



Vol 30, No 1

2014

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Report on MATS 2013

Scott Charlesworth

**Opening Address of the MATS Conference,
June 25-28, 2013, at Kefamo Conference Centre,
Goroka PNG**

Rudolf Lies

***Wantok Jisas: Reading Matthew's Story of the
Canaanite Woman (15:21-28) in a Melanesian Context***

John Aranda Cabrido

**A Biblical Response to Divination in the Churches
Among the Akey People on the Island of Santo in Vanuatu**

Lionel Tom

**The Resurgence of Witchcraft and Sorcery Practices
in the Gula'ala Society of the Malaita Province,
Solomon Islands: a Theological Response**

Allan Alafa Sanga

Empowering Laity

Timothy Kwara

Power of Confessing Sin in Kindred Spirit

Duli Asi

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



OPENING ADDRESS OF THE MATS CONFERENCE, JUNE 25-28, 2013, AT KEFAMO CONFERENCE CENTRE, GOROKA PNG

Rudolf Lies

Rudolf Lies studied theology from 1968 to 1974 at theological faculties of universities in Germany (Bethel, Marburg, Mainz, and Hamburg). Vicarage included a post-graduate year at the Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield, UK. From 1979 to 1984, was a circuit missionary in Menyamya PNG, together with his wife and two small children. Since 2009, he has been the administrator at the Melanesian Institute in Goroka PNG.

INTRODUCTION

Let me start with the mission statement of the Melanesian Institute. It reads: To promote, through participation with its member churches, the enculturation of the gospel mission “to make disciples of all people” in the Melanesian region. This participation is to be through service, maintaining a body, through which the churches can draw support through programs of research, publication, and education of a specialist nature, which is not usually available at local church level.

When meeting with people, and introducing ourselves as coming from the Melanesian Institute (or MI, as it is known in short), we would usually receive a knowing nod, and the implied acknowledgment that we are a valuable, maybe even important, institution. Comfort zone is left, when we venture the question: “Do you know what MI does?” Often this triggers an answer like: “Well, not really.” I am more than sure this does not apply to you all present here today. I trust that all of you know quite a bit about MI. Its full title runs to “Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Cultural Services Inc”. Socio-cultural has recently replaced “socio-economic”, as it was felt that the strength of MI in the economic sphere is, at least in recent

times, not very pronounced. Actually, some of the formal changes are still in the process of being implemented. Culture, more than economy, has been the issue of research, even though some studies on economic issues have been undertaken and published.

THE MISSION OF MI

Who we are: Quite recently, in the process of relaunching our website, a slogan was created: “Researching, Teaching, and Publishing on all Aspects of Melanesian Cultures since 1969”. This reveals our starting point, at least in a formalised way (1969), and I feel it gives a good overview of what have been the main activities of those involved in MI since then. Our website, particularly the publication lists embedded in it, shows the great variety of research issues that have been touched since then. It has sometimes been called a “wealth of research”. There is, indeed, more than our big research on sorcery and witchcraft with which we have been identified, in the recent past. This research, we hope, can be a service to help eradicate that horrible history of violence that has come to the attention of people in PNG, and which has given PNG a bad name in international media. I would encourage you to visit our website and take a look at newer and older publications, which highlight important aspects of Melanesian culture in changing times, and which highlight Christian responses to it. Quite a number of older books can be downloaded for free. We would like to receive some money for some new ones, but even these can be made available electronically, as well as in printed versions.

Any institution, big or small, has its mission statement. It highlights its reference points. Four member churches have, for more than 40 years, helped to keep MI alive, and to give it direction: “making disciples in the Melanesian region”, quoting from Matt 28. It points to Melanesia, though for most of its work, MI has been concentrating on PNG. Member churches, as we speak are the Catholic, Lutheran, United, and Anglican churches. They contribute a small member fee annually, they send staff, on a secondment basis (at present five), and they take a general, and sometimes not specific enough, interest in the work going on. They also help to make contact, and acquire funding, through the international cooperation of churches, without which MI could not exist.

