Oceanic Voyages
in Theology and
Theological Education

Reflections and Reminiscences in Celebration
of the 50th Anniversary of the
Pacific Theological College
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Edited by Feleterika Nokise & Holger Szesnat

Pacific Theological College
Suva
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Preface

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Any institution that manages to get to its 50th anniversary intact and with still a role to play in human society has achieved something remarkable. It is only right and proper that we, too, celebrate this event, as the Pacific Theological College approaches its 50th anniversary. In an academic context, it is not unusual to mark this kind of an occasion with the publication of a book – a Festschrift (celebratory book), as the German tradition has it, a term not infrequently also used in academic environments that use English.

We approached a large number of people who are connected to the College and asked them whether they might be able to contribute to this celebratory volume. Some rose to the occasion, and we gladly present these contributions in this book. As you will see, it is an interesting mix of things: it has personal and institutional aspects, with historical, theological, educational and ecumenical dimensions. As such, it provides a glimpse of the rich diversity of the College.

English is a second, third, or fourth language for almost all students and most faculty members at this College. This is naturally also reflected in the contributions to this little volume. Part of the challenge of living, working, and praying together is to learn to hold each other’s linguistic and rhetorical customs and habits together. We have therefore refrained from fundamental changes, although significant copyediting has been done, and we thank Tessa Mackenzie in particular for her work in this regard. We have also left the referencing system of each author ‘as is’, and have edited little in this regard.

As we looked through the various contributions sent in from all over the world, a certain pattern began to emerge. Although some papers go across these patterns, it nevertheless seemed useful to divide them into two broad categories, and hence part 1 and part 2.

Firstly, there are historical reflections and personal reminiscences. Naturally, they all include theological reflections to some extent, but the primary theme that holds the first three chapters together is history and memory. Rev. Prof. Feleterika Nokise put together an outline of the history of the College, greatly enhanced with many photographic records, some of which are very rare. Ms. Tessa Mackenzie recounts some personal memories, which go back to the laying of the foundation stone of PTC. Mr. Nga Mataio adds an
institutional perspective, in this case one reflecting the role of one of the owner churches of the College, namely the Cook Islands Christian Church.

Secondly, there are reflections on themes in theology and theological education. In themselves, they broadly fall into three areas, and we have grouped them together in this way: mission, theological education, and Biblical reflection.

Rev. Jenny Willsher considers the task of ‘being a missionary’ in light of her experience of teaching at PTC in the early 2000s. Rev. Dr. Traugott Farnbacher offers theological reflections on the challenge of the partnership between overseas churches and mission organisations on the one hand, and churches and church institutions like PTC on the other. Rev. Dr. Olli-Pekka Lassila explores some opportunities for learning that arose for him as a Finnish Lutheran theologian when he taught at PTC some years ago. Rev. Dr. Michael Press explores conflicting worldviews and theological issues in the growth of the Christian faith in Melanesia, based on his time as a lecturer at PTC. Rev. Francois Pihaate demonstrates an ecumenical perspective on church life and theology around a well-known text from Micah. Rev. Dr. Mosese Ma’ilo considers the opportunities of a postcolonial Biblical hermeneutic for Oceania. Finally, Prof. Holger Szesnat offers some tentative theological, ethical, hermeneutical and didactic reflections on a recent community Bible study in Suva.

We hope that readers will enjoy these contributions, as all of them in their own way represent an aspect of the life and times of this College.

Vinaka vakalevu.
Contributors

Contributors are listed alphabetically by surname, and details focus on the relationship of the person to the Pacific Theological College.

- Rev. Dr. Traugott Farnbacher is an ordained minster in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Germany, and works as the Secretary for Papua New Guinea, the Pacific, and East Asia at Mission EineWelt (Mission OneWorld), an ecumenical centre of his church. Over the last ten years he has been at the forefront of his Mission Boards’ efforts to have students from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea undertake postgraduate studies at PTC, and to support numerous College projects.

- Rev. Dr. Olli-Pekka Lassila is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and was formerly the Head of their Foreign Relations Office. In 2005-2006, he spent a year as a visiting lecturer in the Church Ministry Department of PTC.

- Ms. Tessa Mackenzie is a lay minister at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Suva (Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia), and is the current Secretary of the Council of PTC.

- Rev. Dr. Mosese Ma'ilo is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Samoa and a former graduate of PTC. He is currently the Principal as well as Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Piula Theological College, Samoa.

- Mr. Nga Mataio is the General Secretary of the Cook Islands Christian Church. In his capacity as the CICC General Secretary, he has served the College on its Council for many years.

- Rev. Prof. Feleterika Nokise is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the current Principal of PTC. He has filled this role at the College since 2002. Prior to that, he served the College as Vice-Principal from 2000 to the end of 2001, and from 1998 until 2001, he was a lecturer at PTC, first in Theology & Ethics, and then in Church History.
• Rev. Francois Pihaate is an ordained minister in the *Etaretia Porotetani Maohi* and the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches. He is a member of the College Council and Executive as well as the Appointments & Staff Review Committee of the College.

• Rev. Dr. Michael Press is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany, and the Director of the Lutheran Studies Centre at Sabah Theological Seminary, Malaysia. He was a lecturer in Church History at PTC from 2003 until 2009.

• Prof. Holger Szesnat is the current Academic Dean of PTC, as well as Professor of Biblical Literature and Languages, and the Head of the Department of Biblical Studies. He served the College from 1998 until 2001, and again since 2010.

• Rev. Jenny Willsher is an Anglican priest and currently works as the Head of St. Martin’s College, Wagga Wagga, Australia. She was a lecturer at PTC from 2000 until 2003, teaching courses in ethics and ministry.
Part 1

*Historical Reflections & Personal Reminiscences*
Navigating the Ecumenical Dream: A Brief History of PTC's First 50 Years

Feleterika Nokise

The arrival on the 'Duff' in 1797 of missionaries under the auspices of the London Missionary Society at Matavai Bay, Tahiti, heralded a new era for the people of the Pacific. It was the beginning of a steady flow of missionaries from mission societies in Britain, continental Europe, and later America, who flocked to the region, a process that continued until the latter half of the twentieth century.

From the outset, the missionaries were determined to evangelize the indigenous population by converting them to the Christian faith. They came with preconceived ideas concerning the necessity to save the so-called many lost souls by converting them from their pagan ways to a more civilized lifestyle. Embracing the Christian faith in all its splendor and trappings was an essential part of this process.

Ill-equipped in terms of cultural awareness and sensitivity, the missionaries had no choice but to express and present the Christian message in the norms and values of their own cultural milieu. Given the strong moral and evangelical overtones that underpinned their theology and understanding of their mission, they accepted the challenge posed by the nature of their work with enthusiasm, resolve
and perhaps with a certain degree of arrogance. Nothing was going to deter them from achieving the noble aims and objectives of their calling, which were understood primarily in terms of winning as many souls as possible for Jesus Christ.

The spiritual dimension however, was only a part of what they perceived to be necessary for the broader transformation they contemplated. Becoming a Christian required more than a mere alteration of one's religious affiliation and loyalty. One also had to exhibit new ways of behaving, adopt new kinds and styles of clothing, and learn new processes of thinking and associated skills. Thus, all levels of the socio-religious spectrum came under their scrutiny. Western civilization and Christianity were in effect different sides of the same coin.

This dualistic feature of missionary endeavour was most evident in the field of education. Wherever mission stations were established, be it in a village setting or in a neutral place, an educational component of the work was developed. Takamo in Rarotonga and Malua in Samoa were the earliest to be established for such purpose.
The missionaries understood the importance of gaining some knowledge of the local vernacular as a mean of enabling their message to be taught and understood. For many, therefore, their initial aim was to have some degree of proficiency in speaking local dialects and languages. When such a skill was acquired, they began to offer some elementary lessons on skills such as reading and writing. These were fundamental tools in their whole educational outlook. But they were foreign to the usual learning enterprise of the local people.

Missionaries are to be acknowledged for their pioneering work in constructing Pacific language in a written format. It was a change that had far-reaching consequences. It enabled the Bible to be translated and to be read by the local people in their own language. The information contained in the Biblical stories opened up a new and fascinating world to the minds of Pacific islanders. Their curiosity was aroused. Their appetite to learn new things was stimulated beyond their wildest dreams.

Already awed by the material possessions displayed by missionaries in terms of their clothes, tools, lifestyles and personal goods, the locals were convinced that such wealth was the product of the world the missionaries came from and more specifically, from the kind of god the missionaries worshipped. Not surprisingly therefore, the locals made an interesting observation: if one wants to have the wealth that missionaries had, then one had to know and learn things that belonged to the world of the missionaries. This ignited their enthusiasm for the new kind of education offered by the missionaries.

The realm of theological education and the training of candidates for the ordained ministry were considered to be the prerogative of each denomination. The establishment of theological colleges and schools were in most cases determined by the urgent need for mission workers to serve locally and overseas. Theological training was therefore perceived as a crucial component of the overall evangelisation policy of each mission society. These colleges and schools grew independently of each other. Academically, the highest qualification one could aspire to gain was at the Diploma level. None had the means or the facilities to offer anything higher.

The idea of a central theological college in the Pacific was first mooted and discussed during the Conference of Churches and Mission held at Malua (Samoa) 22 April to 5 May 1961.
One of the five commissions at the Conference was given the task of discussing 'The Ministry'. When Bishop Leslie Newbigin presented its report to the Conference, it recommended, amongst other things the following:\(^1\)

It is the opinion of this commission that the desire to raise the standard of theological training in the Pacific would best be achieved by co-operation of the churches in the establishment of a central federated theological school to which selected graduates from our present schools can proceed for further training, provided that a higher academic level is established; and that it offers training relevant to the needs of the Pacific churches.

This latter point arose out of a realization that the churches needed to take seriously the changing conditions of life in the region. There were, for instance, a number of emerging trends that would have been unwise for the church to ignore, such as the increasing urbanization of island people; and the changing attitudes and way of life the result of an increasing number of an emerging well-educated lay population.

\(^1\) Theological Education in the Pacific. Consultation. May 7 -13 1961. Published by The Theological Education Fund Committee of the International Missionary Council. P. 45.
After some discussions, the Conference decided that the matter be referred to the Consultation on Theological Education in the Pacific to be held shortly afterwards (7 – 13th May) at Dudley House High School in Suva.

This Consultation had the responsibility of teasing out the nuts and bolts of what the new institution would be like in terms of a constitutional structure, possible curriculum, financial sustainability, personnel and infrastructure. The reason for undertaking such a task was very clear. Participants agreed that raising the level of theological education was urgent. Furthermore, a united approach was needed from each of the participant churches in respect of commitment and support. The consultation firmly believed that churches should be prepared to accept greater financial responsibility for the training of future leaders.

The hopes of the leaders were encapsulated in the ecumenical spirit of the new venture: namely, that the new college will not only provide careful and exact training in biblical and theological studies, but that the type of training will be such as to make these studies deeply relevant to the changing social conditions of the Pacific world. Here, the missiological connection was firmly established. The founders moreover hoped that as staff and students from various church backgrounds and confessional traditions (there were five confessional groups that gave their allegiance from the outset: 

CONSULTATION ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC

DUDLEY HOUSE HIGH SCHOOL
SUVA
7th – 13th MAY 1961

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Anglican, Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist and Lutheran) share the gifts that God had given to each, the Churches of the Pacific may be led to a deeper gratitude for the richness of God's grace and to a readier obedience of His will. In other words, the leaders envisaged that in all of this sharing and interaction, the churches will realize not only their oneness in Christ, but that they also have a responsibility to make available to the world those distinctive theological insights which God has given to the people of the Pacific region.

A further impetus was provided by a paradigm shift in ecclesiological thinking that surfaced during the WCC Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 whereby the Church and the World were no longer seen as separate entities hostile towards each other, but rather different sides of the same coin. The Church was in the world and a part of that world. It had to deal with what was happening in the world and its impact on human lives. In other words, the paradigm shift also ushered in a new perception of what mission was all about. The ecumenical spirit was in effect defining the parameters of mission. The shift resonated well with the hopes of Pacific church leaders for closer cooperation and the sharing of resources.

Two further consultations were held in 1962 and 1964 to work out the necessary details as to how to bring PTC to birth. Key personnel during the planning period included Alan Tippet, the Principal of Davuilevu (Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma Theological College); Charles Forman; Doug Fullerton; John Bradshaw (Principal of Malua); John Vockler (Anglican Bishop in Suva); Paddy Jansen from the New Hebrides; Graham Horwell, a Presbyterian minister from New Zealand; Setareki Tuilovoni, a minister of the MCFR; Amanaki Havea, minister of the FWCT; and Vavae Toma, minister of the CCCS.
These people were the founding members of the first College Council meeting in 1964. Archbishop Vockler was appointed Chairman and Graham Horwell was appointed Secretary.

**First Council Meeting 1966**

The Council's first task was to find someone to be appointed Principal. The Rev. Dr. John Bradshaw was considered but he was not available. He was returning to England after serving in Malua since 1954. The name of George Knight (Presbyterian Church of New Zealand) was put forward and after careful deliberations, the Council resolved to invite Professor Dr. George Knight, who was teaching in Chicago at the time, to be the inaugural Principal of PTC.

Under Dr. Knight's leadership, PTC's reputation for quality theological education at degree and diploma levels was firmly established on the international scene, particularly in the three core areas of Biblical Studies, Theology and Church History.

The foundation stone for the new college was laid on 2 March 1965 by the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr. Arthur Michael Ramsey, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury (images on page 14).

Construction work on the first buildings on the PTC campus at Vuya Road commenced the same year (images on pages 15-16). The first intake of students to begin their studies at PTC was in 1966 (images on pages 17-18).

Images on p. 14 are from the ceremony to lay the foundation stone of PTC on 2 March 1965: (1) top left: worship; (2) top right: Archbishop Dr. Michael Ramsey (left) and Rev. Setareki Tuilovoni (right); (3) bottom: the foundation stone.
Laying the foundations

View of the site in 1965, from the upper end of Vuya Road

Laying the foundations
The second floor of the main administration block goes up

Bulu House is being built
First student intake, with lecturers
Because the buildings were not ready for the first students, the classes were held at the Royal New Zealand Air Force base in Laucala Bay (images on pages 19-20). Classes at its new site at Veiuto began on 9 June 1966 (images on page 21-22).
Room in students’ dormitory at Laucala Bay

Postal delivery
Building of main administration block continues: view from the northwest

Main block, view from the west
View from the corner of Vuya Road and Queen Elizabeth Drive

The architect hands over the keys to the building
This early period must have been an emotionally charged and spiritually uplifting experience deserving the very best of Pacific rhetoric and oratory. The new college manifested the visions and dreams of the leaders and the churches. It symbolized the coming of age for theological education in the region. It testified to the many strands of church history and missionary endeavors and acknowledged the emergence of church autonomy for many from their respective mission boards. It signaled solidarity and comradeship. The PTC canoe was the result of faith and prayer. It had a sacred cargo and mission.

Oozing with confidence from the overwhelming support of the member churches, overseas mission bodies and the World Council of Churches, it glided effortlessly through the calmness of the lagoon, successfully navigated the hazardous reef and moved swiftly to the open sea to fulfill its destiny, namely, the continuing preparation and training of future church leaders and scholars of the Pacific.
Success here and there

Enthusiasm, excitement and total commitment from all involved in this new enterprise were the hallmarks of PTC’s journey during its infancy years. The member churches sent students and met their financial obligations. Overseas partners contributed generously. Renowned overseas scholars offered their services and came to teach. They complimented the efforts of the first Principal to place PTC firmly on the world map of academia. Three years after classes began, the first graduates emerged: ten with a Diploma in Theology, and six with a Bachelor of Divinity.
The significance of this ought not to be lost. PTC became the first tertiary institution of any kind in the Pacific to confer a bachelor's degree. It augured well for its future.

In the ensuing years, the annual intake increased beyond all expectations, and likewise the number of graduates.
Financially, the College had no problems in sustaining its operations in its early years. Its early successes were affirmed by the continuing generosity of overseas partners which enabled a number of important developments to take place, both in the infrastructure and specific projects.

The main administration buildings were completed with the help of a block grant from the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches. Some faculty houses and student accommodation were also built (image on p. 27).
Most notable was the completion of the Chapel in 1968, dedicated to the memory of Pacific island missionaries who helped in the evangelisation of the Pacific (images on pages 27-30). The library was added, and built in stages between 1970 and 1980 (images on page 31).
The newly-built chapel, viewed from the northeast

Students outside the new chapel
Inside the newly-built chapel
The interior of the library in 1971
In addition to the buildings, attention was given to the health and well-being of students, and a rugby-cum-football field was developed already in 1966.

*Match in progress*

*View from the upper floor of the main block*
Dr Knight's term ended in December 1971, and the second principal of the College, the Reverend Dr. Alan Quigley of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand was appointed and took office in 1972. Dr. Quigley focused on the development of the Ministry discipline, particularly in the areas of pastoral and developmental studies, with an emphasis on field work. At the same time, attention was given to the Pacific orientation of the curriculum and the broader development of College life. Dr. Quigley returned to New Zealand at the end of 1976.

The period was also significant in that it heralded the recognition of Pacific church scholars through the appointment of the first Pacific Islander as the third Principal of the College, the Rev. Dr. Sione Amanaki Havea of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Dr. Havea's appointment began an unbroken line of Pacific islanders in this position. Under Dr. Havea's leadership, the Pacific orientation of the curriculum and the broader development of College life were brought to fuller fruition. Furthermore the Women's Programme was established, and a child-care center was built (image on page 34).

In the 1980s, another change in the leadership occurred. Dr. Havea returned to Tonga at the end of 1981 to take up a leadership position within his church. This resulted in the appointment of the Rev. Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere from the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma as the fourth Principal of the College from January 1982 onwards. During Rev. Tuwere's tenure as Principal, the Master of Theology programme was introduced in 1987, starting with the discipline of Church History.
The military coup of 1987 disrupted the College as the military issued a directive for one of the College's overseas lecturer from India to leave: The military claimed that the lecturer's teaching was detrimental to the aspirations of the indigenous Fijians and, as a result, his permit to work in Fiji was cancelled. The College had no choice but to let the lecturer leave. But the incident revealed an unpleasant truth, namely that some students were reporting to the military what went on in the classrooms. Such a revelation placed many on edge. Political
interference was a new experience for the College. It was a hard pill to swallow at the time.

Rev. Tuwere resigned at the end of 1988 in order to pursue doctoral studies at the Melbourne College of Divinity. The Council then appointed the Rev. Dr. Sione Latukefu from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga as the fifth Principal of the College from 1989. During his time much was accomplished, including the extensions to the Etina Havea Center, the building of six student flats, two classrooms and four staff offices, the beginning of the Women's Center, and the strengthening of the academic programme through the inclusion of the Biblical Studies discipline in the MTh degree programme in 1989. The establishment of the Education by Extension Program also began in the same year.

The 1990s were also turbulent years in the life of the College. Within a space of seven years, three principals and one acting principal were at the helm. The retirement of Dr. Latukefu at the end of 1991 due to ill health saw the appointment of the Rev. Dr. Faitala Talapusi
from the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa as the sixth Principal of the College from January 1992.

Dr. Talapusi pioneered the introduction of a new contextual curriculum in the academic programme and the inclusion of the Ministry and Theology disciplines in the MTh programme in 1992. With all four major theological disciplines (Biblical Studies, Church history, Theology and Ministry) now part of the MTh degree, it became evident that a certain degree of academic maturity had been attained both by the teaching faculty and the earlier graduates of the BD programme who were now returning to undertake the new research degree. Dr. Talapusi also tabled a visionary plan before the Council for a new infrastructure of the College. However, financial considerations caused the Council members to reject the proposal. In hindsight, many of the infrastructure problems that PTC continues to experience today would have been resolved if the proposal by Dr. Talapusi had been accepted.

When he resigned at the end of 1994, the Rev. Dr. Samiuela Toa Finau from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga was appointed as Acting Principal as the College Council searched for a new Principal.

