

THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITY AND MATURITY OF PACIFIC CHURCHES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to an expected resurrection! As one of those who shared in the inauguration of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools in 1968 – I was the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC) delegate to the initial meetings, from which MATS grew, and I had a part in drafting the original Constitution, upon which the Association was established – I am greatly honoured, and thank our Lord Jesus Christ for the privilege of welcoming you to this Conference, at which we earnestly hope MATS will be reborn as an effective movement to stimulate theological education for another generation of church and community leadership across Melanesia.

May I, on your behalf, start by expressing our sincere gratitude to Pacific Adventist University, and to Dr Scott Charlesworth, particularly, for taking this initiative, calling this Conference, offering the venue, and making funding available to ensure it became a possibility. Thank you, and we trust your faith will be duly rewarded, for the honour of the Name of Christ Jesus, for the sake on His church, and for the holistic benefit of our region, through the outcomes of our gathering.

What is the role of theological thinkers and theological educators in or through the Christian church? Why should an Association serving such

people be resurrected in Melanesia in the 21st century? Just who do we think we are, and what is our contribution, and the contribution of a renewed MATS, to Melanesian church and society?

As a step towards viable answers to this set of questions, I turn your attention to the words of the Apostle Paul, as recorded in 1 Cor 3 and 4. As the Apostle Paul addressed the issues facing the Corinthian church, he asked the “Who do you think you are?” questions. He gave particular attention to the self-perceptions of their theological leaders, and the perceptions ascribed to them by the church members.

Paul had diagnosed the Corinthians’ problems: they were stunted in their spiritual growth – still fundamentally immature; and sadly divided by petty jealousy and inter-party quarrelling (1 Cor 3:1-4). Paul warned they were still “fleshly” or worldly, mimicking the values of their surrounding culture, like mere humans, “behaving in a secular fashion”, as Andrew Clarke puts it.¹ 1 Cor 3-4 suggests that, to overcome worldly immaturity and disunity among Christians, requires clear thinking about those who teach and lead the church. Paul drew attention repeatedly to the Corinthians’ thinking about their teachers: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul?” (1 Cor 3:5); “Let no one boast about human leaders” (3:21); “This, then, is how you ought to regard us” (4:1); “I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit” (4:6).² For the Apostle, inappropriate perceptions of theological teachers and leaders, contribute to division, and keep believers as mere babes in spiritual experience. As Gordon Fee succinctly says, “At issue is their radically-misguided perception of the nature of the church and its leadership, in this case especially the role of the teachers.”³

We want to take up this apostolic clue, and explore it in the light of the possible rebirth of an Association of Theological Schools here in Melanesia. The Apostle suggests our self-understanding as Christian theologians, and

¹ Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), p. 110.

² Biblical quotations throughout this paper are from the TNIV.

³ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), p. 128.

the perceptions attributed to us by those we influence as educators and leaders, can promote vital growth to maturity and unity in the church, or they can hinder such proper development in our spheres of influence. In these two chapters, as his solution to these Corinthian problems, Paul uses seven provocative metaphors, which describe the nature of the church, and explain the way to regard theological teachers and leaders. We suggest these same metaphors can also offer wise guidance for the kind of role a renewed MATS should seek to fulfil.

If, in Paul's day, the Holy Spirit's prescription to address immaturity and disunity in the church was to clarify the metaphors by which they should understand their theological teachers and leaders, then we suggest these same metaphors may offer helpful criteria for an effective Association of Theological Schools in our own day.

Of the seven metaphors Paul mentions, the first and second, and third and fourth are so closely linked we can consider them as pairs. From Paul's perspective, we should consider theological teachers/educators as:

- Household servants or farm labourers (διάκονος (*diakonos*) 3:5; συνεργός (*sunergos*) 3:9);
- Construction workers (οἰκοδόμος (*oikodomos*) 3:10);
- Resource custodians and responsible managers (ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*), οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) 4:1);
- Fools for Christ (μῶρος (*mōros*) 4:10); and
- Parents in the faith (πατήρ (*patēr*) 4:15).

