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Report on MATS 2013

Scott Charlesworth

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June 25-28, 2013, at Kefamo Conference Centre,
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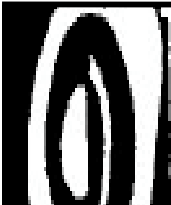
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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



REPORT ON MATS 2013

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Scott Charlesworth has an MA (Early Christian and Jewish Studies) from Macquarie University in Australia, and a PhD (Greek) from the University of New England, also in Australia. He has worked in Australia and Malaysia, and currently teaches in the School of Theology at Pacific Adventist University in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

The Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS) held its biennial conference and meeting from June 25 to 28, at the Kefamo Conference Centre near Goroka. Organised in conjunction with the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-cultural Services (MI), which is situated in Goroka, and building on the success of MATS 2011, which revived the association, after it had been inoperative for more than a decade, MATS 2013 attracted a good number of participants from member institutions around the country.

In attendance were two lecturers and ten master's students, including five from Pacific island nations, other than PNG, who drove down from the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC) at Banz. From the other direction, an administrator and two theology lecturers, a husband-and-wife team, recently arrived from Germany, came up from Martin Luther Seminary in Lae. The newly arrived couple expressed heartfelt appreciation for the opportunity to meet and talk with Christian educators from across PNG. Also at the conference were faculty from Pacific Adventist University (PAU), Sonoma Adventist College (SAC) in New Britain, several teachers from the Pacific Institute of Languages, Arts, and Translation, near Kainantu, Rudolf Lies, Jack Urame, and other researchers from the Melanesian Institute, and Peter Moi, principal of Newton Theological College at Popondetta.

A total of 12 papers were presented, four in the areas of theology or applied theology, two in Old Testament, three in regional studies, and another three

in missiology and the New Testament. Two of the scholars who presented were the sole representatives of their denominational traditions: William Longgar (“A theology of holistic development from a Melanesian perspective”), formerly principal of the United Church’s Rarongo School of Theology and Mission, and now at CLTC, and John Cabrido (“Wantok Jisas: reading Matthew’s story of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28) in a Melanesian context”), who is a Roman Catholic Salesian brother from the Philippines. Apologies were sent from David Willis, principal of the Catholic Theological Institute at Bomana, which was celebrating its golden jubilee during the same week.

A positive development, as far as the reach of MATS is concerned, was that three papers, presented by postgraduate students from CLTC, addressed issues affecting churches in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. The only paper by a woman, “Local representation of AIDS: a challenge for Christianity in Melanesia”, by Nellie Hamura Oa (SAC), presented the findings of a thesis written as part of her Master of Pastoral Ministry degree from PAU. Other papers included: Duli Asi (CLTC), “The power of confessing sin in kindred spirit”; Thomas Davai Jr (PAU), “Created according to the pattern: the tabernacle ideology of the image of God”; Doug Hanson (CLTC), “Contextualising scripture for Melanesians through narrative interpretation”; and Scott Charlesworth (PAU), “The missiological implications of a counter-cultural Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount”. Some of the papers presented will appear in the next issue of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, which is now published digitally at the CLTC website (<http://www.cltc.ac.pg>), and is also available at the UK website, Theology on the Web (<http://www.theologyontheweb.org.uk>).

The plenary speaker, Stanley Patterson, Associate Professor, Chair of the Christian Ministry Department, and Executive Director of the Christian Leadership Center at Andrews University in the United States, gave four lectures on the theme of contrasting models of Christian leadership behaviour. Stan is currently developing a biblical theology of leadership, and participants were both inspired and challenged by his insightful juxtaposition of the “ascendant-dominant” and “descendant-service” motifs

in scripture. The biblical principles shared, though universally applicable, were very relevant to Melanesia.

The task set for MATS 2013 was to find a way forward, in terms of both the purpose and function of a reinvigorated Association. The themes of the conference's opening addresses by Rudolf Lies ("Envisioning the future: mission") and William Longgar ("Envisioning the future: theological education") were revisited in a panel discussion during the conference, and were then raised again in the biennial meeting of MATS on the last day. The moderator, Doug Hanson, led the panel through a stimulating discussion of the ways in which MATS might assist individual schools to improve the quality of their undergraduate and postgraduate theological education. The discussion culminated in the decision, reached during the biennial meeting, to undertake a process of curriculum consultation at the next MATS conference, including consideration of the possibility of developing compatible degree structures. It was also suggested that the various theological schools might better utilise the resources of the Melanesian Institute via invitations to MI researchers to teach short modules, with postgraduate students residing at Goroka, while undertaking extended periods of research in the MI library, and through collaboration on research projects.



The meeting also appointed an interim executive of Scott Charlesworth (PAU) as President, William Longgar as Vice-president, Doug Hanson as Secretary/Treasurer, and several members-at-large, including Jürgen Stadler (Martin Luther Seminary), and Jack Urame. A student representative, Henoma Ttopoqogo (CLTC), was also appointed. Annual membership of the Association was set at K200 for full members and K100 for associate members. The MATS constitution makes provision for other conferences to be held, in addition to the regular biennial conference, should an opportunity or occasion arise. Therefore, in view of an offer to host a conference next year, the meeting decided that MATS 2014 will be held at CLTC in July.