This was achieved at the end of 1995 when the Rev. Dr. Jovili Iliesa Meo from the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma was appointed as the seventh Principal of the College. Under his leadership, the main administrative building to house the Education by Extension programme was completed. The adoption by PTC of the mission programme (God’s Pacific People programme) also happened during his leadership. The significance of this move lies in the fact it is a Pacific
Conference of Churches programme, mandated by the leaders of the Churches, but delivered by the College. The link in terms of cooperation between two major ecumenical bodies in the region is to be applauded.

PTC entered the 21st century with much enthusiasm and anticipation only for these to be severely checked by the civilian coup of May 2000 (images on page 38).

With the taking-over of Parliament next door to PTC by Speight and his supporters, coupled with the fact that his supporters were armed with guns, as well as the decision of the military to set up camp next door to PTC on Vuya Road, the College found itself in the precarious position of being right in the middle between the coup supporters and the military. With no fence to act as a possible deterrent, the compound became a convenient short-cut to parliament for the coup supporters as they disembarked from their buses in front of the College and made their way up to Parliament. The violation of the College compound by coup supporters put many students on edge. Sensing this, the Principal gave a directive not to confront them but let them go through. The already tense situation was further fueled by the sudden disappearance of all the taro, cassava and vegetables from student and faculty gardens. But worse was to come.

On the morning of Saturday, 26 May, Speight and his supporters decided to confront the military who were now camping beside PTC. Over 300 coup supporters marched down Vuya Road. Gunshots were fired and chaos ensued. With no mandate to shoot, the military retreated, many into the PTC compound. This was the last straw. Dr. Meo knew at that moment, that despite his big heart and love for members of our community and a deep reluctance to close the college, he could not guaranteed the safety of the students and faculty members. With 95% of the community from outside Fiji, the safety issue became critical.

There were two phases in the evacuation process. The first phase involved the immediate leaving of the compound. This was not a straight forward matter. Where could the college community go? All of Suva was affected. Movement was severely restricted. In the end, we had no choice but to accept offers from those willing to assist. Some went to the Pacific Regional Seminary, some to the Anglican St John’s Theological College, and those who had relatives and friends went to stay with them.
Scenes during the coup in 2000
Phase two of the evacuation process involved leaving Fiji. The decision by Pacific governments that directed airlines to send their planes to take their nationals home, as well as the willingness of New Zealand and Australia to evacuate others relieved some of the anxiety. But getting from Suva to Nadi proved a nightmare. With Nausori airport closed, the only way left was to travel by road. This meant we had to get buses. We asked for two and were given only one. So we had to decide who goes and who stays. In the end families went first. Finding a bus driver was another headache: no Indian bus driver was willing to drive. In the end we were told that the only driver willing to take the College to Nadi was a Fijian who had a driver's licence but not a bus driving licence. It was not a time to be choosy so we agreed. The next problem was when to leave. The military advised us that they could not guarantee our safety to Nadi because some of the villages between Suva and Nadi have placed roadblocks on the main highway. In the end, the military advised us to leave PTC anytime between midnight and 3 am. The bus left at 1 am from the front of the College.

Dr. Meo and his family, our Fijian staff and students and their families plus a few of us from outside of Fiji remained at PTC. This lasted only four days. As the political crisis intensified and the likelihood of being stranded in Fiji seemed imminent, Dr. Meo reluctantly called the few us from outside of Fiji to his office on the morning of the fourth day since the evacuation. What transpired that morning in the Principal's office reminded me of my Samoan heritage and spirituality. A historical moment defining a major paradigm shift is proclaimed by the usage of the word 'morning'. We sensed the heavy heart of the principal, but it was what he said that made me think of 'morning' in my Samoan context. With tears and a broken voice he said "You must all leave Fiji now ... the end of the College is here ... thank you for staying back ...".

For three months the College was closed. All overseas students and faculty members returned to their respective countries with the exception of faculty members from Europe who sought refuge with close friends in New Caledonia and New Zealand.

But God never abandoned PTC.

After three weeks, Dr Meo recalled a few of us back to help organize the reopening of the College. First we had to move the administrative section out of the main building. The military had declared the area in which the College is located as a military zone. An apartment block in
Suva was rented to house the College office, the Principal and the Vice Principal.

The College resumed in September at the request of the Principal. The trauma of such an experience resulted in a number of faculty members not returning. Graduation in 2000 was held a week before Christmas.

The coup of 2000 highlighted the need of the College to reassess issues concerning its infrastructure and security. It led to the development and completion – for the first time – of a comprehensive Master Plan to guide the improvement of the College. This Plan, developed by Dr. Ernst, has been closely followed after the College recovered from the coup of 2000.

In effect, 2001 turned out to be a time of consolidation. The political climate in Fiji continued to cause concern and uncertainty. Stability for the College was gained only when the Council meeting in November 2000 reassured the College of the importance to continue its work in Fiji. (The issue of relocating the College was discussed at length by the Council given that three coups had occurred within a space of 13 years). In the end, the Council remained firm in its decision for the College to remain in Suva.

Without doubt, the coup of 2000 deeply affected the health of Dr. Meo. He resigned at the end of 2001 and a new Principal, Rev. Dr. Feleterika Nokise, was appointed at the same time to begin work as the eighth Principal of the College from January 2002.

With the Master Plan of 2001 in place, development of the college intensified from 2002. Two new faculty houses were built. A fence was constructed around the compound (image on p. 41). Stormwater drainage was realigned and covered. A community meeting house was erected. Renovations and refurbishing of the Administration Building began. A new bookshop and canteen were opened (images on pp. 41-42). Phases 1 and 2 of the new Library Extension plan were completed (image on p. 42), as were new
sports and recreational facilities, including a major upgrade of the soccer field, and new tennis and volleyball courts (*images on pp. 42-43*). September 2004 saw also the completion of the Mission Center, courtesy of a substantial grant from the Council for World Mission (*image on p. 44*). New flats to house PhD students were completed in 2006 and were named in honour of the Rev. Dr. Faitala Talapusi (*image on p. 43*).
Opening of the new cantine

Library extension at the northern end: space for postgraduate students

New volleyball court
New tennis court (foreground), and raised soccer field (background)

Talapusi flats
It is the practice at PTC to name some of its buildings after former Principals: Thus we have the George Knight Library (image on p. 46); the Quigley Flats for faculty members (image below); the Fofola e Fala: Havea-Latukefu Community Fale (image below); the Tuwere Flats (image on p. 47); the Talapusi Flats (image on p. 43) and the Jovili Meo Mission Center (image on p. 44). The drive in front of the College is named the Toa Finau Drive.
On the academic side of things, PTC’s PhD programme was launched September 2004.

This development was the culmination of efforts to explore such a possibility. It took five years. Six universities in New Zealand and Australia were considered. In the end, a memorandum of understanding was reached with Charles Sturt University (Australia) to jointly offer the degree. The first intake for PhD studies was accepted in 2005. Due to ideological and bureaucratic differences however, the partnership was terminated at the end of 2008 and the College Council issued a directive for the College to undertake its own PhD programme from 2009.

The BD programme was suspended in 2006. The decision by a number of member churches to have their theological colleges offering the BD programme meant that the once steady supply of students for this programme began to dissipate. In response, PTC explored the possibility of offering the Bachelor of Theology, targeting mainly students in the Education by Extension programme, and this was later implemented. When the BD was reviewed at the end of 2008, member churches who do not offer a BD programme as well as those member churches who do not have theological colleges,
appealed to the Council to have it reinstated to enable their students to access an ecumenical formation degree course. The Council agreed and the BD programme was re-launched in 2009 with a three-year rolling programme.

By the end of 2009 the College was offering the following academic award programmes:

- Certificate of Theological Studies,
- Diploma in Theological Studies,
- Bachelor of Theology,
- Bachelor of Divinity in Ecumenical Studies,\(^2\)
- Postgraduate Diploma in Theology,
- Master of Theology, and
- Doctor of Philosophy.

During the Council meeting of 2009, a report of the first-ever review of the College was tabled. This work was carried out by an outside professional team of three well-qualified consultants. The report provided comprehensive coverage of the life and services of PTC, highlighting the enormous contribution PTC has made to the churches and society of our region and the importance for it to continue. It also identified some of the critical problems facing the College, especially in the area of financial sustainability. The crucial responsibility of member churches who owned the College as well as the need to introduce a more efficient financial and management system constituted the bulk of the recommendations. The report has become the blueprint for current and long term strategic planning.

### Programmes at PTC

#### PTC Education by Extension

The distance learning programme of PTC began in 1989 as a partnership between the College and PCC which focussed on training church leaders in Micronesia. This was achieved by means of

\(^2\) The BTh and the BDES were later merged into a single Bachelor degree programme, the Bachelor of Divinity (with or without Honours).
of PTC Faculty members visiting various parts of Micronesia for training and workshops. It was known at the time as the Education by Extension for Development and Action programme. In 1993, the PCC Executive resolved to hand over to PTC the administration and delivery of the programme. The PTC Council accepted PCC’s resolution and renamed it as PTCEE. In time it transformed itself into a distance education programme that is mainly based on correspondence courses.

The aims of the Programme are:

- to train lay Christians, men and women in the Pacific for theologically informed service in various forms of ministry;
- to develop Christian responses to social issue affecting church and society in our region; and
- to enable people to learn in their own environment and at their own speed.

The current Director is Rev. Dr. Val Ogden from the Methodist Church in Great Britain.
God's Pacific People

A special consultation of leaders of the Pacific churches was held in Kiribati in October 1991. It gave birth to a document called "God's Pacific People: Looking to Jesus For a Way Ahead". This document was approved by the Pacific Conference of Churches' (PCC) Executive in subsequent meetings held in Fiji in 1992, and in Tuvalu in 1994. It was endorsed by the Pacific Theological College Council at its Annual Meetings of 1995 and 1996 respectively, and was approved by the Pacific Conference of Churches' Meeting in Tahiti in 1997.

The Document used the passage of scripture expressed in Mark 4:35 "Let us cross over to the other side" as a vital direction for mission involvement of the churches in the Region. It implies crossing the seas, cultures, prejudices and worldviews for the work of mission. Pacific people are encouraged to cross over from one island to another to assist each other and work alongside others. Such crossing over involves risks, in that one becomes vulnerable, and one must join in solidarity with others in their struggles and needs.

This crossing over is therefore an expression of partnership, mutuality, and solidarity where real sharing takes place. GPP is a programme of personnel sharing for mission, service, development, and justice concerns. The guiding principle of GPP is sharing. This sharing includes sharing of resources, planning, administration and responsibilities (images on pp. 52-53).

GPP is currently under the Directorship of Rev. Rosalyn Nokise from New Zealand, a priest of the Diocese of Polynesia.

Institute for Research and Social Analysis

The Institute for Research & Social Analysis was established in April 2008. As an integral part of PTC, the Institute undertakes and facilitates the research needs of the Pacific churches, communities, and of the College in order to contribute to a well-informed Christian presence in the Pacific Islands.
Some activities of the GPF program:

Personal Exchanges

Mission Conference Viwa Is Fiifi

Training Peacebuilding

GPF Steering Committee

GPF Advisory Committee
Activities of the Institute for Research and Social Analysis

- are driven by the context in which the societies are embedded;
- aim to investigate and address issues and concerns of the Pacific Churches; and;
- explore the biblical and theological as well as ethical, social and moral foundations of pertinent issues and concerns of Pacific Churches.

The Institute is currently under the Directorship of Professor Manfred Ernst from Germany (images on pp. 55-56).

Women's Fellowship Development Programme

The Women's Programme that was established in the 1970s came to an end in 2006 when a review of its work found that many of the courses and activities it was offering were already undertaken by the wives during their training days in their own theological colleges. A change in emphasis was needed to complement what the women already learnt. This led to discussions in 2001 to establish some kind of programme for women who come with their families to PTC but are not undertaking academic courses in Certificates, Diploma or Degree studies. A group of faculty women and faculty spouses met to consider the needs and concerns of women at PTC. A survey was undertaken of both leaving and returning women to ask what they have appreciated learning in the past at PTC, what other courses they would like to see offered and, under what structure they should be delivered.

On the basis of this survey a development programme for women was formulated. Four streams of study were identified as significant for Women: Spiritual Formation, Practical Arts, Capacity Building, and Skills for Mission. Only a few specialized courses are offered in each stream. The four streams of study must be taken as a whole integrated package for the Certificate of Women's Development Studies. A fifth stream – English Literacy - was later added. The program is under the administrative care of Mrs. Sosefo Tigarea from the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma (image on p. 57).
Institute of Research & Social Analysis

Social Analysis Workshop

Leadership & Management Workshop

Some activities of the Institute for Research and Social Analysis
Other workshops and seminars delivered by IRSA

- Ecumenical Women’s Leadership & Management Samoa
- Social Analysis Workshop Kanaky
- Research Methods Workshop
Some activities in the Women's Fellowship Development Programme
Impact

It could be argued that PTC has achieved much success during its brief life span of 50 years. It has produced over 800 graduates, many of whom occupied or occupy prominent leadership positions in their respective churches and within their local theological colleges. Some have had enormous influence in the political development of their home countries. Many have had a direct impact on the educational renaissance in their churches and society.

The emergence of Pacific church scholars over the last twenty years can be attributed to the high academic standards pursued by the College. This has happened as a result of three factors: the efforts of local theological colleges who invested in the students its churches have sent, who in turn have become outstanding scholars in their own right; the many outstanding scholars from all over the world that have graced the hallowed corridors of PTC; and the emergence of the PTC library as one of the best theological libraries in the region outside of Australia and New Zealand.

Even the kind of community that has emerged is a success story in many ways (images on pages 59-65).

The multi-dimensional nature of the College, with its different layers of denominational loyalties, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socio-economic and political histories and developments, can be a daunting experience at first. But the challenge of being confronted with the realities of what it means to experience first hand such diversity in unity more than compensates the effects of any initial shock.

For many, PTC offers their first contact with ecumenism. It is a place where many different kinds of realities and meaning systems are found. Spiritual and intellectual openness are essential for survival.

To be exposed to such a community is an opportunity to wrestle with one's own limitations and to discover the enormous potential for spiritual growth through the many faces of God's Grace.
Problems beyond the reef

It would be misleading however to conclude that PTC, with all its achievements and successes, is a thriving and healthy entity. On the contrary, the PTC canoe has had to endure some rough and stormy seas especially during the turn of the century. That it has survived this far is a miracle from God. Given the seemingly endless pounding it has received from the waves and winds of life, the state of the canoe is in dire need of some urgent repairs if it is to be seaworthy again. On the other hand, perhaps the time has come to build a new canoe. Perhaps the original mandate of PTC has run its course. Perhaps Bob Dylan's prophetic song 'For the times they are a-changin' is true after all.

Cracks began to emerge on the once solid structure of the PTC canoe during the 1990s as a result of three distinct yet inter-related developments:

- local theological colleges began to offer the Bachelor of Divinity degree; resulting in the rapid decline in the PTC BD intake;
- the amount of grants from overseas partners has decreased; and,
- the failure of many member churches to honour their annual financial contributions resulting in the accumulation of enormous debts which seriously undermine the general operations of the College.

There is no record of any meeting being held among the owners of PTC or even in SPATS where the likely implications of offering the BD by local theological colleges were discussed in relation to the future of PTC. It is only in recent years, when others followed the same direction and the impact of such a move had become more noticeable, that serious questions were raised about the future of the PTC BD programme.

PTC acknowledged that such a move was not intentional, but rather a natural consequence perhaps of the member churches' capacity and ability to initiate such a development, given the emergence of their own well qualified scholars. The irony of the situation however is that PTC has, either by design or by accident, contributed to the demise of its own BD programme by training those who now teach the BD programme in their local theological colleges and seminary.
This trend, which began during the latter half of the 1990s, has unfortunately, contributed to the bleak financial situation of the college.

The low intake has been a prominent feature of the academic degree programmes despite repeated Council pleas and decisions for more students. Council and Executive Meetings have produced countless resolutions. Verbal declarations of goodwill and support have not been lacking. Promises after promises have been made. In the end however, only a handful of member churches had the courage to 'walk the talk'.

In 2005, the College was on the verge of closing down. The lack of financial support and students from the majority of member churches meant general operations could not be sustained. The seriousness of the situation warranted an emergency meeting of the leaders a week before the Council met at the beginning of November. The signs however were on the wall much earlier and a Strategic Plan Report prepared by a small team headed by Mr Fei Tevi was tabled for consideration. The report recommended that PTC diversified its mode of theological education and explore the establishing of Institutes to complement its academic programme. It was an effort to attract more students.

Student numbers have a direct bearing on the financial sustainability of PTC. This is because tuition fees are earmarked to pay the salaries of the lecturers and their accommodation fees are earmarked for the daily operation of the College. With fewer students, the GOA does not have enough funds in it to sustain the daily running of the College. This has been the case during the past decade. The usual sources of income to run the College are accommodation fees from the students, contributions from member churches and overseas partners, rental fees and donations. But all these have diminished dramatically. The situation is such that PTC has only a handful of students, grants from overseas partners for general operations have not only decreased, but some have stopped giving altogether; and almost half of the 20 member churches have arrears in their annual contributions now totaling almost one million dollars.

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3 In 1995, the student number was 60; in 2000, 50; in 2005, 32.
4 Annual contributions from the member churches is supposed to bring in F$210,000. This amount has never been achieved during the last ten years.
This latter issue has been a thorn in the life of PTC. By 1999, the debts owed by a number of member churches was approaching F$500,000. In an unprecedented move which caught the College completely off its guard, the Council meeting of that year decided to forgive those member churches concerned. Such a decision did not resolve the debt. In reality, it propelled the College to a deeper financial crisis from which it has never recovered. What security the College had in terms of real estate properties was shortly afterwards gone. To try and recover the debt, the College was forced to sell the houses it owned around Suva. But even this did not resolve the problem. Member churches continued to neglect their responsibility of paying their annual contribution and the debts began to mount up again.

The seriousness of the issue concerning the financial sustainability of the College became the focus of an extraordinary Council meeting that was held in conjunction with the church leaders meeting in Auckland August 2010. Fourteen of the twenty member churches present all voted that apart from their annual contribution, each member church was to set aside a Sunday for a special offering for the work of the College. That this offering was to reach PTC by the 31st March 2011. The decision was put in a carefully worded letter, signed by all fourteen leaders and representatives, each of them took a copy home and member churches who were not present were sent copies of the letter. Only six of the twenty member churches that own the College forwarded contributions. To compound the problem, only four member churches forwarded their normal annual contributions.

One of the effects of our dire financial situation is that we cannot recruit the necessary number of teaching faculty members to deliver the academic programme. There is a also an acute shortage of Pacific island church scholars in some of the main theological disciplines. A number of outstanding scholars from our churches who served at PTC have been recalled by their home churches to take up leadership positions. Replacing them with other Pacific islanders is in most cases not possible. There are simply none available. Either the churches require them to serve at home or they are already in better paid positions overseas.

The Council is to be commended in passing resolutions to address the issue. The green light was given in 2011 for a more concerted effort to recruit more faculty members to ensure the standard of the academica programme is maintained. The result of this move has been very positive. As we celebrate our 50th year of existence, the
current teaching faculty stands at seven full-time with three part-time. The number is likely to increase in the coming years.

An exciting development in assisting the residential faculty was the launching in 2012 of an Adjunct Faculty Body consisting of renowned scholars from around the world. An immediate benefit in having such a pool of scholars available was accessibility to those who could become examiners of theses or others who could act as secondary supervisors for PhD students.

The issue of more Pacific island scholars has seen a deliberate move to recruit past and recent outstanding students to be faculty development candidates. Currently there are three, with the possibility of increasing this number to five. They will all join the teaching faculty at the completion of their doctoral studies.

From the outset, our overseas partners have offered strong and caring support for the development of the life and work of PTC. Many of the buildings and much of the infrastructure of the college as well as projects of the residential programmes would not have happened if it were not for the strong financial and personnel support of our partners. At the forefront of this continuing assistance are our partners from Germany, in particular, Bread for the World, EMW and Mission EineWelt in Bavaria. In the same vein is the commitment of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, CWM, CEVAA and the Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ USA. These have borne the brunt of our constant flow of application for help. Others who have notable contributions include WCC, Anglican Church of Canada, Anglican Church of Australia, Uniting World, United Church of Canada, North Church in Germany, and the Presbyterian Church of USA. PTC is indebted to all of the above.