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S HOUSEHOLD OR FIELD, AND THEOLOGIAN'S ARE FAMILY SERVANTS OR CONTRACT LABOURERS – 1 COR 3:5-9

At the root of the Corinthians' immaturity and worldliness lay their open boast that the various factions in their church "belonged to" their respective founders (1:12; 3:4). These founders were ascribed ongoing loyalty and regulatory honour, which only truly belongs to God Himself. Paul confronts this misunderstanding by choosing two basic "serving" terms and

applies them to these their theological instructors. They are household servants, **διδάκονοι** (*diakonoι*), and lowly servants working in the garden, **συνεργοί** (*sunergoi*) – the agricultural contract labourers. Both words imply being under orders, doing menial, thankless tasks. Christ had established this as the essential nature of spiritual leaders in Mark 10:42-45. Christian leadership is not a grasping of position or power, lording it over others. Nor is it status seeking, and wielding authority, but, conceiving oneself as, and living as, household *servants* and farm *workers*, **διδάκονοι** and **συνεργοί** (*diakonoι* and *sunergoi*).

The church-founders' true honour consisted in their bringing others to faith in Christ (3:5), and enabling these believers to discover God's purposes for them as productive fruit-bearers in God's garden (v. 9). They were not intended to establish dynasties of loyal followers, submissive to their every word and theological proposition. God allotted each a specific part in the overall task, and God alone gave the life, growth, and effectiveness (3:7).

Thankfully, few if any of us today remember Charles W. Forman, Professor of Mission at Yale University, who was sent by the World Council of Churches in 1967-1968 to encourage the theological schools in our region to consider working together to ensure better standards, and better interchange of ideas between our schools. Nor do many remember Willard Burce, of the Missouri Lutheran Synod, or the United church's Ron Williams of Rarongo, or Father Patrick Murphy, the SVD special delegate for the Catholic Diocese, or Brian MacDonald Milne of Bishop Patteson College in the Solomons, or any of the rest of us who each did their allotted part in establishing MATS in the late 1960s.

The real role of theological educators, then, is to fulfil our varying God-appointed tasks to bring those we serve to faith and productivity, in dependence upon God, the true fruit-producer. And to do so in cooperation with other fellow labourers (3:5-9). Translating those ideas into a prescription for an effective MATS, suggests a series of key potential roles for a rejuvenated MATS:

- To identify the routine, behind-the-scenes, service functions that facilitate the building up in faith and productivity of the member Colleges in our region;
- To serve the needs and concerns of member schools, not seek status and power for ourselves; and
- To foster the mutual understanding of the varying roles and emphases, and ensure the best possible levels of mutually-enriching cooperation between Colleges

THE CHURCH IS GOD’S TEMPLE UNDER CONSTRUCTION AND THEOLOGIANS ARE THE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS – 1 COR 3:10-17

In the first of Paul’s sudden switches of metaphor, 3:9 describes the church as God’s building under construction. In v. 16 it becomes clear the building he has in mind is the very Temple of God. This metaphor begins with a warning *to be careful how you build*, vv. 10-15. Each part in the building team is assigned by grace, v. 10. The Apostle laid the only adequate foundation, and all subsequent construction must fit squarely on that foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ, vv. 10-11. Each builder’s work will be assessed on “The Day”, vv. 12-15, when the character and durability of the materials, and quality of the resulting work, are tested.

This leads to a reminder – the first of Paul’s ten “Don’t you know . . .” reminders in the letter: *Remember those we are building are God’s holy home*. This is the most cogent of reasons for care as we build: God dwells among us in the person of His Holy Spirit. Together, we are His sacred place, in which He manifests His Presence and receives our worship. So, beware of damaging His holy people-place, (vv. 16-17; cf. 1 Pet 2:4-10; Eph 2:19-22).

Our patterns of theology, and theological association, need, therefore, to be characterised by utmost respect for each “living stone”, being shaped and fitted into this living temple. In our age, when academic “deconstruction” is the preferred mode for learning, and when the very idea of a single universally-appropriate foundation is scorned, this metaphor calls us to a

better, positively “constructive”, model, built firmly on Christ, the one and only foundation. There is no place for shoddy workmanship, or theological vandalising of others, as we equip believers unitedly to become a fit dwelling place for God.

Again, this metaphor suggests our Association of Theological Schools will seek standards requiring Melanesian theological equivalents of “gold, silver, and precious stone”, and never merely be content with borrowed building materials from other academic cultures, as we determine our approach to quality assurance. The Melanesian wealth of holistic spiritual spontaneity, of communal consciousness, and of daily encounter with the spirit realm must not be lost in the framing and implementing of such standards and quality assurance procedures.

THE CHURCH IS THE STOREHOUSE OF GOD’S RESOURCES AND MESSAGE AND THEOLOGIANS ARE ITS RESOURCE CUSTODIANS AND RESPONSIBLE MANAGERS – 1 COR 3:18-4:7⁴

At this crucial point in his prescription for correcting the identified problems of immaturity and division in the Corinthian church (at 4:1), Paul advises, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries”.