Membership is not exclusive. Doors are open, and the composition of staff is not restricted to those churches. Neither is MI talking to those churches only. The recent research on HIV and AIDS has been looking at Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in PNG, and their responses to it. We plan to have a seminar with the Evangelical Alliance in a few weeks to look at the published results (in *Point* 36), and to have an open discussion, which may show ways how to proceed with the efforts of churches in bringing down numbers, and reduce the threat of this illness.

Speaking of the Evangelical Alliance, also points to the other ecumenical body in PNG, the PNG Council of Churches, although it seems sadly dysfunctional at present. It would be my hope that something might be done to enhance its voice and influence again in the future.

Furthermore, I would add to the picture, even if with a slightly different tack, the Churches Partnership Program (CPP), which, with its projects, and its internal cooperation in PNG (and in Australia), adds to ecumenical cooperation.

One other element, but with a different thrust, is the long-standing contribution to the public discourse by Word Publishing and its Pidgin weekly *Wantok*, which is based on the same cooperation of churches as MI. I might feel that it is not as controversial as its English weekly (*Times*, and later, *Independent*) used to be at times, but, for the development of Pidgin as a language, for bringing news to the village level, and to be a voice of PNG, and its values, both traditional and Christian, it continues to play a role.

THE MELANESIAN ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

This conference brings us together in the framework of an institution that was set up around 1970. Again, like others, it has not been very active in recent years. A little more can be seen and heard from its sister organisation, SPATS, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. A website is proof of that 29 member schools are listed. There is an accreditation process that is described in detail in a handbook, which can be downloaded. It has a small staff of four people, and its own office (and a board and others to steer and advise it). An invitation to its chief officer to

come to this meeting has unfortunately not been successful, because of long-standing other dates set. I believe there are plans later in the year for a visit to PNG.

Four areas of work are mentioned, and I wonder whether these might be areas that we might think about in the next few days:

- Accreditation
- *Pacific Journal of Theology*
- Weavers
- Institutional strengthening

Whether, and which, of these aspects, and in what form they are important in PNG, is a matter of discussion. And, following from there: if any or what capacities, finances, staff(?) might be needed, and who might provide it, is totally open. I am sure earlier meetings and discussions have touched on that already. Still, we need to find some common ground between us at this point now. After all it has been three years since the last conference.

Accreditation has already been mentioned. Any association of theological schools should attempt to define some common ground, in order to bring together those with a shared interest. Is accreditation a good term? Does it imply too much? Are we sufficiently ready to even go for it? Of course, we can and will have to go into all the difficult matters that go along with it, not the least is the theological and doctrinal differences. But, setting some standards is – helpful, necessary, important, essential? What is a diploma, a bachelor, a master? How much work is required to gain the right to a PhD? A little quality control would be good. Would it not be a good thing to say a bachelor from one church's theological school is comparable to the bachelor from another? And, to continue studies at other schools, offering further degrees, they need to know whether applicants bring with them the necessary groundwork. And, setting standards always carries the element of raising them with it, which I am sure all of us would wish for in all our institutions.

I am confident we will talk more on this in the coming days, and I trust our talks will include the fact that nobody wishes to, or should try to, influence content of the curriculum as is developed in the schools belonging to different churches. But churches, too, need to be transparent in how they show themselves in the public light, at least, those who wish to be open for ecumenical cooperation. Academic standards, too, are an element of transparency and credibility.

Accreditation is offered in PNG by the Office of Higher Education, a government body. Some of us here are accredited through them, like PAU, CLTC, and Rarongo. And, in the longer run, I feel that it will be necessary. But, why not a little more on “our” terms, by seeking to develop a framework among ourselves, which, in talking with OHE, can be applied, and give recognition to more schools. I am fully aware this might be a longer process, and there will need to be somebody to do it. Would any success in that not strengthen all of us? And would such a process, however it was organised, not give recognition to some of the special needs and situations of theological schools?