**Unavoidable lessons**

There are some blatant truths that we need to accept and own arising out of the above analysis:

- The financial sustainability of the College is an ecumenical responsibility of the member churches that own the College.

- There must be a commitment to put into action the decisions and resolutions made by PTC's governing body, the Council. The integrity of the Council has often been undermined by its own members.
• Contributions from overseas partners for the general operation of the College have declined dramatically. This has been the result of changes in their economy, internal restructuring, and revised policies. It has to be said however that overseas partners are not obliged to support the general operation of the College. This is the responsibility of the owners of the College as stated in its Constitution.

• A concerted effort of member churches to send students on a regular basis remains fundamental.

The immediate future

'Living on the edge' has been the hallmark of PTC's existence over the last ten years. It has been an exhilarating journey of faith.

Will the College survive … YES!

Can the College survive … YES!

Do you want your College to survive … ?

In the final analysis, when all is said and done, the onus is on the owners of the College. With moves already in the pipeline for PTC to become a University of Pacific Churches in the foreseeable future, there is an urgent need for all the owners to recommit themselves in their support. However eloquent and profound they are in word and meaning, however faith-driven and theologically sound they may appear, if resolutions cannot be translated into concrete, life-giving actions, all will be lost.
Pacific Theological College: Memories of a Fifty Year Relationship

Tessa Mackenzie

On that March day in 1965, a young woman stood with her two-year old son and watched from afar the small group of dark-clad figures conducting the ceremony of the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Pacific Theological College. She did not then even dream of what the College would come to mean in her life. But ten years later she found herself helping the students with the English language, and from then her name was on the annual graduation invitation list. The relationship with the College continued, sometimes close, sometimes more distant, culminating in appointment as Secretary of the College Council and Executive in 2008, a position still held.

There are so many memories of wonderful people and friendships made, too many names to mention all, among them Principals of the College - Alan Quigley and Dawn, their son John, a close school friend of our son Robbie; Sevati Tuwere, Jovili Meo and Lisa, and of course Fele and Rosalyn Nokise.

Over the years many Faculty have become friends – a few names to mention from early years: Muthuraj, Beulah and their two children from South India; Stanley Good and Joan, John Garrett and Roberta with their two sons who were school friends of our sons, David Esterline and the short-lived Biblical Association, Jeanette Little in the Library, Jacques and Eugenie Nicole, whose son now teaches at USP, Andrew Thornley, who still occasionally visits Suva.

It was Alan Quigley who gave me the great privilege of teaching English. Through about ten years I shared with a number of remarkable students in their efforts to express their ideas in a language that was not only foreign but confusing. Among them one name stands out – Pims from West Papua who birthed my enduring interest in and sympathy for the people of that abused nation. And there was French-speaking Joel from Tahiti another struggling country, now known by his Maohi Nui name Here.

Of graduation ceremonies, with their reports, addresses, and often beautiful singing by the students, the most memorable is that of 2008 when the College awarded an honorary doctorate to the great ecumenist, Sir Ellison Pogo, who was Chairperson of the Council from 1993 to 2008.
Coming from an Anglican background, brought up in an English vicarage, the greatest gift I have received from this long association with PTC is an understanding of the richness of the diversity of ecumenism and its importance to the churches in the Pacific, and for the whole worldwide Christian community. This has been brought home to me through the occasional morning worship and weekly Holy Communions that I have attended in the lovely College chapel over the last few years. Every occasion is unique, as each presiding minister offers the perspective of his/her church through carefully prepared liturgies and reflections. I have learned that exact ways of doing rituals that I have been brought up with are open to ways that are new to me, but always the essential elements of the eucharistic words as handed to us by Our Lord Jesus Christ is the unchanging centrepoint, as each time we hear the ageless words of institution as recorded in the Gospel. This has given me new insights into liturgy and has enriched all my worship, bringing me a deeper respect for other Christians and for variations of doctrine.

The Pacific churches now struggle to maintain the relationships that were forged in the years after the Second World War, that led to the founding of the college, and some churches can no longer find the wherewithal to continue to support PTC. All churches should realise the importance of sending their students to study here. This contributes in a large way to fostering ecumenism and at the same time it assists to maintain the PTC. Encouragement also needs to be given to those churches that stand outside the "mainline" ecumenical fellowship to send their students to PTC.

The work of the PTC Institute of Research and Social Analysis, with which I have been associated in an advisory capacity since its inception, has an important role to play in advancing ecumenism also, through research and through capacity building.

Add to all this the joy of sharing in the occasional feasts and the celebration through cultural items of dancing and singing that maintain and strengthen the threatened cultures of our islands, together with the gathering round the bowl for informal story-telling and song that may last until dawn. The PTC community is a microcosm of ecumenism at its best.

I pray that this exceptional ecumenical institution that is PTC will continue to flourish through the next fifty years and on into the future.
"Always on My Mind" is an American country music song by Johnny Christopher, Mark James and Wayne Carson, recorded first by Gwen McCrae (as 'You Were Always On My Mind') and Brenda Lee in 1972. The music company 'Allmusic' lists over 300 recorded releases of the song in versions by dozens of performers. While Brenda Lee's version had stalled at #45 on the country charts in 1972, other performers would reach the top 20 in the United States and elsewhere with their own versions: Elvis Presley in 1972; John Wesley Ryles in 1979; Willie Nelson's Grammy Award winning version in 1982; Pet Shop Boys in 1987. It was also performed by Shakira at the 2002 VH1 Divas in Las Vegas. (Wikipedia)

The popularity of the song can no doubt be attributed to the simple but certainly beautiful words that it contains. It is obviously a love song which can be between a man and a woman, a father and a daughter or son, a mother and a daughter or son, between two closely-knit organisations of any type, even between a dying husband and his wife or sister or aunty: the list of possibilities is in fact endless. Let's look at what those words are for a better appreciation of the song (text from Wikipedia):

Maybe I didn't love you
Quite as often as I could have
And maybe I didn't treat you
Quite as good as I should have
If I made you feel second best
Girl, I'm sorry I was blind
You were always on my mind
You were always on my mind
And maybe I didn't hold you
All those lonely, lonely times
And I guess I never told you
I'm so happy that you're mine
Little things I should have said and done  
I just never took the time  
But you were always on my mind  
You were always on my mind  

Tell me, tell me that your sweet love hasn't died  
And give me, give me one more chance  
To keep you satisfied  
I'll keep you satisfied  

[Instrumental Interlude]  

Little things I should have said and done  
I just never took the time  
But you were always on my mind  
You were always on my mind  
You were always on my mind  

As a founding member of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), whose first baby was the Pacific Theological College (PTC), the feelings and spirit portrayed in "Always on my mind" above is certainly a fitting way to describe how the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) feels about PTC today as it celebrates its 50th anniversary. How is this possible? What is the connection between the above song and the CICC in relation to PTC's anniversary? Well, let's take a walk through time and do some reflection along the way.

Conception  

During the Conference of Churches and Mission held at Malua (Samoa) from 22 April to 5 May 1961 when the idea of a central theological college was first mooted and discussed, the CICC was in attendance. And when the foundation stone for the college was laid on 2 March 1965 (Nokise 2011, pp.4-6), the CICC by virtue of it being a PCC founding member, was also part of that memorable occasion. So like the joyous feelings of a father and mother at witnessing the birth of their first child, no doubt the CICC felt the same way when PTC was born 50 long years ago. And being a party in conceiving PTC, the CICC can rightly and proudly say as per one of the lines in the above song that "I'm so happy that you're mine". Most parents will say that their children are always on their minds.
Well, the CICC can also claim that for the past 50 years, PTC has always been on its mind as alluded to in the above song.

Students

The CICC had students study at PTC at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels from the 1960s until its last student in the late 1990s. For a number of reasons, the CICC was not able to send any more students to PTC thereafter. An important reason was to do with supporting its own local Takamoa Theological College, one of the oldest in the Pacific Islands. The CICC management continues to find itself in the difficult position of prioritizing its support and sharing resources between the two institutions. It even went as far as informing PTC in 2008 that it wanted to sever its ties with PTC altogether, partly because it was no longer sending students to PTC. However, an intervention by the PTC Principal in 2009 led to the CICC reconsidering its position and eventually electing to continue its support by maintaining an annual donation and participating in the college’s council meetings. No doubt the spirit of "Always on my mind" played a major part in the CICC not pulling itself completely out of PTC. In retrospect, that probably would have been a disaster and an insult to both parties had it happened, in terms of the spirit inherent in "Always on my mind".

What we have learned

So what has the CICC got to say insofar as PTC as a regional and ecumenical institution is concerned? Have there been lessons learned? Have there been experiences about PTC that it would like to treasure? The answer is the affirmative, many lessons and experiences have certainly been learned of which the important ones are mentioned below.

First, the caliber of the CICC graduates coming out of PTC had a relatively strong academic background on biblical studies, theology and church history, the 3 core areas that PTC is well known to have much strength in. The ecumenical nature of PTC no doubt contributed much to the graduates' wider scope of theology as well. On the other hand, a denomination-based theological college would probably have a much narrower and lesser coverage of theology. So in this particular respect, PTC can slap itself on its own back and
even claim to be a leader in the field amongst the theological colleges in the Pacific. Let's say that this would be one of the strong "X-factors" that PTC has and should rightly be proud of.

Second, despite PTC having gone through many challenges, it nevertheless continues to survive to celebrate its 50th birthday, a true "Pacific battler" indeed, to paraphrase the well-known Australian saying of "Aussie battler" which referred to Australian war soldiers who fought hard in past world conflicts, and to current hard-working Aussies. PTC is continuously challenged in terms of budget (member churches and funding organisations always have valid reasons for contributing less), financial mismanagement by its own administration and finance staff, challenges from other regional and international theological colleges in terms of students intake, staff turnover due to retirement, competition from other employers, and even member churches recalling their personnel to serve back in the national churches and/or theological colleges. It is probably safe to say that some of these challenges are not going to be disappearing any time soon.

Third, PTC has strived to adapt itself so that it continues to be relevant in the changing playing field of theological education in the Pacific today. This is evidenced from the different types of programmes that it has embraced, such as PTCEE, GPP, those coming out of the Institute for Research and Social Analysis, and no doubt there are others which can be included on to the list. It has also been accommodating of students' family responsibilities through, for example, the establishment in 1980 of the Etina Havea Centre to cater for PTC children so their mothers could participate in the College's Women's Programme.

So what are the above lessons and experiences saying to us today? Simple, it is saying to us that PTC recognises and appreciates the fact that there are increased demands being put onto its shoulders by the changing landscape of theological education and that it is doing its best to embrace and accommodate those demands. This is indeed a good sign of an institution that is not scared of change and competition, that given the challenges it has come through it is nevertheless prepared to maintain its position as leader in the ecumenical movement, that it will continue to serve the member churches at all costs, that it surely wants to continue being a Pacific battler. I certainly would take my church hat off to any religious institution with an attitude like that, of which there are not that many around.
Where to from here?

Having said all of the above, the question is why should PTC continue to be on the mind of CICC as the above song suggests that it should? It had no students studying at PTC for many years now and it is not certain how long this unfortunate situation will continue, it is not benefiting in any tangible way from what PTC is currently offering, it is "pouring money down the drain" so to speak in terms of its annual donations, but what is it getting out of that? Absolutely nothing I'm sorry to say, in fact if the CICC was run as a profit-making business, it would have already cut its connection with PTC as part of the normal organizational cost-cutting measures.

But the simple fact of the matter is that PTC belongs to the CICC as much as it belongs to those other member churches and partner organisations that played a part in its conception. No doubt those who were party to the conception never envisaged the possibility that one day PTC might have no option but to close its doors. So can the CICC really "disown" PTC like we read in the news these days about parents disowning their children? Having come this far and given the current status of its relationship – or lack of it – with PTC, does it make sense at all for the CICC to wish that it was not a party to conceiving PTC 50 years ago? If the CICC decides to walk away from PTC, wouldn't the "always on my mind" feeling and spirit turn into one that will "always haunt my mind"?

Perhaps one way of responding is to go through the song again and see how it relates to the CICC today. The CICC responses are on the right in italics:

Maybe I didn't love you
Quite as often as I could have
And maybe I didn't treat you
Quite as good as I should have
If I made you feel second best
Girl I'm sorry I was blind

You were always on my mind
You were always on my mind

And maybe I didn't hold you
All those lonely, lonely times
And I guess I never told you
I'm so happy that you're mine

Yes I did, I was a party to your creation.
Ok, probably, but I'm only a medium church and did what I could within my means, keeping in mind the fact that I also have a local college to sustain. Yeah, ok, sorry for having to look after 2 babies.

If I have benefited in the past from you, then how can I wipe you out of my memory?

Yes I did, I continued my annual financial contributions. We also discussed together your financial and other difficulties. That was my feeling 50 years ago and today.
Little things I should have said and done
I just never took the time

Yes, little things do matter of course. I've I should have said and done. I've said my piece in the meetings and did what I could, but of course I could have done more.

But you were always on my mind, You were always on my mind
Of course, always on my mind, thanks to the events of the past.

Tell me, Tell me that your sweet love hasn't died
And give me, give me one more chance
To keep you satisfied
I'll keep you satisfied

I should be the one telling you that my sweet love for you hasn't died. I will try and keep satisfying you by maintaining my annual donations and see what I can do with students intake. Can't make any promises though.

Little things I should have said and done
I just never took the time
But you were always on my mind
You were always on my mind
You were always on my mind

I want you to know that should the real world catch up on us one day and lead to your extinction, you will always be on my mind.

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Part 2

Reflections on Theology & Theological Education
**Being a Missionary in the 21st Century: Lessons from PTC**

*Jenny Willsher*

In April 2000 the phone in my Parish office rang. I answered the phone and a woman introduced herself and said she was phoning me as she had just read an article in the local newspaper that had been written about my husband, my son and myself. The article informed readers that my husband David and I were leaving the Parish where we had been ministers for years to go as missionaries to lecture at a Theological College in Suva, Fiji. The woman who was on the phone wanted to warn us not to go – she had lived in Fiji for a couple of years when her husband worked there, and it was a horrible place – "you can't get real milk, only UHT milk, the food is horrible and not like food in Australia – lots of curries and traditional foods, and it is hot and there are lots of dark people". After the woman had finished her warning I very quickly ended the phone call, I was saddened by her cultural arrogance and racism. I also had a laugh, as she really knew nothing about the person she had been talking to – my family has had a long term association with Fiji and I had visited many times and had a great love for the country and its people. David, Joshua and I also had a great love of curries and *dalo*, *kokoda* and *palusami* and we only ever used UHT milk in our home!!

To be invited to Fiji was for us, the result of a lot of praying and listening to God, and there was a sense of being called to share our gifts where they were most needed. We were humbled when Archbishop Sir Ellison Pogo joined with the leaders from the Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) to "commission us, as a family, for mission" before we left Australia to work at PTC. As Chairman of the PTC College Council he expressed his particular desire that we would mentor the Anglican students from the Anglican Province of Melanesia, and in particular, that we would model and encourage partnership in ordained ministry between men and women, as he hoped that his Province would eventually enable the ministry of ordained women. This "commissioning" suddenly made us realise the huge responsibility we were taking on as missionaries in the 21st Century.
What does it mean to be a missionary in the 21st Century? Hopefully the Church has moved beyond the past paradigms of mission that confused gospel and culture and implanted an "alien" culture in a "new" land. That is the past history of mission in the Pacific in the 19th and 20th Centuries – where there was an imposition of European culture in the guise of "gospel" that resulted in the destruction of much of traditional Pacific culture.

The sadness and reality of this past became most apparent to me early on in my lecturing at PTC as I tried to be true to the core principles of PTC in my lecturing – to be theological, contextual, and to be ecumenical.1 As I listened to the stories and cultural histories of many of my students it was quite apparent to me that God had been very present in the hearts and minds of the Pacific peoples long before missionaries ever arrived in the Pacific region; in much the same way that God was present with the Jewish peoples in the Old Testament era. God in Christ became incarnate to the Jewish people to say "Hey guys, you haven't got the full picture, I am a God of love and forgiveness – listen and learn from my Son so that you can come to a fuller understanding of who I am and what my hopes and desires are for each of you who choose to follow me."

This is not to say that Gospel and Culture are separate entities; they are inherently enmeshed. Leslie Newbigin says:2

> Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time, is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one

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1 This was keenly emphasised by Rev'd Dr Jovili Meo during an interview with him in Australia as well as during an orientation to PTC led by him on our arrival at the College.
can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion. It is, in fact, an abandonment of the gospel, for the gospel is about the word made flesh. Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life.

The task of the missionary should be to sit and listen to God’s people, to their stories of God and their encounters of God and then, using those traditional experiences and stories as a base, enable the People of God they have been called to serve and journey with, to come to a fuller understanding of God through the life and example offered by Jesus Christ. What many ministers and teachers sometimes forget is that Jesus’ life also gave us an example of how to be cultural missionary teachers – he sat and listened and dialogued, he used story and parable – often starting with the cultural context of his listeners, and his stories used day to day items that were familiar parts of the cultural context of his followers - vines, mustard seeds, lamps, sheep.

This willingness to listen, dialogue, learn from the cultural context of another land and then grow in your own faith is a crucial quality of the 21st Century missionary. My journey at PTC returned me to my own cultural and religious context as a changed person – I had opened myself to the long term presence of God in the Pacific Islands and my faith grew and developed in leaps and bounds as my students enabled me to encounter God in a whole new way. I also believe that my openness to their teaching enabled them to also learn and grow in their own faith journey.

In the time I was at PTC (2000 – 2003) I had the privilege of lecturing a range of subjects in the BD, Women’s Programme and the Education by Extension Programme – Ethics, Social Analysis, Christian Education, Worship & Liturgy, Ministry & Mission, Pastoral Care in Crisis Situations, Children & Youth Ministry, Pre-marital & Marriage Counselling and Practical Theology. In each of these subjects it was easy to include sound theological principles and ecumenical perspectives in my teaching, the challenge was to be contextual, and here I was on a steep learning curve – yet this was


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perhaps some of the most enjoyable yet challenging learning of my lifetime.

One method I developed in my courses to fully integrate traditional cultural perspectives into the topic being explored and to enable students to theologically reflect on their own cultural traditions and then share those traditions and reflections with one another & with myself, was to require students to give a seminar in class. One example was in the subject "Pre-marital and Marriage Counselling in the Context of Extended Family" – the students were required to described pre-Christian traditions in their own country/culture that were used for pre-marital counselling or for marriage counselling, and then explore how these traditional practices could be incorporates into a contemporary Christian context in their home church. It was in the course of such teaching that I was reminded of the harm done in the Pacific by the early Christian missionaries. Perhaps one of the most heartbreaking encounters, one that still haunts me ten years on, was a comment by one of my students who came from the Marshall Islands. The student came to me after the first Worship & Liturgy class of the semester where I had outlined their assessment tasks, and indicated that he didn't think he would be able to do the assignment as he had no knowledge of the pre-Christian worship practices in his country. This was because when the first missionaries had arrived they had banned all traditional music, dance and stories, because they were "pagan and evil". We adapted the task so he could complete it – but there was a great sadness evident in him as he watched the seminars presented by students from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tahiti and Kiribati and saw their excitement as they discovered new ways of Christian worship that incorporated their traditional ceremonies and practices.