Paul’s word for “servants” is the Greek word ὑπηρέτας (*hupēretas*). The verse is pivotal in its immediate context – closely linked to the previous paragraph as well as to what follows. The previous paragraph sets the conceptual context in which the ὑπηρέτας (*hupēretas*) term functions in 4:1.

In 1 Cor 1:10-3:17, Paul had already challenged the Corinthians to grasp the difference between the wisdom of this age and the apparent “folly” of God: a foolishness evidenced by the way God works through a crucified Messiah, uses insignificant people of no social status, and relies on

⁴ In this section, I am drawing from my article, “Confirming the Christian Scholar and Theological Educator’s Identity through New Testament Metaphor”, forthcoming in the July 2011 issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology*.

preaching about the cross to communicate the strange wisdom of His purposes through the Spirit. Now, in 3:18-23, he says human wisdom is foolish from God's viewpoint.⁵ The supposed wisdom of this world is narrow and selective. Indeed, it fostered jealousy and divisiveness, as the Corinthians demonstrated all too well with their claims, "I am of Paul", "I am of Apollos". How should Christian theologians respond to these divisive tendencies, inherent in the "wisdom of this world"?

God's wisdom requires "no more boasting about human leaders" (3:21).⁶ This means they are not to side with their own preferred option, and reject the rest – not even if "of Paul" were your preference, and you would be quite keen for him to "own" you. Neither are they to withdraw from the world, rejecting all its wisdom as ungodly, or all the Christian factions as "immature". Surprisingly, the call was to embrace them all. God's radically-different wisdom is broad, embracing, and generous towards others with different teaching emphases (3:21-22). God's wisdom expresses a welcoming, inclusive epistemology. He expects His teachers to do the same. The different perspectives, insights, and emphases represented by Peter, Apollos, and Paul are complementary. Each is necessary for full-orbed growth and health in the body.

But there is more: not only the full range of Christian teachers, all the resources of the cosmos, are potential learning and instruction material. Whether the secular world itself, or the wide-ranging lessons of life, or the darker experiences of death – these were God's resources, all given to the children of God for them to learn from, explore, and study. The Corinthians were to gather the contributions from across the time spans, past, present, or future, never becoming stuck in a single, generational time warp. "All are yours!" (3:22).

⁵ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 152.

⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1968), pp. 94-95.

Again, the triad, “Paul, Apollos, and Cephas”, presented to the Corinthians a range of distinctions: of cultural background; of national upbringing; of theological emphasis; of communication style and elegance. Corinthians were familiar with judging the status, skill, and sophistication of visiting teachers. But the Apostle calls them to move beyond that whole academic culture by embracing all the diversity as potential resources for building up the people of God. Here is a God-given charter for Christian scholars and theological educators to embrace the full diversity of viewpoints in the family of God.⁷ They and their hearers were not to retreat into what we might call a denominationally-, ethnically-, theologically-, ideologically-, or stylistically-bounded isolation, accepting instruction from only one narrow section of the whole range. The wisdom of God, in 1 Cor 3:22b, banished even the dualism which separated sacred and secular as valid instructional material. Every area of study and investigation was here sanctified as resource material for the growth and unity of the people of God.

There was, however, one proviso: “They are all yours, but you are Christ’s” (3:22-23). The Corinthian believers did belong to one person – not Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, as they boasted – but to their Lord, and, to Him, both teachers and taught must be loyal at all times, especially in their scholarship and learning. The full breadth of study and exploration was to be brought consciously under the Lordship of Christ Jesus. He, in turn, ensures it will glorify God the Father (v. 23). Such a missional freedom, and generous expansiveness of viewpoint, provides scholarship with an academic freedom, securely rooted in the theological realities of the Lordship of Christ, and unity of the Godhead.

Paul now, with this context in place, says definitively, “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as ὑπηρέτας (*hupēretas*) – resource custodians!” (4:1). Christian leaders need to know their sources, in all their depth and breadth: theologically, ecclesiastically, culturally, and across the disciplines, as the Apostle has just shown. They are the ones who locate the appropriate and relevant teachings for each particular occasion, and ensure those resources will be kept safe and accessible for the next time they are

⁷ See Fee’s pointed application, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 155-156.

needed, as the scroll-tending ὑπηρέτη (*hupēretēi*) is recorded as doing in Luke 4:20. These are, of course, the basic tasks of research, scholarship, and librarianship. Christian leaders need such scholarly skills. Christian theological scholars are to be Christ's librarians, discoverers and curators of the wealth of material from the range of sources for effective work in their field of study. This is the way Christians are to conceive their leaders – as the resource persons, able to equip and “service” them, for their obedience to Christ, wherever He has placed them vocationally as His representatives (cf. Eph 4:12).

