confirmed the potential validity of dreams as a means by which God has regularly communicated with His people.

Thus, Melanesian Christians today do not just accept, nor just reject, dreams. They recognise the importance of both respecting the potential

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missionary attitudes in Africa. Hitchen, 1984, p. 695, refers to differing opinions between missionaries about dreams in the West Indies as long ago as the 1830s and 1840s.

[116] Cited in Strelan, 1977, p. 93.

[117] Sundkler, 1960, pp. 25-26.

[118] Mbiti's suggestions 7 and 8, in Mbiti, 1976, p. 45, are often applied in Melanesia as well.

[119] Malinowski, 1932, pp. 330, 332; Firth, 1934, pp. 71-72.

value and evaluating the actual authenticity of any dream. This careful evaluative approach is to be encouraged through continuing biblical and theological reflection on dreams, and their place in our churches.

There is Both Continuity and Discontinuity Between Traditional and Christian Attitudes and Practice Regarding Dreams

Another of Mbiti's comments on Christian attitudes to dreams in Africa can be applied directly to the Melanesian scene:

> The fact that dreams have a recorded (but not doctrinal) prominence in the Bible, legitimises their value and place among African Christians. The fact, too, that dreams have importance in African traditional life provides for a high degree of continuity between the traditional and the biblical experiences of dreams. This makes it almost compulsory for Christians to dream, and take dreams seriously, in order to be true to the biblical witness concerning this experience of man (sic).[120]

CONCLUSION

We have shown that each of the categories of dreams found in the churches has a parallel in traditional Melanesian religious experience. If religion is a true experience of the inner depths of a society's life and culture, it would be strange if this were not true in Melanesia. But, at the same time, our churches are aware of differences, tensions, and dangers in just taking over into the church, unchanged, the old attitudes to dreams. This awareness highlights the importance of ongoing discussion of the issues raised in this paper, and calls for serious theological and biblical work to develop a well-rounded, contextualised theology of dreams, and further guidelines for their appropriate use within the church, such as Matthew Kelty hinted at, back in 1977, and, towards which, Stillwell took another step in 1986.[121]

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[120] Mbiti, 1976, p. 46.

[121] Kelty, 1977, pp. 7-12; Stillwell, 1986.

I conclude by suggesting that some further steps could be to restate the significance of Jeremiah's warnings about the misuse of dreams among God's people (Jer 23), but to move positively beyond the warnings to seeing Joel's promises (Joel 2) fulfilled, as they were at Pentecost (Acts 2), as authorising both the expectation and reality of dreams as a feature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the current church age; and, therefore, the New Testament guidance for proper use of spiritual gifts (as summarised, for instance, in 1 Cor 12-14) as the proper place from which to continue formulating our applied biblical theology of dreams for Melanesia today.

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