Not all early missionaries caused the type of harm experienced by this student. I came away from PTC with a greater appreciation of missionaries such as Bishop Patteson, who brought the Gospel to the Solomon Islands. The most powerful and "awesome" worship I have ever experienced was led by the students from the Church of Melanesia at the Anglican Cathedral in Suva for the Celebration of Bishop Patteson Day in 2001. The Melanesian students and their families illustrated the strength and power of contextual worship and how it can bring the people of God to a deeper relationship with God. The men, women and children of the church of Melanesia dressed in traditional costumes that were part of many of their traditional ceremonies. Two examples from that worship were the Gospel procession and the offertory procession. The gospel procession was
a traditional dance that celebrated the bringing of the Gospel to Melanesia. Dancers wearing shells, rattles and traditional costume carried and danced a small boat representing the "Southern Cross" which contained the Bible from which the Gospel reading was to be read, down the Cathedral aisle and then met the tradition procession of servers and clergy in white robes and handed the Bible to them. There were many symbols contained in this dance/procession but to me, from a missiological perspective, most important was the symbolism that in many ways it is now the role of Pacific Islanders to bring the Gospel in a new way to the palagi culture. The offertory procession saw the transformation of a traditional dance where a sacrificial pig was carried on a decorated platform to the chief as an offering to the gods, to then be shared with the whole village. This traditional offering dance was transformed with the elements of Holy Communion, the bread and wine, being danced in on the platform - a reminder of the sacrificial offering of Christ on the cross symbolised by the sharing of bread and wine in the Eucharist.

I recently attended the Consecration and Installation of the Rt Rev'd Rob Gillion as the new Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of the Riverina in Australia. At the start of the liturgy the Rev'd Shannon Smith, an aboriginal priest in the Diocese of Riverina, gave the "Welcome to Country" on behalf of the local indigenous peoples:

Before whitefellas came, it was the tradition of Aboriginals that when strangers came into their particular country to hunt or to gather, or to just pass through on their way to other places, that the host Aboriginals would go out to welcome them.

When they met, there would be the formalities of greeting. Part of the ceremony of welcome would be the men sitting around and talking men's business whilst the host women would take the visiting women and children to a women's site to talk women's business.

When this was completed, the two groups would join again and the men would hunt for kangaroo, goannas and emus - and the women would prepare an area for eating and would gather firewood, and berries, fruit, nuts and plant roots for a meal.

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3 The "Southern Cross" was the ship Bishop Patteson sailed on when journeying around the Solomon Islands.
Then the ceremonies—the corroborees would commence—and the dancing, the singing around the fire could well go on, not only all night, but sometimes for many nights in a row. Each corroboree with a message—each with its own story—men, women and children taking part. Whilst during the day, the visiting tribe would be taken and shown the sites of significance and be told the stories of the spirit of the land they would be passing.

In this way, the hosts believed that by the end of formalities, when the strangers were ready to move on - they would not be considered strangers but friends who now had the spirit of the country in their hearts—they carried the spirit with them—just like the people who lived there.

They believed that once the spirit of the land was in their hearts, then those people would never damage the land - they would love it and care for it like those whose home country it was…

I reflected on this welcome she gave to the new Bishop and also on the current practice of "acknowledging and paying respect to the traditional owners of the land, past and present" that begins many functions and ceremonies in Australia. The "Welcome" and the "Acknowledgement" enact the great respect we should have for indigenous peoples and their traditions. From a Christian perspective it should also remind us that God was present in the land as Creator spirit and had encountered the people dwelling in that place who then expressed their encounters with God in song, dance and story – or in the Australian context in their dreaming.

This respect should be at the core of 21st Century missiology – those who go out in mission should do so with respect; respect for the knowledge and traditions of the people whose journey they are called to share, a respect that acknowledges that they are present as guests. Guests who not only offer Christ's ministry to others, but who also receive Christ's ministry and who are called to continue their own learning and faith development. Shannon's welcome to country was reminiscent for me of my experience as a "missionary" in the 21st Century Pacific whilst lecturing at PTC. PTC drew together staff and students from around the Pacific and around the world; together we ate, we shared songs, dances and stories from the Pacific lands, we were shown the sites of significance, and when we were ready to
move on, we went as friends, as we carried God's spirit of the vanua in our hearts. The missionary of the 21st century is one who will love and care for the land and the people they visit and do so with a genuine respect for those people and the land.
From Mission to Ecumenical Learning with a Pacific Church: Perspectives from a European-Pacific Partnership in God's Mission

Traugott Farnbacher

1. The Public Nature of our Christian Calling

By virtue of their calling, Christians are to walk in the footsteps of Christ. When He empowered his disciples "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5), the nature of their vocation became manifest. He entrusted to them and subsequently to us believers to carry a mandate of public relevance. This stood in analogy with His own sending – as He claimed to be the light of the world (John 8). The sending of the disciples likewise must be interpreted as an authorization to do mission based on the will of the God universal Himself: "As the father has sent me, thus I do send you!" (John 20). The Lord who disclosed and defined himself to be the light of the world believed that those following him will make a difference – very much in line with His own mission!

In the Pacific, the introduction of Christianity was, in its initial steps, shaped by foreigners with their ambitious mission to bring about change towards and within specific world view and life-realities. Salt was not known to many parts in the interior of bigger island groups, especially not in former New Guinea – whilst the symbolism of light and darkness was apparently used in pre-first-contact tradition. The mission of missionaries, not only in the Western but also in other areas of the Pacific, was to spark new world interpretation: Leave behind any perception of life, any cosmos-perception and its control beyond and apart from the recognition of God's unique light revelation in Christ! Such radical quest for change was linked with an ultimate call to overcome hostile relations of whatever sort. This attitude was contrary to "the mission" of Jesus and its call. The gospel was to impact by reshaping the world of social relations – starting with the respect, protection and promotion of any God-given life in all its manifestation and environments. Thus, Christianization provoked people to make big steps into the light as beaming out from and determined by a universal and ever-present, inclusive God.
Thus the message was understood in at least two ways:

a) To understand and accept the gospel goes together with an exposure to the light of the one God, who as an act of creation made a difference between darkness and light; His son brings about light exposure. The message of the apostles in the light of Easter was to enlighten and attract people – the start of the church universal. Well, the sun rises in the East, not in the West. Bethlehem, Galilee and Jerusalem were the place of birth of the divine mission – of course not limited geographically. When through the voice of foreigners, God's "new name" as a reconciling, universal God and as personal Lord was publically proclaimed, people gradually adopted Christianity. Whatever naming we give: conversion to the triune God, receiving salvation or to be reconciled with Him – or in similar terms. It was said and reported by Islanders in former New Guinea that after all the change was a discovery or an experience of enlightenment.

b) To transcend all inward-directed ethnic self-determination was the main thrust of gospel propagation. Once the beams of the Godly light were received, a process of transformation began to re-shape the communities. The mission of the gospel opened doors to the larger community; the Christian concept of all cosmos life under one God brought awareness about a wider society out there. The former unknown came into the picture and gradually became accessible and the challenge was to unite in peaceful coexistence. When those new horizons of life were disclosed, any encounter with the unknown foreigner should not just serve to enlarge one's own boundaries. Proclaiming the new covenant created nothing less than new social realities: As much as the sun shines for everybody, God's light can illuminate and transform any relationship. Dreams and myths as to how to interpret and encounter the foreigner had been part of cultural heritage before; this became a matrix and underwent new interpretation because of the Christ-and-His-gospel encounter and exposure. Thus at the same time when denominational mission was the operational rationale, the thought of a bigger, deeper, larger Ecumene – the one world under one Lord in all of the habited earth – was planted.

Yet the addressees were faced with uncertainties: Did the gospel proclamation generate (maybe restore) equality for and over against any existing ethnic entity – thus between civilisations from close and far: Desire for Melanesian brother- (and sister-) hood was one reason for the early Cargo Cults in the Melanesian parts of Oceania in the 1920's – born out of deception. The addressees of the
Christian message in fact had difficulties to interpret their lives as equals in a fully participatory manner. Further: How could God's self revelation and the discovery of a totally different mode of life and world perception disable the traditional cosmos powers? To what extent did the new world concept open avenues into a new future? Why did the mission-to-church venture take so long in certain regions? Which type of education was conducive to go along with and qualify the process of transformation into a Christian community? I certainly do not have the answers to all of those valid questions, but one should not suppress one's own views either.

2. Some References to Mission with regard to Papua New Guinea

Western missionaries, be they originally sent from the Missionary Society of London to Polynesia or from smaller places like the Neuendettelsau Mission Society to former German New Guinea or by whoever else to the islands of Oceania – be they foreign or indigenous / regional –, fostered the proclamation of the gospel in such a way that in the midst of these cultures with their prevailing beliefs, Christian congregations came to exist. Ultimately those Christian communities were to become the agents and owners of the change as envisaged. Jesus said, that light can and shall not be hidden under a bucket, but must develop its public function. Light can neither be monopolized nor can it be fabricated and dealt with like any ware or merchandise. Rather, is it a matter of discovery and usage to unveil and develop its natural potential in order to full fill "its mission". To achieve that, right from the beginning education and training was a prime tool of doing mission all across the Pacific and in its manifold modalities – be they mobile or institutional, basic training of differentiated skills and knowledge. It all started with simple schools adjoining the mission stations – and it went all the way to Curriculum based trainings of various sorts. This all was in the interest to make people understand what they were supposed to believe in – and in order to bring knowledge useful to daily life by utilizing given abilities and by implanting new ones. People should be actively part and beneficiaries of new developments.

More or less fierce clashes between old and new belief and value systems were provoked in order to attain a new self-perception as social and religious communities. One test-question in people's mind was: How empirical and indeed tangible will the "promises" of the
new religion prove to be? The gospel message, if it was to be efficient, had to be rooted in culture with all aspects of social structuring. Therefore the spiritual insights and any socio-structural impact could not be separated: The Frankonian missionary Christian Keyßer in New Guinea worked to encourage the adoption of the new faith and to sustain its contents in this "new era". For that purpose, advised by the new elders, he established the so called "Gemeindeordnung" a "manual for congregational life" (1910). This small "Catechism", a compilation of congregational ethics, was set up as a directive for socio-religious standardized regulations. He intended to preserve what had been achieved through baptism: to represent a "new time" according to God's will as Keyßer and the new converts had understood it. The "Sattelberg" as one of the first Protestant communities in "Kaiser Wilhelmsland" was to follow specific rules and orders of life. Those touched by the gospel were challenged to manifest an alternative social and religious grouping of the "people reborn". One manifestation was the maintaining of positive relations – in the ambiguity of the twofold work of God's will: His law and gospel was to touch people's hearts, minds and deeds – for the very aim of seeing harmony restored. The process was dialectic and (as such) also a radical one. The new Christian congregation was to serve as a model for other new evolving congregations. Yet, some outsiders and insiders have wondered, if there was an "over- or under-exposure" to light or an "overdose" of salt applied: Many expectations towards a "new mankind" were not responded to. The imperative of the ethics of the Sattelberg congregation remained a "sting in the flesh" in mission history: definitely to anyone who pretends to fully have achieved newness of individual or communal life – as well as a challenge to those who deny that a change of life is an agenda of the first mission-to-church days only. Obviously, any answer to the change quest, its impact and sustainability can be rendered only locally. As a Lutheran theologian I do believe, that gospel and law – both – do manifest God's good will for all of our life. There is always a promise-and-assertion dimension as well as ethical appeals in our encounter with and interpretation of scripture; both must be honoured and applied. This affects everyone who seriously engages to encounter the Church sceneries in the Christian Pacific.

The traditional "reciprocity dogma" and specific manifestations of the Mana life-power concept were and still are, to my understanding, rationales of cosmos interpretation also in Melanesian culture. The cosmos control approach embedded in it was to be transformed into
new interpretation of life-and-actions control. Thus, from the early mission days onwards, practically every sphere of life was exposed – with tremendous consequences. Evidently, this was not just a theoretical venture, based on and satisfied with dogmatic. In Melanesia this process took much longer than in other parts of the Pacific. The gospel on its long way to very remote sites and to the hearts had to prove how it becomes meaningful: How can the message of reconciliation become influential and blessing-full in the day-to-day mastering of life?

This process with its two feet of preaching and teaching, can also be described as a long way towards liberation in the Western Pacific mission. This eventuated along those guiding principles: From inward anxieties and relational fear and also from traditionally limited knowledge to confidence, mutual acceptance and to new knowledge. Along with that was a double fold thrust: a) To overcome a compensation- and violence-geared handling of external relations – and b) to redefine the cosmic cycles of life, including the mana concept under the one creator and redeemer. We "in the West" can obviously learn a lot from the Pacific churches about the nature to be holistic Christian. The venture of a Christian congregation had to include all aspects of life – with its thrills and also its awkward aspects. In analogy, the cultural, social and religious, educational conditioned Pacific views of word-and-life can no more be understood separate from the Christian faith and its matrix of biblical values.

In sum, we can state that despite experiences of alienation between the mediators of the new message and their mission, the dialogue between gospel and culture – with PNG-wide a Christianization stretching over nearly hundred years! – was in the end successful, at least for the given first and second generations. This was the foremost achievement of the Pacific missionaries themselves who were midwives of the new birth of the Church universal in its ethnic shapes. As a second summary we can conclude, that with much gratefulness, and also enthusiasm, God as the reconciling Lord Anutu of All was existentially accepted. Thirdly we may say, that nowadays many do wonder, how relevant the statistical figures of 90% Christianity in PNG are – as to the public impact of "Godly light and salt" in traditional tribal or in wider urban societies. Who can reply to that question? We should not avoid reminding awkward uncertainties of many, in how far the gospel in fact has brought across both dimensions – the redeeming by faith as well as the blessings – beyond foreign influence. What, in the realities of daily
livelihood did salt and light achieve for betterments? To what extent did what type of education become instrumental to achieve tangible change? An aporia, an open wound?

3. Intercultural Encounter within our Differences

As a matter of fact, within a few decades Pacific islanders turned out to be not simply "receivers" of the new faith as presented by Europeans; rather, they did to a much bigger extent shape for themselves new recognitions of life. Traditional patterns of world interpretation were employed for that purpose: Dreams and vision, natural disaster and personal incidences became instrumental to make people interpret the biblical messages as proclaimed by the foreigners. Ultimately it was the newly emerging local leaders to manage the adapted hermeneutics needed for the transition from ancestral prime religion to Christianity within their worlds. This process went far beyond "just believing" but wanted recognition and application; the very spin of the small and big cosmos should come under God's sovereign reign.

The time of mission in its historical sense in PNG – the largest "mission field" in protestant history worldwide ever! – and its impacts with all its advantages and also ambiguities is over. Then, how do we on either side define and practice our partnership relations nowadays? It is the ELC-PNG partners who remind and challenge me times and again, that such a unique relation as conditioned and qualified by presence of foreigners and their preaching, teaching cannot just end with the declaration of the church in its full autonomy (founding of ELCONG in 1956 and autonomous ELC-PNG in 1975/1976), but rather should be open ended and future minded. The process of learning and sharing is not concluded or accomplished in full.

Even whilst we do affirm that we are one in Christ, we do remain so different in the regard to the richness and also the contradictions of our cultures – which is obviously in our life settings and dwellings, in our social standards, modes of wealth, goods and kinds etc. Yet, we are to define our togetherness in the ways of how we walk along with each other. We do share a message which according to its nature is embedded in a given specific culture and which at the same time is not just subject to or part of it, but trans-cultural. Over the years I became increasingly concerned how we address discrepancies in which we "as partners" do master our lives with our uneven chances.
Yet, the more I value the fact that we can communicate, worship, pray, dialogue, walk our path to distant places – not because of my German/Bavarian background or due to any legacy of our mission history! Hopefully we are never conditioned by financial assistance in some programmes and projects. Yet, it is a sad and a disturbing reality that some Pacific churches and institutions are dependent on funds from European churches. Because we are exposed to the same light and since we all share the need for salt (and more food!) we ultimately stand all under the "mutual call for mission" towards another which is not geared by "material advantages" and which never will end – even so its form, modes and thrust has changed, and even so more and more scholars believe and teach, that the biblical call for mission is an historical reminiscence without meaning.

Is there any message out of the following for us: The first bishop of ELC-PNG, late Zurewe Zurenuoc, whom I treasured and admired, was known as a faithful, sovereign leader with a fascinating life story. He struggled, successfully, for an autonomous church to be rooted in his country and culture (1976!). A few years before his death we had a talk and I was stunned by his remark: "I myself would always require a missionary, since the gospel is not born out of my culture, but rather does challenge me again and again to have a 'voice from the outside'." Nostalgia, romanticism? I told him, whilst serving in PNG, that I too, I will be always in need for someone to bring the good tidings of the gospel from the outer world.

Therefore, if I cease to be a learner from the abundant, somehow also tremendous cultures, from Pacific world-and-life perceptions, from traditional methods to manage life within quite awkward circumstances in some island regions, the unveiled treasures of natural resources of many kinds – how then can we shape our Christian communion across the oceans; what would be left of our calls to solidarity? How can I pray with a vision in mind, how can I share in vital programmes, how could we receive resourceful Christians from the Pacific in our home churches, how could we send personnel to serve? With regard to our claim to be in need or even to stand in some obligation towards each other, we can count on divine legitimacy; we do need concrete calls out of the *Ecumene* and then have to discern areas of encounter or even cooperation.

Worship in the Pacific is by large very much a public event and will hopefully remain such or regain its esprit again where it becomes weaker. The culmination of congregational life still is the Sunday service – even so, due to lack of proficiency and developed skills in
rhetoric and in teaching, at least in PNG many are tempted to move across to more charismatic leaders and their groupings. Prayer and personal reading of scripture remain vital characteristics of faith-in-practice experiences. We do treasure this indeed with gratefulness towards our sisters and brothers in Christ. Many times I am overwhelmed how despite some obvious deficiencies in leadership, infrastructure and care in present Lutheran PNG "on the top", the worship is not affected by this, but does transpire God's presence amongst His people out there – be it in most remote areas as well as in urban places of adoration. In a divided society "bleeding of thousands wounds" (Bernard Narakobi), time and again the fascinating and humbling charisma of Christian commitment manifests God's presence in a country richly blessed. This drives us believers, pastors and also academic teachers to reflect and to enhance times and again the wonders of His creation, powerful beams of His splendour and glory in the natural spheres – and in the Christian community alike, when people come to meditate how His creation, redemption and our sanctification do unite and provoke us within His Ecumene.


Let me refer to those three essential Christian values with relevance to mission in the Apostle Paul's promises and assurances as stated in 1. Cor.13,13:

**Reconciliation – by Faith**

The Christian communion is a mixed, diversified body constituted by people reconciled by faith in Christ. This fascinating phenomenon has something antagonistic in itself, since we are not one as yet, but walk in faith in order to attain to a fully reconciled unity in Him. Regardless of our Christian history, age, proportions over against other religions we realize that there is an underlying, unifying element in our transpacific linkage. Despite our social, cultural and economical divergences in Christ we are called to nourish our relations. In the light of the trends of neo-colonial dominance, exploitation, spiritual alienation within and from the outside, radical change of values pouring in and across in the Oceania region,
reconciliation is the paradigm for all aspects of life. If together we follow God's invitation to enter his light we are called to have faith in the saving and blessing capacities of our God. Faith shall be planted and it shall grow. We in Europe hope that something of a faith-focused society shall transpire in the very interest of our congregations. Lutheran churches, whose come-into-being was very much shaped by the concept of a justifying and reconciling God, bear a mandate for the ecumenical church in that continent:

To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical... As a communion of churches, we bring special gifts to ecumenical work that could be affirmed and shared, along with an openness to what others bring... Our vision for ecumenical work is to ... participate in the Triune God's Mission for the healing of the world. (LWF 'Consultation on the Future of LWF', 2005)

Transformation – through Love

As members of the Christian communion we are blessed by the love which we have received and which we are passing on. We do not follow trends, but we desire to be changed (sanctified) and to contribute to change in response to the call of our Lord. As God Himself is love, love remains the essence in any stage and expression of the Church developments in its movements towards the world. This love is so deep, efficient and not-spoilable, that even after the "parousia" it will continue, as Paul affirms.

Transformation through love is a gift, an asset and a value at the same time. Never will we fully dig it out, but remain learners in His footsteps as Jesus was the personalized love of God eternal. If we perceive this we equally are called to be reliable, faithful, trustworthy and open minded. No one knows what the future will hold for churches in the Pacific and international mandates in our accompaniments there. Thus it is the more healthy for all relations that His love shall shine in and through our relations. We shall hold up our trust in positive alternatives.