To the ὑπηρέτης (*hupēretēs*) term, Paul links, as a necessary twin, the word for a household steward or responsible manager, οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*): the servant to whom the household head delegates the managerial responsibilities of the household. The οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) was classically exemplified in Joseph's role in Potiphar's household, Gen 39:1-6. The οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) understands the need for faithful execution of duties, and accountability to the master.⁸

This link between ὑπηρέτης (*hupēretēs*) and οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) in 4:1 is elaborated in two main responsibilities in the following paragraph. The custodial manager is responsible for the “mysteries of God” (4:1). The gospel was, for Paul, a previously-hidden, but now openly-manifest message. Its mystery value relates to that earlier hiddenness.⁹ Christian leaders and scholars are responsible to manage, and take a custodian's care, of the wealth, resources, and dynamic potential inhering in this glorious message, centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. This honour carries matching obligation.

⁸ Philip H. Towner, “Households and Household Codes”, in Gerald F Hawthorne, and Ralph P. Martin, eds, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993), p. 418.

⁹ Cf. Col 1:25-29, where Paul again describes his missional service as a “management responsibility”, οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*), and outlines its threefold nature. He has a message to make fully known, Col 1:25; riches of the previously-hidden but now open secret to bring to people of every culture, namely, that Christ among them guarantees the hope of glory, Col 1:26-7; and Paul has people to bring to maturity in Christ by his preaching and warning, Col 1:28-29.

Responsible custodian managers are to be faithful and accountable. In a transparently biographical passage (1 Cor 4:1-5), Paul develops the Christian scholar/teacher's sense of accountability by referring to three possible courts, which may distort this accountability, and with which, therefore, he had come to terms.

Free, indeed, are the theological educators, who responsibly manage their roles so they can accept, with equanimity, the interim judgments of *those they serve*, or of the various courts to whom they must give earthly account (whether they be church, or college, or accrediting agency, or research funders!), and, at the same time, are not slaves to the drivenness, fear, or “workaholism” that spring from *a personal sense* of inadequacy about their own work. Relaxed expectation and joyous anticipation of judgment from a much higher court than any of these, namely, the Lord Jesus, whose tendency is always to praise; these were, for Paul, the way to true academic freedom – and to more-productive study, scholarship, and teaching!

Let us pause to imagine for a moment what a MATS would look like if the **ὑπηρετής** (*hypēretēs*) and **οἰκονόμος** (*oikonomos*) style characterised all its operations:

- We would respect, value, and appreciate the diverse personnel, resources, and heritage, in the full spectrum of denominational, ethnic, theological emphases, and tribal, national and international provenance of resources.
- We would think and act on the basis that Christ alone is the one to whom we all ultimately belong, not our denominational boards, constituencies, or power brokers; and that any and all of these resources are available for the whole Melanesian church. We would work to make them accessible to all member Colleges.
- We would own, here in Melanesia itself, the responsibility to organise, catalogue, preserve, securely store, and dispense our distinctly Melanesian parts of the global wealth of the gospel, and theology of the church.

- So we will work to have the best archival and up-to-the-minute teaching and research resources *on* Melanesia, here *in* Melanesia, rather than only in the ANU, Mitchell, Hocken, SOAS, Pontifical, Pasadena, or Day libraries.
- We will foster excellent responsible management of our theological resources and heritage for future generations – in spite of humidity, cockroaches, termites, and equipment breakdowns.
- We shall foster publication and dissemination of reflection, research, and theological evaluation by Melanesians for the enriching of the global church.
- But only those who have imbibed the ὑπέρτης (*hupēretēs*) and οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*) lifestyle dare be trusted with such tasks.