MI actually might be one institution that needs formal accreditation, less than others, as we do not hand out certificates. Thus, we have no vested interest in that. What MI (like anybody else here representing an institution of learning) needs, is some academic and other recognition for its work. In this, we might be even be in a focus position from all of you, as our publications, and their research input, try to serve the needs of all your schools and their students. I would claim that we are good at it. Our books are quality products, but only recognised by the fact that people like them. There is no certificate stating the quality of MI. What might, of course, also help is the fact that we have a pretty good track record in publishing regularly for the best part of 40 years. But, all of this does not take away the need to discuss internally, and find out what might be the next steps forward.

Ecumenism is the other side of the coin. And ecumenism has been, from the very early years, at the heart of MI, and what we are about. I mentioned the two strands of ecumenism, PNG-CCC and the Evangelical Alliance, but I

would not hope, and do not think, that, in itself, marks a big divide. For me, ecumenism is about talking to each other, sharing our concerns, and maybe helping each other in giving advice on how we see things, both within our churches, and also in society, and PNG in general. After all, churches wish to speak not only to their followers, but address the general public, and be a voice addressing issues and concerns, as they see them. Maybe jointly, our voice can be heard a little better, and can have some more impact. For that, a meeting like this offers time to reflect together. And doing that, as seems to be the feeling, in a regular pattern about every two years, we stand a little closer together than we might have done in the past. Capacities required for that would, of course, be somebody to set up such a meeting, getting a place, preparing a program, and doing logistics. For all of that a big thank you to Scott Charlesworth needs to be said.

MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Following the model of SPATS, an important issue is the publication of the *South Pacific Journal of Theology*. I have some copies of the *South Pacific Journal of Theology* here with me. We all know its counterpart, the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*. It describes itself as the “organ for discussion . . . by staff and students of the membership churches of MATS”. Unfortunately, the list of membership churches has fallen somewhat into disrepair. I think we can all express our thanks to CLTC for giving the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* a home in the past number of years. It has taken good care of it, and tried to develop its role further. A big step, which might also carry a risk, has been the decision to publish it in an electronic format only, since the beginning of this year. Financial considerations might have played into, it like the forbidding postage rates in PNG. MI knows about that, and is strongly considering to go the same way with its journal *Catalyst*. The challenge will be to keep it in the people’s minds, and to promote interaction between publishers and readers. Maybe we can share some experiences on that in the next year or two. Another item is to carefully look at the development of the internet in PNG, which is making quite some progress, but, at the same time, not to forget some of those who would still need printed copies. The lovely term of print-on-demand comes into that. I believe that UPNG and its bookshop is working on that.

Probably the best chance to be kept in the minds of readers is to find and publish quality articles. And such articles not only bring about discussion within the churches, and within the public, they also rely on discussion and discourse at all levels of the churches and their schools. In the end, everything comes back to the question of quality, and, with it, some standards to define it. MATS, as a platform, could contribute to that.

OUTLOOK

Touching on Weavers – a women’s theological study program of SPATS – touches on the issues of gender. This is a huge field that, in itself, could cover a lot of time, and does deserve more energy to be spent on it. As an outsider to PNG, I share the view that PNG, in a great part of its geography, continues to be male-dominated. It would seem that the perceived violence against women is related, in part, at least, to the stress of cultural change, which is inevitable. I feel that, even the violence against women, mainly, in sorcery accusations, can be linked back to cultural changes and stress: urbanisation, land pressure, lack of perspective for the future among young males, joblessness, increased need for cash to survive and make a living, new role models for relationships. Would it not be good if this was discussed more frequently in our churches, and discussed by the women in the churches themselves, and that their voices were heard more?

The last point in SPATS is what is called “institutional strengthening”. This is an ongoing thing, and needs to be done in-house. It also can, as I believe, greatly benefit from external advice, even from giving each other some advice in an open, transparent manner. But, on that one, we definitely are very much at the beginning, as, by the way, is SPATS. This part of the website is “under construction”.

Would this be a nice description of the next few days? We try to do some constructive work. All of us can try to throw in a hand, while we are in positions to do so. We carry the work for some time, and then will have to pass it on to others. Some work might come to nothing. But it is my strong conviction that God’s mission, which has brought us here, and has brought some people here from far-away places, like myself, will not come to

nothing. God's mission is far more than our efforts, but we are privileged to be some small part of it.

God bless, and thank you.