Transformation is a process induced by God himself; this becomes manifest only locally and within a person's inner and outbound life. It would be a tremendous error if "Westerners", by overestimating their material potentials, would believe that a project-driven, structural change-the-world-by-money approach with its shallow sympathy will be effective or even sustainable. Instead of any romantics of a save-
the-world euphoria we all do need the living communion paradigm: Love can prove its transforming capacity in our intercultural coexistence if only it is applied. This all is ultimately not the result of workshops, papers or schedules – but a miracle like a birth; it happens through spiritual insights, is practised in humble learning, ready for some risk, proper teaching and equipping new generations after us chosen to become leaders after us.

Empowerment – by Hope

The Christian congregation is a communion of hope for the many people who do lack such. Therefore, as the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer significantly had challenged Christians, including the academics of his times, that the church by virtue of its existence is always to be a church-for-the-other. Therefore we can conclude that its public nature refrains any deterioration of the church to either individualistic "islands of the well feeling ones" – or else to align with any political, or economic or whatever interests which counteracts the message of hope-for-the-next. In our highly critical present times, where the super powers and the rise-and-fall-and-renaissance of others dominions do bad to God's creation, to the many who suffer, to peoples without perspectives for peace – the ecumenical church cannot guarantee betterments or lasting solutions by drafting papers or by top academic training alone. Since we are light and salt of the world, we never can give in struggling for a future pregnant with hope. Thoughtful and prayerful presence within situations of shaken hope is required all over. This recognition enables us to limit ourselves – and to look out for docking stations how we can pass on hope. Our aim always will be to generate hope which only God can bring about in our minds and actions – and to see God's people be empowered. We shall grow together whilst we do tackle challenges in the interest of people next to us and also far away. The testing stage of hope is not the sceneries of politics nether the swamps of success and material superiority with all its tricks – but rather when we become specific and when check very individual given situations: How can I promote hope? How can I equip my students – how can I help my teacher to not give up hope in me and many? How can we help to empower youth, women? How can regional cooperation activate hidden potentials. A top example is West-Papua, where church can do what politics can not (yet) achieve: To exceed and even somehow overrule human drawn borders and segregations. Likewise in the midst of newly arising fear of alleged sorcery, witchcraft-projection, lest to speak about the deep dark oceans of
uncontrolled violence like in present PNG close to anarchy in certain regards: How can Christian congregations empower in order to maintain human values, to sustain orientation, to help the traumatized, to demand change where leaders fail, to promote healing?!

5. From Mission to a Transpacific Ecumenical Partnership: Aspects of Relations

Based on common basics of our faith as Christians we do relate as churches of the reformation, to the least. Many decades ago important steps were taken to enter a new era beyond any missionary conditioned and denominational driven boundaries: PTC and PCC were incepted. This was an historical event, which never shall be forgotten or marginalized in the landscape and minds of Pacific Christianity. In present times, as for Lutheran PNG we have chosen platforms to communicate and cooperate in the shape of Forums on a regular basis. As we had gone from bilateral to multilateral relations in the 1950's we are to develop further our awareness for the bigger pictures. Given the present challenges, threats to life as well as the opportunities for positive influence on social realities, Christianity in the Pacific carries a significant mandate for the public. Despite the restraints of distance and expenses, the mode of relating has to remain operational and must adapt all the time. Whilst we do not represent any more any classical way of doing mission, still some basics above and before us will guide us.

The old, essential meaning of the call to solidarity will remain. As much as light is meant to shine for sustaining life – we must continue to share our spiritual common assets – regardless of the difference in size and denominational profiles. As a global learning community we Christians are not just subject to mainstreams, but are to define and spell out time and again where we stand and how we have to respond. If we all are members of a Christian Ecumene, the needs and struggles on the agenda – be they foreign imposed or a brew of home-made conflicts – call us to discern together how to act, faithful to our calling, through our Christian witness and service. The grandeur of the Pacific liquid continent with its ethnic and spiritual diversities marvels us and evokes proud European as much as ambitious Asian esprits with their somehow still self-imposing dominion-approach: Let us meditate in humbleness and commitment
alike the depths of that ocean of learning how we can be light and salt.

The light paradigm bears a message quite evident and ambivalent at the same time: The beams of light are of the same origin and identical in its physical nature, but its reflections are quite diverse; its physics can even be interpreted multi-fold. As much as the sun is burning energy, yet not yet depleting its outflow, we need to remain light transmitters for one another, individually and as churches. We need to foster our mandate how to enable Christian life to grow. The waters of Oceania do represent cycles of life; its dimensions of life-giving potentials can hardly be measured – but its richness is full of wonders and full of a daily use: What does this mean to us?

This and the previous century have seen an ever increasing intensity of migration as our earth has never witnessed it in history before. The Pacific had been ill-compared by stress-tired Westerns with some sort of paradise. What are people intending, when they travel and venture to act or to meet? If “they” do such in huge, innumerable numbers for whatever (many times) doubtful, purpose and gain – how much more are we churches from the South and the North, East and the West to share the most precious of all messages ever heard and to grow in common responsibilities!? God’s light shines without divisions and presuppositions; the gospel is in fact transparent, simple in essence, tangible as much as ever reachable, never depleted and effective. Such can serve as a paradigm of the universal, always outward bound nature of our calling, which never can be limited by confession, geographically, socially or ethnically.

Nowadays many churches still do dwell in heavy isolation in some Pacific Islands – not only in PNG. The prime purpose of the gospel-light is fulfilling its work right within ethnic boundaries. Never can that be subject or altered by political parties or ideologies, by institutions, personalities or directives. Even church leaders, regulations and documents never are free from possible errors. That we protestant do affirm. Nothing can stand between God and myself / ourselves, when it comes to the Christian essential values “Hope, Faith and Love”. Everybody at any given moment and location is closer to the Godly light and to His calling to be light for any others – as it used to be the driving thrust in “the early mission days” – wherever it became manifest. If I am in the bush in PNG, I feel well and do realize in communion with the people living under heavy restraints, that our Christian life is according to God’s promises. Thus it is not conditioned by enjoying amenities of modern life in the cities and
centres. Wherever anybody in any given context lives his/her personal faith he holds a public mandate and he/she takes up responsibility to make a difference in lifestyle, attitudes, positive acceptance of each other as equals. God the source and giver of life and all good things, does equip His people with different, yet sufficing gifts, despite often painful limited resources: God's mission never goes private.

Some from the outside – especially where programmes, funds and personal underwent serious reduction – were suspicious, that it might have been forgotten to cut an "umbilical cord". They have more or less welcomed the developments for large ranging exodus of personal, lesser engagement in joint programmes – and last but not least in reduction of finances. Have they understood the nature and importance of post-missionary emerging relations in the face of the multiple challenges in our present global villages and cities. Neither are we agents of fund transfer nor guardians of mission museums. Interactions of various sorts are possible and do make a lot of sense. I wish to provoke us from "the West" (or East or North) to discern and engage. My experience during my regular encounters with "normal" Christians and leaders in the Pacific is, that mutual spiritual and physical learning and sharing, many decades after the birth of Pacific Christianity is far from over. As much as we all depend on God's light, the mission of the light is never accomplished. Thus our partners in the Pacific many times compare our "accompaniments in deeds" with empirical figures: The family, a tree, the flow of a river and the like. Whenever, in my mandate entrusted to me for the Pacific and East Asia by my church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria (ELCB), I do enter foreign countries and cultures – and therefore do not come as a tourist, a business person, an anthropologist or researcher of whatever sort. Our legitimacy to maintain and help develop relations between such distant and diverse churches in their contexts of quite diverging concepts of life and faith cannot be explained by interests and the opportune. Humanly speaking our encounters bear elements of ambiguity. Still, to just distance ourselves and leave the Forums, venues and working places of the Lutheran and the ecumenical scenery in the Pacific, would contradict our Christian calling.

Over against realities in possibly "late-Christianity" Europe, the church and the worshipping of the communities still does quite evidently represent focal centres of public life. Yet we have to ask, in how far the women with their so evidently constructive role in society are valued as equal members, active participants - as agents of
change in the very midst of church and society. If Christians in PNG and to a limited extent we overseas partners in accompaniment do observe a renaissance of violence, traditional patterns of destructions like sorcery and witchcraft projections – in the light or better in the shadow of a decreasing respect for the God given light, in some regions with appalling manifests of destruction: what are we called to do? Painful is it, to observe the ill functioning of basic services, the lack of providing protection, the swamps of money driven self-gains in present PNG. Christians in solidarity from and with this biggest island in the Pacific cannot remain silent about the failure of many authorities bestowed with huge funds and with so many opportunities, why the uncontrolled flouting of law and order situation is not seriously addressed. Where is the challenge and persistent call by the Christian Ecumene in PNG to urge change? We do dare to ask, how in a country with such a history of Christianity and also with such an inflationary presence of unfortunately never-stopping-"new"-missions, when evident deficits will lead to pro-active, constructive protest. So much of positive human potential sits idle, innumerable talents are to be discovered and employed, solutions to be embraced!

New partnership structures have evolved between Lutherans in PNG and its former mission churches – without giving up a common focus:

The partnership in mission between ELC-PNG and overseas churches is guided by the concept of interdependence, that is, the acceptance that both churches are equal, dependent on one another and have been equally endowed by our God with gifts and tasks.

This statement defines a new era of a new partnership in 1998, when the structure of partner relations in a communion shaped by mutuality, solidarity and sharing was commenced. The transition to a round table structure has made its way, out of former Lutheran Mission New Guinea (LMNG-1953) via the New Guinea Coordinating Committee (NGCC in 1974). As for our ELCB’s involvement in the Pacific we do accept that there is a somehow distinctive linkage between our historical engagement and our present co-responsibility for developments – hopefully in the form of mutual accountability towards each other and before God.
6. Equipping Leadership – Connecting Christians

We join the acknowledgements of the mandate of the Pacific Theological College in its central role and mission by and for the Ecumene of the Pacific. Your unique institution with its charisma and multi fold opportunities does serve as a Centre of post-graduate training programmes, therein embedded the generating of academic and church leaders, its research facilities with its potential to equip knowledge as much as campaign, the thrust of the extension programmes, the GPP capacities and impact, the publication – and more: PTC is a treasure for the Pacific churches. Its internationality, interdenominational set up and its intercultural qualification as a campus of living encounters are unprecedented; it shall hopefully serve as a model for many years to come.

The immense impact of foreign dominions in Oceania – as much as the influx of new emerging churches in the Pacific does challenge the churches to seriously consider regionalization much better then the present one. The differences in social structures and Christian identities alike can be perceived as opportunities to increase not just awareness, but to facilitate some new ways of cooperation – in training and in the exercise of mandates if responsibilities alike. If due to failure of proper planning and engagement, some institutions of ELC-PNG do lack sufficient trained, motivated, ethical leaders or/and lectures – as an example – why should it not be possible to engage in a continuous exchange programme, starting at the level of theological training. Why not have Samoan Methodists or Congregationalists serve in Lutheran PNG – or vice versa or in other directions!? I am certain: such would help to regain basics of work-and-life ethics – in the end in the very interest of the congregation. I do doubt very much, that "confessional differences" would be any hindrance there. PTC would be, to my esteem, a prime platform to enhance and coordinate a Pacific-wide exchange-and-inspire programme – hopefully well advised by the PCC itself.

The mentality of holding up to some "secret or holy knowledge" is still floating around in some Pacific island ethnicities. There maybe some charm or even meaning in such mysterious realms of the hidden. Evidently, such inward bound knowledge lacks any transparency. Neither does such a self-centred accumulation of speculations dispatch much help to the next. God wants us Christian by our calling to Christ to be light and salt: Disclosure of the hidden serves transparency; relevant knowledge shall make wisdom accessible. The "wisdom of the Christian fool" (Paul) is the cross of our Lord
where any life-threatening dynamics is overruled. In prayer, we bring all before God and wish to manifest that we can participate, unite and act without fear and prejudices. Here as well I wish to commend the mission of PTC – where the spirituality of open sharing in worship is a decisive element of shaping leaders in knowledge and faith.

Ongoing Mission by the *Ecumene*. Such mission is never accomplished. In concrete it shall be enhanced as an immediate consequence of the Christian call to be empowered and to empower, to overcome separation and to build bridges, to be reconciled and to reconcile. Rivalry of missions and churches in PNG as the land of the many tribes, where the number of churches in a few years may outnumber the amount of languages spoken (!) must be blamed as an utmost outdated rationale and mode of work. The thrust of the gospel is the quest of transformation towards unity in the one, triune God and "across the yards". Can PTC and PCC help – since the PNG Council of Churches (PNGCC) is not really operational since many years? Partnership and accompaniment is not a privilege as granted (or denied…) by Northern/Western churches to Southern churches – or vice versa; it is an element of Christian life. Instead we stand for the prerequisite of equality, mutual recognition and participation in its passive and active sense.

The ecumenical dimension of Christian-life and church-life in the Pacific was „officially" discovered only 50 years ago. Since then significant ecumenical Pacific conferences in some conjunction with the WCC were organized and important institutions and associations under the umbrella and auspices of the Pacific Conference of Churches were incepted and elaborated on.

With its numerous programmes, the Pacific Conference of Churches has addressed imminent challenges of present Oceania and its future in church and society alike. The round table of PCC with its international partners was re-instated in 2010 – only a "once-off" event or a constant venue to discuss issues of common concern? One outcome of the round table was to re-start a Theological Commission, which was welcomed by the 10th Conference of the PCC in 2013 in Honiara. In addition to that and in the light of the many new churches surfacing, the need was discovered to not only address themes of socio-cultural and socio-political relevance, but also the quest for a living spirituality by and for the churches in the very core of their own existence.

ELC-PNG and representatives of other churches in membership with the PNG Council of Churches (PNGCC) had gathered in 2010 in
Lae, PNG for an ecumenical gathering under PCC. The function, working mode and role of PCC as well as the one of the PNGCC itself so far bore little meaning for Christianity in PNG as such. Hence, the presence of the General Secretary, the Principal of PTC and other leaders and their addresses were symbol and thrust alike. The Pacific churches should not concentrate on its Polynesian and Micronesian members, but re-focus again their most diversified group of Christian churches in its biggest island in the largest possible numbers according to its programmes and competences. In the light of so many problems and needs in the larger society and within the ethnic groups crucial areas of concerns have to be addressed. If the PNGCC is unable to unfold its mission to the public of PNG – the PCC should take this as an attraction to become again actively engaged in agendas of prime concerns of public responsibility to unveil the sleeping potentials of Christianity across Oceania.

The agenda ahead of you – and if you wish for partners who may sojourn together to some extend – is to my understanding bigger than the one in former years. To name a few as from my perspective:

1) Witness for Christ in a Pacific entering the age of secularisation and also modern communication – combined with 2) the implicit sending of Christ to the marginalized/poor with the quest for doing justice. 3) The mission of doing diakonia (educational, social, medical) in countries/churches were concepts of diakonia, including the role of deacons or deaconesses and this whole mandate are by large unknown. 4) Programmes of mutual consultations between Melanesia and Polynesia and Western partners in regard to human resources and their adequate development – which as for ELC-PNG is stuck since nearly 20 years... 5) Exchange programmes of students and lecturers alike across some main denominations, including West-Papua (!); such has started to eventuate – thanks to God! Finally 6) small scale lay trainings for believers with empowerment of those "normal Christians" within their localities carries good promises. Training seminars to learn how to express one's personal faith along with spiritual renewal of life-and-worship should not be regarded as a "business of 'the new groups'" alone! The God's Pacific People programme approach is very instrumental here, too.

The church universal in its unique Pacific manifestations holds a distinctive call. Such a church will be courageous enough to name and tackle weaknesses – and bold enough to share their success and strengths for the benefit of other parts of the body of Christ in the
Pacific and for the world. May God grant us and specifically to PTC and PCC such courage and wisdom!

Despite all our shortcomings, however, there is a host of committed pastors, evangelists, teachers, elders, expatriate missionaries, youth leaders, women's workers, and still more congregational members who are to be commended for having humbly and faithfully served their Master, Jesus Christ, who is the Power and Wisdom of God. This church strongly believes that 'he word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1. Cor. 1.18). (Terms of Reference for partnership between ELC-PNG and its Lutheran Overseas Partner Churches)
Pacific Horizons for a Lutheran Theologian from Finland

Olli-Pekka Lassila

1. Introductory Remarks

This contribution to PTC Festschrift aims to describe my feelings and findings as a Lutheran theologian and teacher at PTC campus in Suva in 2005-2006. My visit from Finland to South Pacific was an interesting eye opener in contextual theology. Already before coming to Fiji I was in principle aware of contextual approach as a challenge. One should pay attention to local culture and tradition. But the Pacific Theological College, its students and staff opened my eyes and mind to understand the practical side of contextual approach in Fijian and Pacific context.

As a theologian from Finland I found new and fruitful horizons in the Pacific region. At the same time my Nordic Lutheran identity and worldview became shaken, in a positive and refreshing way. As countries connected by the internet, Fiji and Finland are close to one another if we look at their e-mail country codes: fj and fi. In reality, my home country Finland is situated on the other side of the globe, between latitudes 60 and 70 North, between Sweden and Russia, and some 15,000 km from Fiji and Suva! Finland is still a rather homogenous Lutheran country in Northern Europe. Historically our church is linked to Sweden and Germany. The membership of the Lutheran Church in Finland is declining, but still today 75 percent of Finns are members of our church. Other churches in Finland are much smaller. The Orthodox Church in Finland, the other "national church", has some 58,000 members. The total number of our population in Finland is 5.6 million. Hence, the encounter with pastors and Christians from twelve island nations and their churches in the Pacific was quite an experience.

Living as a member of the PTC community offered a good window to the world and life of Pacific people. The most rewarding experiences were discussions with staff colleagues and students. My own views and theological positions became confronted with and measured by opinions and traditions which were unknown and new for me. In the beginning this was somehow confusing.
2. Rocking Theological Horizons

I came to PTC as a Lutheran theologian from one of the most Lutheran countries in the world. I had written my doctoral thesis in Ethics and Philosophy of Religion. I was well trained in Lutheran dogmatics and systematic theology with large excursions in existential theology and philosophy. However, after some months as Visiting Lecturer on the bank of Suva lagoon for Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist, and for some Lutheran students, I noticed something: my Finnish Lutheran theological horizon started to rock. So, what happened? Some important areas of theological tradition and interpretation which I had learned and applied in Finland, did not work in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, 18 degrees below the equator. Or, to put it in a little bit more careful way, I was not able to make "my home theology" work in the Pacific context.

It is not easy to admit that your own horizon is too limited. It is even more difficult to accept that other solutions and theological interpretations are as valid, perhaps even better than the truths of your own. Before coming to Fiji I had worked for almost nine years (1991-2001) at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva as LWF Area Secretary for Europe. My colleagues at the Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Churches, coming from different countries and continents, had already helped me to see my own preferences in a larger context and scale. After Geneva and Suva I have not thrown my Lutheran dogmatics or social ethics into waste basket. I just see them now in a new perspective. They are a good and practical horizon for my journey in my home waters in the North. But I am no more so convinced that my theology from Finland is enough to face and understand the challenges in connection with the societies in the Pacific islands.

How to explain this rocking of my theological horizon? Airplane pilots are relying on an important instrument when flying in the clouds or in the darkness. Their artificial horizon helps them to maintain the plane in normal, horizontal position, although the pilot does not see the real horizon through cockpit window. Without this mechanical horizon the plane could be up-side down when coming out from the cloud. The instrument shows true readings about the stance of the airplane in relation to real horizon. My problem in Fiji was the fact that the theological and cultural instruments of the people in the Pacific region gave them other readings than my own horizon. We could also say that my horizon was calibrated with European measures while Pacific people were guided by basic values in their societies. I
am aware that today the lifestyles of people in the South Pacific and in Northern Europe are not totally separated or unknown to each other. We are all members in one global village where people and nations are connected by the worldwide web. Nevertheless, people and nations tend to appreciate their own traditions and habits.