THE CHURCH IS ON COSMIC DISPLAY BEFORE THE WORLD AND SPIRIT POWERS AND THEOLOGIAN ARE EXHIBITED AS FOOLS FOR CHRIST – 1 COR 4:18-13

Paul turns from the theological educator's accountability within the church community to our wider role before the world and the unseen spirit realm. The Corinthians had grasped the eschatological vision of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God so well that they were living in their society as if they were already reigning fully, and that the whole consummative victory was already theirs, 4:8. "How I wish . . .", says Paul, v. 9. Paul is all too personally aware the full reality is rather different for faithful theological teachers. Formers of Christian opinion are certainly involved in the battle. But they are more like prisoners on display in the enemy's triumphal procession. A successful general, to celebrate his victory, would lead a procession into his home town, displaying all the booty and treasure confiscated in battle, as the triumphant soldiers do their "victory lap" around the streets. But, at the back of the procession, are the humiliated prisoners – held up as the rubbish, the dregs of a conquered society, for all to scoff at and mock before their execution in the arena. That, says Paul is more like the reality he knew, because Christian leaders are on display, both

before the powers of this world, and before the spirit powers of the angelic world, 4:9.

The powers of both these worlds, as Paul had explained earlier, 2:6-8, thought that hardship, hunger and thirst, persecution, homelessness, dishonour, and public humiliation were victory for them and defeat for the church. In their kind of wisdom, the spirit powers assumed that evil, deception, and shame, expressed in sorcery, idolatry, and lies were significant victories in the cosmic battle between good and evil. According to this wisdom, the Christian teachers were fools, out of touch with real power, and of no influence.

But Paul knew the real battle was won in the values the Christians displayed, and the way they responded to the hurts and misjudgments thrown at them. With a tinge of sarcasm, he challenges the Corinthians to think again about their own values. He saw subtle victories for the enemy in the way they were congratulating themselves on their wealthy and comfortable lifestyles. They boasted they were living like kings: apparently wise, insightful, known for their intellectual prowess, apparently strong, popular, and well-honoured in their city.

Paul warns the reality of loyal theological leadership is different from such “prosperity doctrine”. Those, whom the worldly wisdom counts as weak, misunderstood, and of disrepute, but who live by and model Christ’s values, are in touch with a deeper reality. How could it be otherwise – our Lord was a “man of sorrows, despised, and rejected of men”? His pathway leads to a cross of rejection and suffering. But His way is the wisdom of God. And knowing this deeper wisdom empowers the Christian theological educator to absorb the misrepresentations and misunderstandings of those who reject our fumbling attempts to articulate our Christ-centred ontology and epistemology.

But Paul does not have a “martyr spirit”. He acknowledges the real cost in upholding this alternative wisdom before the worlds of academic and religious forces at work around us, v. 11. He is well used to hunger; thirst, poor clothes, verbal and physical abuse, and pressure on his home life. He

returns kindness for attack, and patiently persists amid rejection and hardship, never speaking back at those who slander and spread false criticisms. He accepts the snide put downs of being regarded as the “rubbish of this world”. “We’re treated like garbage, potato peelings from the culture’s kitchen” (MSG). The reality is that, to lead God’s people, we must be ready to go out on a limb and be misunderstood, and sometimes to be defamed and even tossed aside, because of misunderstandings when we have dared to be different in our attempt to show the love and concern of Christ, where others just pass by on the other side.

So what might this “fools for Christ’s sake” metaphor have to say about rejuvenating a Melanesian Association of Theological Schools?

- MATS will be seen and observed by other sections of academia, and the name and honour of Christ will be judged by the way we relate to each other, and work as an Association.
- Will we model an Association, not governed by status seeking, or by the dominance of the powerful over weaker members?
- Will ours be an Association, in which those who might be expected to claim rights, because of academic standing, library holdings, or faculty qualifications, choose, instead, to serve other schools, share their resources, and build up, encourage, and support those weaker and less well-endowed schools?
- Will our Association give serious academic attention to the realm of spirit powers, and issues related to the dominance of evil forces over the people of God, even when such studies are given little academic credence elsewhere?
- Will MATS become an Association in which the self-effacing cruciform marks of the Lord, who loved us and gave Himself for us, are evident in its ethos and *modus operandi*, and will the realities and implications of that same crucified and risen Lord’s redemptive work over the forces of evil feature prominently in its publications?

- Will our Association redress the lack of Melanesian content and witness in the global exhibition of the wisdom and foolishness of Christ in academic circles?

THE CHURCH IS THE FAMILY OF GOD AND THEOLOGIANS ARE TO BE PARENTS IN CHRIST – 1 COR 4:14-21

Paul's last metaphor in 1 Cor 4 turns full circle, and brings us back to the family household again. He shows that he has filled the role of spiritual parent to the Corinthians – and suggests that parenting for Christ is another way of understanding real theological leadership.