One basic issue in Lutheran theology is the doctrine of Two Kingdoms. God reigns over the world with his two arms: with the Gospel (right arm) and the Law (left arm). This separation is linked to Theology of Salvation and Theology of Creation. According to Martin Luther the Church is the realm and home of the Gospel. In the church human beings are offered grace and salvation as a gift by faith. But in "worldly things", in society and in political discussion even Christians should use rational argumentation when acting as members of a state and human society. This kind of approach facilitates cooperation and mutual understanding between different confessions and religions in the society. In the Pacific context the situation was quite different, when we discuss mutual relations between Church and State, or between local church and village community. Those "Two Kingdoms of Luther", the division between Spiritual authority and Secular authority seemed to be an unknown matter for people of Pacific island nations, at least for my students.

Church is church and the society as such is pluralistic, secular community according to mainline thinking in Finland and in Northern Europe. Many island nations in the Pacific are witnessing to another horizon: Sacred and secular are interwoven in daily life. The church is penetrating the daily life of the people in villages. I had been facing the "Southern holistic horizon" already in Geneva. In discussions with my female colleague from Kenya, Rev. Dr. Kanyoro expressed the African holistic view stating with smiling face: "Olli, you have two boxes in your head, I feel comfortable with one!" During my short stay in Fiji I learned to appreciate the skills of Fijian rugby players. With my "two boxes" I could only wonder and admire when Waisale Serevi, the Star Number One in the Fijian team, was interviewed at the local TV after the victory of an important game. This good-looking and strong hero gave thanks to God for the success in a humble and sympathetic way. The Lord had given power and wisdom to win the game. Before the beginning of the rather wild and violent match, the Fijian national team gathered for a moment of prayer in the middle of the playground. And when Josefa Iloilo, the President of Fiji, delivered his political speeches in 2006, the wording of the speech reminded me more about the message of a lay preacher in Finland than about statement of a head of the state.
Somebody would perhaps say: "Well, this is an old and well-known difference between Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist) traditions, between the Theology of the Cross and the Theology of the Glory". This may be true, at least partly, but I see here something more: Two horizons of life and two worldviews (Weltanschauung) with their roots far away in the past. The frame and paradigm for my thinking is the Western history of ideas with its complicated layers and phases since Aristotle and Saint Augustine through Enlightenment and French Revolution. My first impression of the theological horizon of my Pacific students was this: They are old-fashioned and conservative. They have difficulties to follow my way of thinking. For me it was not always easy to understand the points my students were making. By and by I started to understand better. The issue is not competition, not superiority or inferiority between North and South, Finland and Fiji, or Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru and Tahiti. There are two different horizons, and both of them have something important to offer to the overseas partners and friends. Today I would not argue that my horizon is right and the Pacific one wrong. Both of them have their strong as also their weak sides.

Having lectured for some months at PTC, one day I put a question to my students: "A teacher is coming to you from the other side of the globe. His world and background is so different from yours. Is it possible to see a point, an added value with the presence of a theologian from Finland in the teaching staff of PTC?" A moment of silence followed. Then one student answered, as far as I remember, it was Eddie, an Anglican priest from Solomon Islands: "Well Olli, I think there is a good point. You are making to us such questions which we never before have met." I was grateful for that answer, and it made me feel relieved. The horizon of my students was partly strange for me, and so was the mine for them. But from my Nordic horizon I could see things and raise questions which were new and fruitful for my Pacific friends. It was one expression of an old truth in Latin, from the world of diplomats: Do ut des! Give and you will be given! In fact, the message of Jesus was exactly the same.

### 3. Pacific Pearls for an Explorer from the North

For many people in the North the South Pacific is the "heaven on earth" *par excellence*, with its warm climate, blue lagoons and coconut trees. I was able to witness that this is true, and I am grateful
for this unique experience. I also saw how people in the Pacific have to struggle with various challenges in our globalized world. Through climate warming they are facing increasing problems with the environment of their islands. As explorer in Pacific culture and theology I would like to summarize my positive findings in two aspects of life: *life in community* and *relation to nature*. These two things are put together by *vanua*, an interesting Fijian concept.

Even a short period of life in Fiji helped me to see better our individualistic and egoistic approach to life in the North. In Fiji and in Pacific societies the Northern European accent on *me* or *I do* has been changed to *we* and *we together*. The feasts and celebrations at PTC were quite an experience for Finnish participants. Preparation of the feasts with *lovo*-cooking, dancing programs by different ethnic groups, and the evening always starting with a traditional and impressive *kava*-ceremony. This all underlined one basic thing: *we belong together, we share the meal and other gifts together*. Fiji is a rather poor nation and the people in the villages have to struggle for their existence. Given this background it was encouraging to hear my Fijian friend explain to me: "Our village community is our social security."

The book of Dr. Ilaitia S. Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place*, made a strong impression to me. I read this famous and important study only at the end of my stay in Fiji. It confirmed and clarified my observations both in Fiji and Tahiti, and at the PTC with students from Fiji and Tahiti and from a dozen other Pacific nations. *Vanua* is the place where I live, it is also my family and grand family. It is my garden, my village, my island and my nation. And still one additional aspect: Nobody, no single person has fundamental ownership to *vanua*, to earth and land. *Vanua* belongs to whole community. *Vanua* are the people living around me, as also my parents and grand parents already passed away. When I for the first time saw a grave in the garden, in front of a house on the island of Huahine in Tahiti, I was rather surprised. Afterwards I understood better. People want to be near their dear family members also after death, while people in Europe tend to hide and escape the reality of death.

*Vanua* also underlines close linking between human beings and nature in the Pacific islands. Some concrete expressions of mutual relations and belonging together between human beings and nature aroused my suspicions of syncretism, even or superstition. As example I quote poet Kauraka Kauraka from Cook Islands:

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I was born on Wednesday the fifth of September 1951, at our house in the village of Avatiu, Rarotonga. My placenta and umbilical cord were buried there a few yards from the house, and the place of burial is marked by a coconut tree which is still growing today. (*My Downing Star*, USP, Suva 1999 p.68).

This seems to belong to mainline thinking in the Pacific. My Tahitian friends and students at the PTC, a young couple, told a quite similar story about the birth of their child.

This kind of Pacific stories are hardly compatible with standards of Christian understanding and worldview in Europe. However, I do not argue that they are wrong. For me today they are something positive. They are expressions of holistic Pacific *vanua* theology. This is based on traditions and wisdom of Pacific people since centuries. It leads to one of my most important findings from the visit to Fiji. I noticed various impacts of Pacific cultural traditions on the theology and church life in Pacific region. But only then and there I started to acknowledge that also my own Lutheran tradition in Finland is carrying lot of bi-products from Nordic culture, including some pagan traditions for instance in connection with Christmas and Easter celebrations. My theological horizon started to rock during my stay at PTC, but today I understand that this was a necessary and useful phenomenon. The horizon of my Pacific friends is for me a helpful tool when trying to understand our complicated world in global and ecumenical perspective. From Fiji I could see even Finland and my own church in a new horizon.

Thank you, *Vinaka vaka levu*!
Melanesian Hopes for a Better Life and Christian Faith

Michael Press

Since the beginning of the Christian mission in Melanesia there has been a conflict between the inner worldly orientation of the Melanesian religion and the emphasis on eternal life and salvation in Christian theology. For Melanesians salvation is not transcendent but immanent, a wellbeing of body and soul, or the state of liberation from hunger, fear, distress and burdens which implies the restoration of the blessings which are believed to have been lost through wrong doing or some fatal mischief of the ancestors.

According to the Catholic missionary in Papua New Guinea, E. Mantovani,¹

Melanesian religions, in general, are concerned with the acquisition, maintenance, increase, and celebration of 'life'. The signs of life are health, wealth, prestige, success, security, abundance of what is needed, good relationships ... the main practical concern of this religion is to keep the channels of 'life' unclogged ... Religions are not eschatological but immanent: the 'life' must be experienced here and now, not in the life to come.

The Melanesian hope for a better life is imbued by their mythological worldview. Maurice Leenhardt, who worked for more than 30 years with the Kanak people of New Caledonia, has outlined the changes since the arrival of Christianity in his book Do Kamo (1947).² In the mythological world the person was defined by its relations, for instance to the ancestors, the totem animal, the spirits and the hierarchical family relations. If the leader represented God (for instance in Fiji), disobedience to him would upset the cosmological order and was therefore unthinkable. Another example is the healer who is one with the ancestor and heals with his power. Therefore it is misleading to speak of a person in the sense of the Western tradition deeply influenced by Christianity. There was no centre of will and

rationality as opposed to other subjects and objects and there was no future and no past.

Leenhardt quotes the words of his first convert Boessou\(^3\) that Christianity did not bring them a new spirit but the body. Before the arrival of the Christian faith the body was part of the mythological world, adaptable like a lizard changing its colour. Christianity introduced the individual body in contrast from the other person. It introduced the interval between the persons and between persons and objects, therefore it introduced the freedom of the will, and the option to change the society. It also introduced the concept of time as differentiated between past, present and future. The new Christian person was located in a history of salvation. The big ships at the shore did not come down from heaven, but from places located on maps, from England, France or America.

For the Polynesian mission Niel Gunson has described how the early missionaries in Polynesia struggled to accommodate to the inner worldly expectations. They regarded themselves not only as messengers of the gospel through conversion to Christ as personal saviour, but also as messengers of Western civilization.\(^4\) Their aim was building a theocratic society in which the laws of God replaced the sinful laws of the culture which sanctioned for instance cannibalism, infanticide etc. Because of the long distance from home and the very limited means, the success came by establishing a Western education and making the mission self-sufficient through trade with the passing European ships, thus integrating the natives in the modern capitalist economy. Soon however, many missions realized that personal conversion to the crucified saviour was a concept very difficult to grasp for Pacific islanders and their preconceived concept of civilization had to be adapted to the societies they lived in.

A similar experience was repeated in the German Lutheran mission in Papua New Guinea which had started humbly in 1886 and became successful only with Christian Keysser after 1903. He changed the mission concept from individual conversion to the conversion of the whole community which was confronted with the alternative to continue living in fear of sorcery or to accept the Christian God who was first of all the almighty creator.\(^5\)

\(^3\) Leenhardt: Do Kamo, Paris: Gallimard, 164
\(^5\) See Keysser, Christian: A People reborn. Pasadena: William Carey
conversion resulted in a new Christian community order based on the ten commandments.

This concept was still reflected in the mission handbook for the preparation of the Neuendettelsau Lutheran missionaries used in the 1950s according to which the aim of the mission is "Volkwerdung", becoming Christian people within a Christian order of creation. Individual conversion and growth in Christ had to follow later. Sometimes this second step of Christian mission never happened.

Thus the mission prepared the Melanesians for the new world which started to change their way of living for ever. The mission was holistic, the school and health station besides the church provided for the basic needs of the people, the new settlements in villages and the Christian order of life prevented the Pacific islanders from becoming exploited landless workers for colonial farmers or businessmen.

However, until today the Christian religion is to some extent still perceived in the framework of the Melanesian religion and worldview. This is obvious in the relation to the ancestors and the spirits, the expectation of miracles and healings, or in parts of Melanesia the perception that the chief represents God. One key element of this worldview is reciprocity. The relationship between tribes, leaders and followers, families and ancestors is based on reciprocity. The spirits are appeased by sacrifices so that they will grant a happy life. Keeping the laws and orders granted by the ancestor will result in blessings, trespassing them will result in sickness and punishment. This fundamental reciprocity was maintained by Melanesian Christians as the following quotes of Fijian and Lutheran Christians in Papua New Guinea show: "We are faithful to the Lord – then he will be faithful to our family." "If you give one tenth to him (God), then he will bless us more. But if you don’t give it to him, he won’t bless us." "Whenever I did not follow what my father and mother taught me about God, I really had a lot of bad luck."

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8 The statements were collected in the years 2005 to 2007 in personal interviews by the author.
Another example of the continuing Melanesian worldview is the belief that God directly responds to our daily needs, if we are faithful to him: "Last Monday, I didn't have any money ... there was a church member, he came and gave me two kina. I was in desperate need of money. God provides. He sees all our needs and he provides."

There were deep and lasting changes when the universal Christian God replaced the tribal gods and spirits. Being aware of the danger of generalization, one can say that religion in Melanesia tends to be less perceived as a personal relation to Christ, than as a communal and reciprocal relationship with God as provider of life and protector of the order of the society. Prayers, religious acts and promises are used to elicit God's response. God is mainly approached as provider of a good life with the understanding that the believer has something to do for it. The church is often organized along ethnic lines and has merged its ethnic rules with God's law.

An interesting unpublished document from the mission history of the Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea shows how the missionaries' struggled to react to this merger of Melanesian and Christian religion. When in 1941 the German Lutheran missionaries were detained at the internment camp at Tatura, Australia, they used the time for discussing the goals and methods of the mission. The missionaries agreed that the Papuans accepted Christianity in order to access the superior European material goods. Thus the success of the mission was mainly due to a shift of allegiance to the spirits of the Europeans who demonstrated through their superior goods the superiority of their spirits. However, under the (Australian) colonial government the Papuans began to realize that one can have those goods even without being a Christian. Hence the question arises whether the mission should continue to work for the inner worldly wellbeing, or whether they should focus on the gospel of Christ meaning personal conversion through forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

The majority of the missionaries proposed to carry on with the first option. If the material goods originate from the spirits and have a fundamental function for the community, then labour, social order and religion are inseparable; they are part of the miti, the Christian way of life. Under the new circumstances (the colonial government) the aim of the mission must be warding off individualism and secularization. Economy must be part of religion. Otherwise the Papuan will ask:

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9 The source are the minutes of the discussion in German language filed under the title "Missionare hinter Stacheldraht" at the Neuendettelsau (Mission OneWorld) archives No 56/71-72.
"When the *miti* does not provide me with material goods, why should I need it?" As a result he will return to his ancestor cults. Opposing the success-oriented magical thinking would result in putting God at a distance from their everyday life. Therefore mission must continue to emphasize God as origin of all goods through rituals and feasts which celebrate God as the creator. Christian customs should relate to pre-christian ones, e.g. rituals at the time of harvesting, house and canoe building. Some missionaries went so far to claim that there is no alternative to the adaptation to the Papuan worldview "because it is unchangeable like the colour of their skin".

This position was opposed by a smaller group of missionaries who claimed that God did not promise a better material life. Such an expectation puts a burden on the church. The mission changes souls and aims at conversion but does not make material promises. The gospel is opposed to the world-immanent, success-oriented thinking. Christian Melanesian rituals will be misused in terms of magic. When the mission fails in overcoming the connection between religion and material success, the Papuans will leave the *miti* as soon as their material expectations are not met. The gospel must be proclaimed as something new and very different. The search for wealth has no right in the relation to God as God gives freely and the sinner cannot demand reciprocity from God.

The two parties drew different conclusions from the evaluation of the situation which are still valid today. The first party accepted the merger of Melanesian and Christian religion. Material well-being must be part of the Christian *miti* as much as the preaching of the gospel. If the magical and reciprocal way of thinking is rejected, the gospel will be rejected. The other party tried to distinguish conversion from material well-being for theological reasons. The task of the mission is restricted to the preaching of the gospel, which may not be compromised with inner-worldly promises. Though this position lacked the attraction for Melanesians, it realized the dangers of the first position: If the material promises fail, or if they can be met outside the church, many will regard the gospel as unnecessary, or change the church. This happens today when the historical mission churches everywhere in Melanesia lose members to the Pentecostal churches and the new American missions because they receive there what they no longer receive in their former church. The historical mission churches struggle very much to maintain their legacy of schools and hospitals\(^\text{10}\): material benefits or at least the

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\(^\text{10}\) For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea still
promise of it in the preaching of a prosperity gospel and a lively relationship to the spirits which is revived under the name of the gifts of the Holy Spirit like healing, speaking in tongues, miracles.

The ongoing attraction of the so-called cargo cults in Melanesia, which should better be named Messianic cults, tell much about the wrong tracks of such merger of Melanesian and Christian religion. Even though there is a strong and honest faith and hope of a renewal and newly established relationship to God, the means to achieve this and the promises attached to it are purely mythological and therefore tragically doomed to fail.

The question remains whether a third position would be viable. This third position does not attempt to integrate Melanesian and Christian religion but to deepen the Christian faith by forming the "new person in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22-24). This would mean developing the faith in Christ as the never finished transformation of the sinner. It means experiencing in faith that the new person in Christ does not expect certain religious behaviour (including donating to the church) to be rewarded. Faith does not promise a better material life but eternal salvation and forgiveness of sins in Christ.

On the other hand, it would be a misunderstanding of the Christian faith to see it as other-worldly. Faith has deep impacts on the social and economic relations, to mention only a few: looking at everything from the perspective of the need of the neighbour; overcoming tribal mentalities through universal ethical norms, because there is one God for all; regarding the creation as God's gift to care for and to work with instead of exploiting it with mining or logging; becoming citizens who care for good governance and uphold the order of the law instead of supporting nepotism and corruption; embracing education as God's gift, etc.

The gospel breaks through the reciprocal and magical Melanesian worldview by proclaiming the unconditional acceptance of the sinner in Jesus Christ. This is the only way of liberating the Christian person from the continuing domination of this worldview. The practical difficulties of such a confrontation between gospel and culture for the sake of the gospel should not be underestimated, but the negative

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runs some hospitals and health stations, a shipping line and is involved in school education; however, these assets are often mismanaged and a financial burden for which the national church is no longer able to care.

consequences of the continued merger of the Christian and Melanesian religious worldview are too visible right now. Theological education in the South Pacific, for which PTC stands, will be of utmost importance for church leaders in becoming agents of change.
Understanding God's Will in the 21st Century as Revealed in Micah 6:8

Francois Pihaate

Introduction

I must confess first that I am not a well qualified Biblical scholar unlike many in our so-called Liquid Continent. I am just a humble servant of God born in a very tiny village in the island of Tahiti in Maohi Nui called Vai Arii Nui.¹ I am an only child brought up by my grandparents who had no other means for daily living other than fishing and farming root crops. The sea and the land resources that surround our setting are our environment where we drew our knowledge and skills to affirm our identity, the place where we belong, where our placenta was buried² and where our embryo is thrown into the deep ocean. I was also taught the legend of the place where we belong and a song as a way to always remember the place of my roots. The song goes like this:

E moua to nia o Puraha, e tahua to raro o Matairea, e otu to tai o Taunoa. To na ava o Paui ia, to na marae o Farepua ia e to na vai o Vai umete ia.

It is translated as:

Up is the mountain Puraha, down is the ground Matairea, the point at the sea is Taunoa. Its passage is Paui, its marae is Farepua and its water is Vai umete.

As I grew up in that environment I also learned my Christian faith via Sunday school teachings, youth group and church activities. Every Sunday my grandparents sent me to church while they stayed home to prepare lunch. To tell you the truth, both of them were not active in church life, but their belief in God was very strong. My grandfather always prayed before diving to put down the fishing nets, which was a surprise for me then. Where he learned how to pray, I don't know!

Then, when I became older to take up the challenges of life, I received a call from God to the ministry which I am in now as an

¹ Today it is called Papeari.
² It is usually marked by planting of a tree such as a coconut, lemon, tìare or breadfruit.
ordained minister of the Etaretia Porotetani Maohi for almost thirty years (1985 – 2014). As required by the church constitution one has to be married to serve in the ministry. In 1986 I married my dear wife Maire Punuataahitua and from that union of 28 years God has blessed us with three children, two boys, one girl and two grandchildren - one girl and one boy - to whom we are very thankful to God for such blessings.

Looking back from the time we began our faith journey with God up to where we are at now, we never thought of how far we have journeyed to reach this point in our lives, only God knows! But in embarking on God’s canoe, many sacrifices need to be made. While painful, they made our faith journey a successful and joyful one. Like many Biblical stories, each of us, our families and our people are called to leave everything behind and to go where God is sending us, such is our experience in our faith journey. This reminds me of Jesus' command to Peter in John 21, 18:

I tell you the truth, when you were young you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

My humble interpretation of this command is simply to say that it talks about one's response to God's mission: "... he will hold your hands and will lead you where you do not want to go". This is how my family and I ended up here with PCC. But we know that this is not the end of our journey; God always calls us to the unknown yet exciting journeys in the future.