Many want the status – few, the responsibilities – of parenting. Thousands are ready to fill the role of παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*): instructors, advice givers, paid guardians, we might even call them “supervisors” or “counsellors”, today. They are willing to give measured help and assistance – but there are limits to their availability, and to the depths they will walk with people in need.

This is not the model Paul approves. He seeks parents, not just advice givers. “Indeed, in Christ, I became your father through the gospel.” Parenting means relationships, in which the theological teacher accepts the full responsibilities of parents. Not just the prestige, but the problems. Not just the public approval of the well-known teacher, but those willing to do the dirty work – nappy changes behind the scenes, as it were. Ready to persist with the difficult student, as a mother or true father does with their own children.

In our world of broken, disrupted family backgrounds, so many of those coming to theological study have such family deficits that more and more surrogate parents are needed to foster and bring eager, immature converts to maturity. This involves all the parenting relationships and skills we can bring. It means warning, not shaming, modelling, and setting an example, ensuring ongoing learning, and even discipline, when necessary

Paul challenges them – “*I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me*” – in such a role. This metaphor needs to be properly nuanced in its application. Paul calls for parenting, not paternalism. Parents seek the welfare, growth, and development of those entrusted to their care – not paternalistic power and authority for their own sakes. Parents uphold the inherited, and willingly-embraced new values, which fulfil and retain all that is best in the family’s own heritage, not an imported or imposed value set, accompanied by paternalistic dominance. Parenting is motivated by a vision for increasing maturity, independence, and full adult participation in family life from the younger members, whereas paternalism continues to regard them as mere children, and expects to always treat them that way. Parenting accepts the difficulties, struggles, and forgiven failures, because parents, themselves, own the responsibility for the family to live well into the next generation. Paternalism writes off the failing, and puts limits around the costs it will endure, itself, for the good of the family. Parents know, as Paul’s contrasts in vv. 19-21 suggest, where the word of God is working effectively, it produces, not arrogant talk, but life-transforming power. Theological educators, who appreciate the relational features of their parent-like role, yearn to express love and gentleness – rather than having to function in a corrective mode with those under their care.

As Melanesians, we also know it is not paternalistic pretenders, but true parents, who become worthy ancestor *tumbuna*, who are respected and honoured, and, even as living-dead, continue to exert a family-enriching influence.

This is the parenting model this metaphor offers for MATS to consider as its role in its re-birth.

CONCLUSION

Paul had diagnosed the Corinthian problems as worldliness, immaturity, and disunity, and saw right perceptions of their leaders and theological teachers as a, if not the most, significant factor in addressing these issues.

In Melanesia, *disunity* among the people of God often takes the form of denominational tribalism. Its more recent manifestations are dividing

families and villages, which, until recently, enjoyed an almost sacral unity through whole-village loyalty to a single denomination. That era has past, and very few villages today are not divided, with allegiance given to two, three, or even more, distinct church groups within one family line. And this, at a time when villages, wider communities, the nation, and the whole region need cohesion, cooperation, and harmony to withstand the rapid changes encroaching at so many levels.

In its earlier phase, MATS was, for quite some time, the most-genuinely ecumenical of the church agencies serving the churches of PNG. Catholics, Protestants, SDAs, Evangelicals, and mainline churches participated together from the beginning. The diversity and challenges are even greater today. Only an in-depth grasp of the concepts, we have discussed above, will enable a reinvigorated MATS to fulfil any similar unifying role today. But that is a priority need of our nation and region.

Melanesian *worldliness* is a many-headed monster. Never-quite-discarded traditional beliefs and powers, whether of sorcery, *sanguma*, *glasman*, or direct spirit intervention, are resurgent realities confronting the church. Western secular worldliness matches, or exceeds, those challenges in seriousness across much of the country, accelerating rapidly with every advance of many multi-nationals and undisciplined media. Churchly nominalism adds its own religious veneer over, or alongside, each of these. The pressure to allow aspects of one or another of these options to shape our theological leadership mounts steadily.

The standard for Christian *maturity* in Melanesia can never be anything other than “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”. But, again, inadequate self-perceptions by, or inappropriate perceptions attributed to, Christian leaders and theological educators, hinders and undermines growth towards that mark.

We have suggested the metaphors, which Paul promotes as his prescription to correct false perceptions of leaders, are vital to handle these same three problems in our Melanesian context. They also offer a set of criteria, around which we could greatly enhance how we address these issues,

through the reestablishing of a Melanesian Association of Theological Schools that embraces and strives to exhibit the characteristics the metaphors dynamically present. May God recommission and equip us for just such a task this week.