Unlike other faith journeys we had taken as a family, this faith journey, while exhausting, is rich in experiences, knowledge, relationship and learning. And above all, it is a journey of discernment, of searching and understanding God's will through me and my family for the sake of his Kingdom and to better His people and His mission. As Jesus taught us in his prayer: "May thy Kingdom come" (Matthew 6, 10), to spread the good news of his kingdom requires leaving and going beyond the boundaries of one's birth place and where one belongs.

Our First Baptism in the Ecumenical Journey

We have been fortunate enough to be selected among many other students who did further studies at the Pacific Theological College.
And we will always take for granted PTC as a turning point in our faith journey in the ministry. Not only for the pool of good courses and lectures delivered during our time but most importantly to learn how to build a common ground of understanding, respect and to live in a family with such a diversity of beliefs, traditions, and cultures; amazing and praise the Lord!

Studying theology is one of two aspects of PTC’s establishment. The other aspect which I believe is the most important one for PTC is where one is challenged to critique through Biblical and theological teachings how the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom is lived out by and within one’s church back home. Do the practices and teachings of our churches reflect the values of the Gospel? In other words, PTC is like the island of Patmos where the Apostle John was exiled, and from there one looks back home and throws a critical view on the existing pattern of practices and teachings in the church and its leadership. There is a wise saying back home which goes like this: "A tree can hide a whole forest behind it. If you want to see the forest, you stand far from a single tree, only then you can see the whole forest."

From that standpoint I decided to write an essay as my final paper for the BD degree, on the status of a Pastor in the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia: What does it mean to be a Pastor in the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia? This was before the church changed its name to "Etaretia Porotetani Maohi" in 2004. Writing an essay is one thing but living what you wrote is quite another! When my family and I went back home and I was appointed to different parishes in the church, it was time to live out my critical view of a pastor and leader of the church according to the Gospel.

Through word and action, we started doing things differently to what the people were taught and practiced over decades, if not centuries, in the parishes. Breaking the barriers of 'holiness' of a Pastor to allow human relationships to blossom and flourish was one of the main actions we undertook throughout our ministry (Luke 4). And that is what I want to share with you in this paper.
Understanding God's Will in the 21st Century as Revealed in Micah 6, 8

You know what is good. What he requires of us is this:
Act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

I acknowledge here the many interpretations and comments written on this verse by biblical scholars since the first centuries to date. As I said above, I am not a biblical scholar, but what I want to share with you in this space is what I learned and will continue to learn through the many challenges and experiences that my family and I faced since we began our humble walk with God. In a nutshell, what it means to me is to be a living witness to God's will for me and my family, and for the people we are called to serve.

If I can put Prophet Micah's words in a simple way, it reads: That's all God wants of us. It is akin to what we may say to someone after a job done well: That's all. The question that can be asked here is: why is it that when God reveals his will to us it is short, while we human beings seem to forget that in all languages, there is a sign, a full stop, to signal that this is the end of a sentence, when we try to interpret God's will? Why do we wrap ourselves up in complications, confusion and our own human interests when God's will is clear and simple? What are we trying to do? Is it to fulfill God's will or our will? Is it to establish God's Kingdom or our kingdom? Do we so readily and easily use God's name to satisfy our desire for power and leadership because we know exactly that when we use God's name or being anointed by God, there is immediate respect and obedience among our people? Is that part of the good that God is reminding us with Prophet Micah's words "you know what is good"?

In order to shed light on the meaning of that's all, let us hear some of Jesus' statement in John 10, 30: "The Father and I are one". And in Matthew 11, 28 - 30:

Come to me all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.

It is through these words that Jesus reveals his true identity. We are not looking at a Pastor as a man or woman in one mind and heart with God's will; one who would deny himself or herself before God: "I
have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has commanded me what I say and speak” (John 12, 49). Today, pastors in our churches are more interested in maintaining their own power and influence and authority, and we need to take heed of Jesus' words in John 7,8: "He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth, there is nothing false about him."

Because of his compassion and love for his people, Jesus asks all those carrying burdens of life to come to him without fear, for as he said: he is gentle and humble. What links this saying of Jesus to God's will, which Micah reminded us, is the desire to alleviate the burden of the people, and to assure the people that serving God is not a heavy, scary time, life-, strength- and wealth-consuming. All that God wants is the well being, joy and peace for his people and on this basis alone can we affirm that God's will has been fulfilled. Thus, what is amazing is that it is God who is adjusting Himself so his people find joy, well being and peace.

On this basis, we can affirm that serving God is not a competition or a race on who is the best and who arrives first. So many times, when we organize and plan our work, it begins in a good spirit with the intention to bring glory and honour to God. However, sometimes we end up with claiming the honour and glory to ourselves. We need to always bear in mind that we are servants of God and as servants we are called to fulfill His will and not to please and satisfy human desires. When we do the work that pleases only human expectations we are serving human desires and not God's. As the prophet Micah said, that's all God's will, to bring joy, well-being and peace to his people. This not a command that God is imposing on us, but rather a reminder of what ought to know and do but conveniently forget. In other words, God is asking us to do little things well and faithfully according to His will and not great things. But in doing these little things well and devoutly we will contribute to something great – the building of His kingdom.

We can say that in all times and anywhere, the church leaders do not listen to Prophet Micah's message resulting in the suffering of the people. This remains to today. Throughout the years we were praying to God, "may your Kingdom come", yet we never achieve our request. Is it because God does not listen to our prayers or that our prayers lack honesty and integrity? Is it because there are many lies that we utter from our mouth with no sincerity? Jesus did not teach this prayer just to fill the air rather he really wanted God's Kingdom
established on earth, but what we did is to establish our own little kingdoms. Our human history is filled with such examples where we tried to put obstacles to the fulfillment of God's will and instead established our own will. God creates man in his image thus it is his will that man should fulfill. Jesus is our Lord, yes indeed, but he never asked his disciples to kneel down before him or to kiss his hands. Right at the beginning of his ministry he warned the first disciples who wanted to follow him: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Luke 9,58). If we put this in our own terms today it reads as follows: Pastors/Bishops have palaces or double store houses, and our Lord has none.

One thing that we need to bear in mind is that Christ has became a human being like one of us and has humbled himself to the status of a slave in order to show God's love and plan of salvation to the needy, marginalized, sick, powerless and homeless. In order for us to fully live Christ like attitudes, we need to confess as John (3, 10) said: "He must become greater, I must become less."

Conclusion

Joy, well-being and peace of His people is all that God wants us to fulfill. In doing so, we are making visible His Kingdom on earth and making the Lord's Prayer worthy to pray. The way to achieve is to walk humbly with God and He will give us the power to realize his will on earth. What is asked of us is to put all our heart, mind, and strength in God. As Jesus said to lawyer who came to ask what the greatest law is and what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' response was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22,37). To the Scribe who asks him about the greatest law, Jesus response is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12,30). To the teacher of the law who asks him what shall he do to inherit eternal life, Jesus responds: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind." (Luke 10,27). Although Mark and Luke had included strength in Jesus' responses, the main point is the unity of heart, soul and mind with God's will and that He will make us strong to fulfill His will on earth.

To God be the Glory and Praise. Amen.
The Postcolonial Turn for Biblical Hermeneutics at the Pacific Theological College

Mosese Ma'ilo

At fifty years of existence, the Pacific Theological College continues to be one of those biblical laboratories that experiment extra theories (from philosophical, cultural or literary disciplines) on the Bible and its interpretation. The hunt for what is relevant to Oceania will go on and on. The most recent to be called into service is postcolonial theory. It focuses on ways in which literary productions of the former colonies were produced, marketed, and mediated in Europe. It also acknowledges the reality and severity of the colonial project on every part of life of the Third World including Oceania. A number of Oceania scholars use conjectures of postcolonial theory (whether directly or indirectly) to re-read the Bible and its interpretations. This paper points out how such enterprise could be most resourceful in the present course of biblical hermeneutics in Oceania.

1. What is Postcolonial Theory?

Robert Young, in his Oxford publication on postcolonialism (Young: 2003, 1) begins with the following provocative questions.

Do you feel that whenever you speak, you have already in some sense been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking, that you are only ever going to be the object of their speech?

Do you sense that those speaking (on your behalf) would never think of trying to find out how things seem to you, from where you are? That you live in a world of others, a world that exists for others?

On purpose, I select this opening to settle our knowledge of postcolonial theory on a more engaging platform. Our home, Oceania, has a history of (quasi?) colonialism and we are challenged to look from the other side of the picture, experiencing how differently things look when you live in Papeete, Suva, Apia or Noumea, rather than New York, Paris, Berlin or London, and understanding why. Postcolonial theory assumes that such politics of 'difference' is a
corollary of 'imperialism,' the historical process that fixed relationships of domination and subordination that delineates our current world. From the perspective of a victim of colonization, Musa Dube defines imperialism as,

. . . an ideology of expansion that takes diverse forms and methods at different time, seeking to impose its languages, its trade, its religions, its democracy, its images, its economic systems and its political rule on foreign nations and lands. The victims of imperialism become the colonized . . . whose lands, minds, cultures, economies and political institutions have been taken possession of and rearranged according to the interests and values of the imperializing powers (Dube: 2006, 297).

In literary studies, the question was, 'How can we find a way to talk about the reality and severity of imperialism and colonialism?' A brief overview shows that the success of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said: 1995) sensitized a new generation of critics involved in a major departure from the humanist approaches.¹ He explored the extent to which colonialism fabricated a way of seeing the world, an order of things that was learned to be true and proper. Taken as scientific truths, it was used to legitimize Western power and domination.

A second group of critics began to scrutinize colonial representations of the colonized subjects in other texts like travel writings, colonial administrative documents, painting, art, and of course missionary writings. Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak pursued this trend in two different ways. Bhabha argued that the ambivalence of the colonized subject became a direct threat to the authority of the colonizers through the effects of mimicry. Spivak explored the problem of whether or not it was possible to recover the voices of those who had been made subjects of colonial representations, particularly women, and read them as potentially disruptive and subversive.

¹ This cannot disregard the original contribution of pioneers like Frantz Fanon, who in the 1950s produced *Black Skin, White Masks*, a book that explains the consequences of identity formation for the colonized subject who is forced into the internalization of the self as an other. In the 1960s, he also published *The Wretched of the Earth*, a book that exposed the mechanics of colonialism and its effect on those it enslaved. But Said's work laid the basic foundations for literary critics.
But an important book appeared in 1989 titled *The Empire writes back*... (Ashcroft et al: 1989) This is the third group of critics, who noted (in Commonwealth literature) the importance of how writers from countries with a history of colonialism have expressed their own sense of identity by using untranslatable words, signs and structures derived from 'other' languages, and incorporating many different creolized versions of English into their texts instead of following the standardized "English" syntax (John McLeod: 2000, 26). Their local concerns were primary to their meanings; not of minor value.

At the risk of oversimplification, postcolonial theory is not immune to terminological problems and hypothetical contradictions just like any other theory. But it offers Oceania biblical critics a way to talk about the reality of inequality in the region today as a construction of European imperialism. Colonization of small islands in Oceania was legitimized by representing natives as the savage, childlike, inept and incompetent to think and look after themselves. Colonization was also about getting Oceania people to accept their inferior ranking in the colonial order of things—a process we can call 'colonizing the mind.'

Colonial relationships still exist in the world as well as in Oceania. The values of colonial relationships are silently or apparently alive in the treatment of women, children, poor, less privileged and the marginalized within the cultural, political, and ecclesiastical backyards of Oceania.

### 2. Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics

In biblical studies, scholars concentrate on three modes of reading. They are based on relating postcolonial studies with the Bible as an ancient text, by relating postcolonial studies to modern readings either by way of Europe or America, and identifying those who re-read biblical narratives in the light of postcolonial concerns (Segovia: 2004, 125-131). Let me elaborate more on these three modes of reading.

#### I. Situating Imperialism and Colonialism at the Centre of the Bible

This mode of reading treats the Bible as a literary product of various colonial contexts like the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek and
Roman Empires. Fernando Segovia, one of the pioneers of postcolonial biblical studies argues, "... the shadow of empire in the production of ancient texts (Bible) is to be highlighted (Segovia: 2004, 126). The purpose is to obtain the always forgotten views of the marginal and how they look at a world that was dominated by the reality of Empire. How does the centre regard and treat the margins in the light of its own view of the world? How is history constructed by both sides? How is the margin represented in the centre? The task of postcolonial reading is to surface critical issues that are sidelined, as well as questions of power, ideology and culture. For such magnitude, see especially the contributions by Musa Dube's re-reading of John (Dube: 2002, 51-75); Warren Carter's re-reading of Matthew in the colonial context of the Roman Empire (Carter: 2000); and Itumeleng Mosala's re-reading of the Book of Esther in the colonial context of the Persian Empire.

II. Situating Imperialism and Colonialism at the Centre of Western Reading

The second mode of reading focuses on the exposure of colonial intents behind Western scholarship and interpretations of the biblical texts. Some of the following names are not postcolonial practitioners in their respective fields of study, but their insights reflect this magnitude of the postcolonial enterprise. Havlor Moxnes exposes how colonialism, national identity, ethnicity, and race have influenced scholarly constructions of Galilee in nineteenth century biblical scholarship in Europe (Moxnes: 2001, 26-37). Shawn Kelly exposes how the category of 'race' was injected into the historical streams of Euro-American biblical scholarship (Kelly: 2002). Michael Prior contends that the task of interpretation involves "... the imperial past of European expansion into Latin America, South Africa and Palestine, and showing how the fabricated ethnocentric, xenophobic and militaristic character of the Bible provided the legitimacy and inspiration for such a barbaric enterprise (Sugirtharajah: 2006, 70)."

For postcolonial critics, Western interpretations and constructions of biblical history and theology are very much influenced by an attitude of western supremacy.

III. Readings in the Light of Postcolonial Concerns

The truth is, in spite of the omnipresent character of imperialism and colonialism; it was never imposed and received in an impression of
absolute passivity. At times, there were resistant readings from the part of the politically, culturally, and religiously subordinated margins. It is therefore appropriate to distinguish between two groups of readers; people who readily accept and associate with the long tradition of Western dominant readings, and those from the colonies and once colonized areas who rail against such imperialist interpretations. These readers (mostly from the third world) resisted dominant readings by placing the Bible in the context and reality of their life situations. The analysis of the readers' contexts and their reactions are as significant as the worldview(s) of the Bible writers.

Essays and articles in anthologies like *John and Postcolonialism*, edited by Musa Dube and Jeffrey Staley, thematic *Semeia* issues like *Semeia* 75 (1996), edited by Laura Donaldson, and *Semeia* 88 (2001), edited by Roland Boer, are very good examples of the scope and purpose of postcolonial biblical interpretation. Two broad strategies dominate this magnitude of postcolonial biblical studies; a search for the marginalized or suppressed voices in, behind and below the text, and the formulation of subversive readings, or a deliberate inversion of the traditional reading of the biblical texts (Punt: 2002). The purpose is to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of the biblical texts by making links across the cultural divides. How? By illuminating biblical narratives and making sense of imported foreign concepts, spatially and temporally through indigenous resources, texts, and concepts (Sugirtharajah: 1999, 97).

3. Pacific Theological College Biblical Hermeneutics: The Postcolonial Turn

It seems adequate to say that postcolonial theory has the ability to assist a biblical hermeneutics that is truly Oceanic.

I. Ability and Value of Postcolonial Theory

In spite of its limitations, postcolonial theory lends its shoulder to Oceania biblical hermeneutics in two dimensions.

First, its ability to articulate the aspirations of subjugated people with reference to their sense(s) of identity and self-determination. It offers a way to eloquently and coherently express the reality of who we are and how we view the world. I have in mind a new understanding of Oceania identity; one that realizes the importance of change, of
hybridity, where identity is understood as hyphenated, split, multiple and multiplying. One scholar put it in more concrete words and contends that our identity becomes "... a complex web of cultural negotiation and interaction forged by imaginatively redeploying the local and the imported elements (Carusi: 1991, 100)." This understanding disqualifies any essentialist notion of "identity" based on consciousness and genetic "origin".

Secondly, the value of postcolonial theory is invested in its capacity to pose a resistant and emancipative encounter against dominant readings and interpretations, without ever neglecting aspects of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in the process. This is one of the most significant contributions of postcolonial theory to PTC hermeneutics. A hermeneutic of both resistance and emancipation aims at dislodging Western constructions of knowledge about us, by defying the standard binary models of categorization. On the same level, a hermeneutic of emancipation addresses our diversity and diverse issues we face in the region. It serves our interests in reclaiming our histories and memories, not for the sake of triumphalism, but our presence in this Ocean as flesh and blood readers.

II. Biblical Hermeneutics and 'Decolonizing the Mind'

Postcolonial reading emerges as a fitting marker for a variety of critical perspectives on the process of decolonization. Oceania is a place with a history of colonization and obviously, some island nations are still traumatized by colonization, and maybe most of us are descendants of its victims. In such a scenario, decolonization is imperative. We affirm that colonization was also about getting natives to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things—a process we can call 'colonizing the mind.' It functioned through the internalization of Western values and assumptions as regards the way they perceive and represent the world. The internalization of such colonial sets of values was effectively disempowering people (McLeod: 2000, 19).

At fifty years of existence, biblical hermeneutics at Pacific Theological College must take the course of 'decolonizing the Oceania mind.' This is about emancipating our hermeneutical perspectives, which are still imprisoned in the social, cultural, and ecclesiastical impacts of colonial structures. Postcolonial biblical hermeneutics is more than ideology criticism. It specifically addresses the silencing of the 'other' through posing the colonized as the contrary of the colonizer, and emptying our world of meanings

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(Gandhi: 1998, 15). Decolonizing the mind as the re-engagement of Oceania world of meanings must be the focus of Oceania biblical hermeneutics, a process towards the empowerment of the people of Oceania.

Congratulations to Pacific Theological College on its 50th anniversary. May you continue to be the biblical laboratory in Oceania.

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Gender-based Violence and Ephesians 5: Reflections on the Ethics, Hermeneutics and Didactics of a Community Bible Study in Suva, Fiji

Holger Szesnat

1 Introduction

Although the Pacific Theological College is primarily thought of as a regional, ecumenical institution, it is located in a specific place, namely Suva, Fiji Islands. This creates a certain tension, and therefore a challenge to its faculty members: On the one hand, we are working in a regional context, with students (and staff) from all over the South Pacific (cf. Ernst 2006), which poses a challenge to as well as opportunities for teaching and learning; on the other hand, we are placed in a specific context, namely the people of the Fiji Islands, with its own particular challenges and opportunities.

One aspect of this location in a specific context is that some members of faculty have always been engaged locally – some of us are asked to preach from time to time, and sometimes we are requested to give talks, lectures, or make other contributions to church and community life. This paper arises out of this context. Specifically, this is a reflective paper on the process of facilitating an 'interactive Bible Study' on Eph 5:21-33 in an ecumenical gathering of Christians, both women and men, meeting in Suva, Fiji Islands, on 4 December 2014, as part of the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" programme organised by the Suva Christian Network (Talanoa).

In the process of preparing and conducting this Bible Study with about 80 people, I realised anew the complexity of such a process – not only in terms of doing this Bible Study in this context, but also in my own learning process. I also recognised that my own approach to handling such a Bible Study had changed in the past couple of decades. Fifteen years or so ago, having just completed my doctoral

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dissertation (Szesnat 1998d; cf. Szesnat 1995, 2008), I would have done this very differently – and I do not think that it would have been useful for people. My focus would have been historical and social/cultural, and the hermeneutical and theological contexts would not have been clear.

If nothing else, this paper is an attempt at self-reflection: not necessarily because my fundamental views about the text have changed (though I do reflect a little on this at the end), nor my views on early Christianity and questions of gender, but mostly because my perspectives on integrating interpretative work into a larger liberation-theological framework have developed in various ways.  

Perhaps I should add that I am not aiming to produce something entirely new in the following reflections: if nothing else, I would like to invite readers into a number of considerations, challenges, and learning opportunities that I have tried to grapple with. Neither am I claiming to have found 'the way to do' a Bible Study for this purpose in the given context: I am aware of a number of shortcomings, and I suspect that there are others. But, for what it is worth, here is a first step.

2 Hermeneutical Starting Point

Describing one’s starting point is more complex than it might at first appear. The notion of the hermeneutical circle has become commonplace today, however it is conceptualised, especially since liberation theology argued that the starting point of theology is (or ought to be) context or praxis: i.e., context/praxis → reflection → action; and back to context/praxis again (Segundo 1976, 8-9). Having learned my most foundational theology in a liberation-theological context (South Africa during the apartheid era), I, too, will begin with life context. In reality, of course, the hermeneutical circle is really a never-ending spiral without a fixed starting point: when we think about the life context, we are already shaped by a complex web of prior experience and considerations; indeed, we experience context only through participation/action.

Prior to completing this paper for the celebratory volume in which it is to appear, I presented a summary of it to a small group of pastors and theologians in Germany, namely at the annual meeting of the Heidelberger Arbeitskreis für Sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegung (January 2015). I am grateful for that opportunity to tighten up the argument, and for the discussion that ensued.
2.1 Life / Situational Context

The idea of addressing violence against women in the context of Fiji arises from a real-life context: battered women, intimate partner violence, domestic violence – whatever it may be called, such violence against women is undeniably part of our reality, whether we like it or not. Of course, this is also a global issue, but that does not make it any better. I quote from the summary of a major empirical study recently conducted and published in Fiji (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 2013, 2); the severity of its findings speak for itself:

Fiji's rates of violence against women and girls are among the very highest in the world: 64% of women who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner in their lifetime, and 24% are suffering from physical or sexual partner violence today. This includes 61% who were physically attacked and 34% who were sexually abused in their lifetime. Rates of emotional abuse are also high: 58% of ever-partnered women experienced emotional violence in their lifetime, and 29% in the previous 12 months before the survey. Overall, 72% of ever-partnered women experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their husband/partner in their lifetime, and many suffered from all 3 forms of abuse simultaneously.

Although I cannot base this on empirical research, it is worth noting that the fact that men beat 'their women' is usually not even disputed – at least in my experience; it appears to be taken as a fact of life. This was also the case at the Bible Study that I then conducted – the question of denial was not even raised by participants. Rather, it appears to be taken as a fact of life.

The textual focus for the Bible Study was chosen by the steering committee of the convening group as a result of soundings taken at the previous year's event. Using Eph 5 to legitimise violence against women (and wives/spouses in particular) is common – not just in Fiji or the Pacific (cf. Schlueter 1997; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2002). This might strike the casual observer as perplexing since the text says nothing at all about violence. Clearly, any such argument has to be based firstly on isolating the submission of women/wives aspect from the context of the text, and then supplementing it with a further, completely non-textual argument which basically claims that a wife who does not 'submit' deserves to...
be beaten. The fact that the text says nothing at all about this is a useful opening to cover at least the most fundamental aspect that a Bible Study should achieve: that violence against women/wives is completely unacceptable.

2.2 Personal Context

Before I go to the text that I am meant to prepare for this Bible study, I am already shaped by certain presuppositions, or my prejudgement / prejudice, as Gadamer calls it (Gadamer 1990). This includes the fact that my own approach to the Scriptures is fundamentally shaped by the experience of what was then often called 'contextual theology' in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid – though this was, in the main, a code word for liberation theology (Cochrane 2001, 2008). As such, I recognise that the Bible is a site of struggle (Schüßler Fiorenza 1997; West 2008): not only is the interpretation of the Scriptures a contested arena, but the Scriptures themselves are a witness to the struggle against the idols of death, and for the God of life (Richard 1983; Sobrino 1993; Gutiérrez 1991). Recognition of the multiplicity of voices within the Bible, the polysemy of texts, and the constant, ongoing task of meaning-making are all part of this (Croatto 1983, 1987). Issues of gender and sexuality are as much part of this as are politics, economics, and so on. My own previous work on gender and sexuality in antiquity, with a focus on Paul and Philo of Alexandria (Szesnat 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1999), also inevitably shapes how I come to the text in Eph 5.

I am also aware that the text in Eph 5 has had a long 'history of effect' (i.e., Wirkungsgeschichte a la Gadamer), in a variety of ways and contexts, past and present; indeed, that was the reason why the text was chosen by the organising committee in the first place. A text like Eph 5:22 – 6:11 has, at certain times and in certain contexts, become a text of terror, to borrow Phyllis Trible's phrase (cf. Trible 1984), not just for women, but also for slaves and their descendants (Martin 1991; Meeks 1996). The text therefore becomes a complex theological mine field: On the one hand, a lot of serious damage has been done to people through the use of this passage as a kind of 'clobber text', to the extent that some readers are so pained by it that they avoid the text altogether. We might want to consider Howard Thurman's haunting recollection of reading the Bible to his illiterate grandmother, who had been a slave in the ante-bellum United States of America, and who told him never to read from the letters of Paul, since her slave master had instructed the minister who occasionally
preached to them to focus on the injunction to slaves to obey their masters (Thurman 1949, 30-31). On the other hand, precisely because the text still functions as a tool of oppression today, it is imperative to address it.

Yet another presupposition for me is that gender-based violence (and, as I would argue, any violence) is incompatible with Christian life. I arrived at this not simply through socio-cultural conditioning, though that is no doubt part of this: a complex path of personal social interactions and ideological influences, including the reading of the Scriptures, all contributed to shaping this conviction.

It is also part of my own context that I approach any given text as a person with a particular life history, identity, class, ethnicity, and so on. Reading a text that addresses wives and husbands, children and parents/fathers, slaves and slave owners, makes this particularly challenging, and poses certain problems. Interpreters with a very different life context might find my explorations difficult to follow, but the challenge of reading the Scriptures communally as Christians lies precisely in this area.

Finally, given that I was asked to prepare an 'interactive Bible Study', I also need to mention what models of Bible Study approaches have shaped my own. I am primarily influenced by the kind of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) approach developed by what was then called the Institute for the Study of the Bible (now: Ujamaa Institute) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This is a communal, group-based Bible study approach which is fundamentally a way of reading the Scriptures for liberation in order to foster agency and action in poor and marginalised communities. Of course, Fiji is not South Africa. Any given model needs to be adapted for different contexts, and I do not wish to claim in any way that I what I created represents such an approach, even though I see myself as working in that tradition of liberation-theological praxis. In the Pacific, I prefer to call the approach I use 'community Bible study for social transformation'.

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3 Given the prevalence of intimate partner violence in the kind of society I grew up in as a child and youth, it would be simplistic to call this presupposition as simply 'cultural'. If anything, it was influenced by a very specific sub-cultural milieu, and even there more on account of its ideology, and not necessarily practice.

4 The approach has been extensively described and analysed, especially in the writings of Gerald O. West (Ujamaa Centre Staff and West 2007; West 1993, 1999, 2011, 2014).
3 Initial Textual Observations

A careful reading of the text, i.e. Eph 5:21-33, throws up a number of issues. The most obvious matter for those trained in Biblical scholarship is that this text is part of a genre known as a 'domestic code' or 'household code'\(^5\) which starts at 5:22 and ends at 6:9. We find similar kinds of codes in the New Testament and other ancient Greek and Roman sources, including Jewish texts (cf. MacDonald 2011; Strecker 1989; Balch 1988; Lührmann 1981). The household code in Eph addresses three paired groups of household members: wives (5:22-23) and husbands\(^6\) (5:24-33); children (6:1-3) and fathers (6:4); slaves (6:5-8) and slave owners (6:9). In each case, the pair appears to be in a hierarchically structured status relationship, and the text addresses the lower status person first. Part of the problem of the text is that the pairing is fictionalised or idealised, as it were – then as now: real life relationships are much more complex (MacDonald 2011, 2012). For example, not all men would have been husbands, fathers, and slave owners at the same time; a woman might be a wife, but also a child of parents, and also a slave owner; etc. In other words, in real life (then as now), there is not a simple top-down hierarchy, but multiple intersecting hierarchies and relationships.

The text I was meant to focus on (5:21-33) is part of a larger textual unit, though this is less obvious in translation than it is in Greek. Since Greek allows the writer to construct very long sentences – something that is not easily possible in many, perhaps most languages – English (and other) translations naturally tend to break up the Greek sentence structure into shorter English sentences. Partially as a result of this, some of the connections are obscured,\(^7\) and therefore also the structural unity of the broader context of the passage. It makes sense to start reading with the larger sense unit that begins at 5:15: “Be careful, therefore, how you live” or “Watch carefully how you live” (βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε),

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5 Also known in scholarship as Haustafel, the German word for this genre.
6 In the Greek text, the broader terms γυναῖκες (women/wives) and ἄνδρες (men/husbands) are used since Greek does not distinguish between women/wives and men/husbands. However, the text and its cultural context clearly implies the paired 'wife and husband' roles in an ancient household, rather than a general 'women and man' reference.
7 Representing this and a few other grammatical problems of the text in translation is a notoriously problematic matter, which is naturally also affected by shifts in interpretation (cf. Fiore 2003).
which itself picks up 5:8, the matter of living "as children of the light" (ὡς τέκνα φωτός περιπατεῖτε). Everything that follows, including the household codes, depends on this injunction ("Watch carefully how you live"):

First, there is the resulting exhortation not to be "like those without understanding" (ὡς ἄσοφοι, 5:16); instead, the readers/listeners are told to "be filled with/in the Spirit" (πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, 5:18). This 'being filled' is explored with three examples, which are constructed with three main participial clauses: "as you sing psalms" etc. (λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς, 5:19); "giving thanks" (εὐχαριστοῦντες, 5:20); and finally, "being subject to one another in fear/awe of Christ" (ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, 5:21). The household codes that follow (5:22 – 6:11) are grammatically and thematically subordinate to 5:21 (see also Barth 1974, s.v.; cf. Wessels 1989, 71). This is underlined by the fact that the first sentence of the code (5:22) does not even have the verb ("submit"), though it is implied – a common feature in Hellenistic Greek.9

It is significant that many translations and commentators conclude the paragraph here, at the end of 5:21, and begin a new paragraph in 5:22. The problem with this common presentation is that the connection to the last example (the participial clause, "being subject to each other") is easily lost, and that is highly problematic. This is, therefore, a crucial point that is worth repeating: namely, that the three paired exhortations in the form of a household code, starting in 5:22, are all subordinate to 5:21.

There are tensions in this text – and tensions in a text are usually worth exploring. Firstly, 5:21 speaks of mutual submission, yet the following household code seems to imply that only one side of each pair is supposed to submit or obey (wives, children, and slaves). This tension is something that, at least until recently, has tended to be pushed aside in scholarship, partially because there has been a

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8 The usual understanding of this phrase (with the Spirit) is disputed by John-Paul Heil, who argues on linguistic grounds that a translation as "in the Spirit" would be preferable (Heil 2007), the implication being that "the implied agent of this filling is the ascended Christ, the implied content is gifts of Christ's divine love". While this is persuasive, it does not alter the sense sufficiently to warrant introducing this into the Bible Study.

9 As a even glance at the text-critical apparatus of Nestle-Aland27/28 shows, some scribes who copied the ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts apparently felt this and tried to supply it as either a 2nd or a 3rd person plural imperative: "be subject to".
tendency to discuss the household codes outside of their framing in a given letter (e.g., Tanzer 1995). What is frequently lacking in scholarship is a detailed discussion of just how the household code functions within the letter in which it is used. This is important historically (we are in danger of missing the rhetorical strategy and the overall point of the letter) but also theologically in our own contemporary contexts. Therefore, if I want to be open to potentially liberative meaning disclosure of a text, a focus on 5:22-33 alone is not helpful.

Secondly, the christological analogy used for the husbands creates further tension, both in itself, and when viewed in its canonical context: The exhortation to husbands to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25, partially repeating 5:2), pushes the reader/listener to consider just how Christ loved the church, just how Christ "gave himself up for her" (ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς). Historically, the first audience would have considered this question in light of oral tradition; today, it is the canonical environment that will at least partially shape the reading/listening community's thoughts on this, though the reality of today's oral traditions of 'what Christ did for us' will also affect our reading practice.

Once we acknowledge this canonical referentiality (indeed: intertextuality), the larger frame of the letter itself comes to mind: If we postulate that a key thought in Eph is that God's peace has overcome all enmity, what contextual considerations does this set up for our text? We might see this as a third aspect to the potential tension that the text creates within its larger epistolary context.

All these tensions destabilise a common interpretation of this text, or, one might actually say, destabilises the text itself. It is true, of course, that if one reads backwards from the code and its exhortations to the three paired groups – a perfectly sensible reading strategy in itself – one could question just how much remains of that

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10 There is a different kind of (and much simpler) christological analogy for wives as well as slaves, but that is another story.

11 It is noteworthy that both conventional conservative and also feminist interpreters agree on the function of the text regarding the relationship of women and men, or wives and husbands. To be precise: both understand the text as affirming the subjection of women. The interpretative methodologies might differ, and the theological evaluation of course differs as well, but the fundamental reading outcome is very similar. This is not necessarily a reason to suspect this reading, but it give us cause to take a second look.
mutual subjection. This is particularly so if one does not stop at 5:33 but continues to read on in order to include the second and third pair in the household code: In the end, it is wives who are told to submit to their husbands, implicitly (and paradoxically, one might say) precisely by omitting that verb in Greek (5:22); it is the children who are told to obey (ὑπακούω) their parents (6:1); it is the slaves who are also told to obey (ὑπακούω) their masters (6:5).

Nevertheless, if I read the text from a forward direction, the demand to the entire group that is addressed, namely that they should subject themselves to each other mutually, could equally well be taken to question the core assumptions we make (and perhaps those of the first-century audience as well), namely how the household codes that follow are to be understood: If the readers/listeners are enjoined to subject themselves to each other, the following household code with its status-based assumptions becomes problematic. The text thus destabilises itself and its readers/listeners; the tension within the text begins to produce effects.12

Finally, what may well help us in this process is the fact that, as Ian McFarland has pointed out as well (McFarland 2000, 354), the exhortation to be mutually subjected constitutes a logical impossibility (when read literally) in the sense that it creates an infinite loop: Literally, "being mutually subject to each other" suggests the image of two people standing in front of a doorway, urging each other to be the first to go through – in perpetuity, thus resulting in neither going through. This can hardly be the point that the text is supposed to convey. The reader/listener is therefore forced to consider alternative meaning scenarios for this phrase, and a canonical perspective, especially taking into account other text from the Pauline letter corpus as well as the gospels should come to mind: For examples, the fairly frequent encouragement in the Pauline letter corpus to do certain things 'to each other' (i.e., mutually), or the synoptic passages that address leadership in terms of subjection (Mk 10:43 parr.).

12 My point is not quite the same as that of Markus Barth (1974), also reiterated by Francois Wessels (1989): in essence, their readings are based on the claim that this is the view of the writer of Ephesians. I am less confident about our ability to construct the intentions of the author. Rather, I suggest that this is a possible interpretative scenario, both for the author and the first audience in the first century.
4 The Bible Study

4.1 Basic Design Considerations

A number of factors had to be taken into account: For starters, I had limited time for preparation, which meant that I had very little recourse to scholarly literature prior to the Bible Study exercise. In other words, in the preparation of the Bible Study itself, I relied mostly on memory, as well as a fresh reading of the whole Letter to the Ephesians.

Just as with the text that I was asked to look at, I was also given a set time framework that I could not alter in a significant way. This created a problem for me: CBS work is based on small-group work with frequent group reports to the full number of participants. Given the time frame, it was clear that this would not be done. As a result, a single, final feedback session would have to suffice.

Otherwise, the basic process and approach of the CBS would fit; that is, a series of set questions that are handed out in stages (see Appendix 1), and which are designed to maintain a balance between directing participants' attention to text and context, while being open enough to allow groups to shape their learning and discussion so that it becomes their own.

I knew that the group would be diverse in terms of the background (social, educational, church, gender, etc.). Some people knew each other, some did not. It was going to be a one-off Bible Study without follow-up. Language was going to be a problem in that we used English as the medium of communication, yet not all participants were comfortable enough in the language to express themselves, yet using translators would have required more time. Status differences among participants (e.g., the presence of talatala, i.e., ministers) further complicated the group discussion processes.

Most, if not all participants in the Bible Study would approach the text with a fundamental attitude of trust: Some might be uncomfortable with some aspects of it, but the basic expectation is one that takes it for granted that the text can tell us something about how to lead our lives today. I could express this pejoratively as naivety, but equally well (and positively) as open trust. This is not, in essence, all that different from what the South African experience has shown; indeed, the South African CBS approach takes this as one of its starting points.
Methodologically, a key insight in the South African context (which is at least to some extent corroborated by similar work in other contexts) was and is that the fundamental interpretative approach taken – whether historical, narrative, or whatever else – is not in itself necessarily crucial (West 1993, 1995).\textsuperscript{13} Depending on text and context, a variety of methodologies can work, even though at least in some contexts, historical issues may be asked for by groups even where academic interpreters might not expect this (West 2004a). I decided to avoid historical reference points in respect of Eph 5, primarily because I am not convinced that this can easily be communicated in a useful way in the context of this specific Bible Study, but also because I am frequently not convinced that the historical arguments proposed by some are actually all that persuasive (e.g., contra Fee 2002), or that the hermeneutical strategy behind it is helpful in this context (e.g., contra Tanzer 1995). As a result, I ignored classic scholarly debates such as that on the authorship of Eph in the design of the Bible Study – always with the proviso that if a question were to arise from the discussion, I would be prepared to respond.

My own experience with forms of contextual Bible Study has been limited to working with narrative texts, and this seems to be the primary focus of work done among those from whom I learned this approach (Ujamaa Centre Staff and West 2007). Designing a similar kind of study for a text from the New Testament letter corpus, i.e. texts which are frequently based on a form of propositional rhetoric, poses different challenges. In particular, this is because I took an educated guess that most participants in the Bible Study are (a) not used to reading much beyond the Bible and perhaps a local newspaper, and (b) are instead used to reading small snippets of text in isolation from their immediate context.

Still, as in much other CBS work, a key design challenge was to encourage and empower participants to read the text in context(s): both the context of their own lives and experience, but also the context of short passages within the larger scriptural context.

Involving context sometimes involves difficult choices, though, as in the case of Eph 5:21-33. In this case, it is relatively easy to find a starting point (Eph 5:15, as shown above). Yet where do I end the

\textsuperscript{13} To use Ricoeurian terminology: behind the text; world of the text; in front of the text (Ricoeur 1976, 1978, 1981). Literature on the use of Ricoeur's work in Biblical hermeneutics abounds; see, for example, Sandra Schneiders (1999) and Mark Wallace (1990).
textual focus of the Bible study? Genre considerations show that the sense unit continues until 6:11 (i.e., the second and third pair in the household code). However, I chose not to direct attention to this block for time reasons, knowing well that this affects how one reads 5:22-33: After all, the nature of the exhortations to child and father/parents, and to slave and slave master, could well influence how we read the first pair (wife/husband). This was a decision which some interpreters might see as a fundamental flaw, and I have to admit that I am not entirely comfortable with it. Nevertheless, time considerations are important as well, and the focus on gender-based violence pushed me not to write the second and third pair of the household code into the Bible Study text.14

Finally, I decided against presenting my own translation of the text: all participants were encouraged to bring whichever translation they were comfortable with, and for the illustration of the structural arrangement of the text (see below) I relied on a slightly modified text from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). Presenting a completely new translation would inevitably require an explanation on my part, which would in turn take up a lot of time. In addition, it might foster suspicion among those who might be potentially hostile towards the direction that the Bible Study might take.

4.2 The Detailed Design of the Bible Study

The Bible Study was divided into four stages (see Appendix 1), each with one or more fairly open questions. All participants had the questions in front of them, but only for one stage at a time so that groups would not be led by their perception of where things were going later.

As with all CBS work, the challenge was to create questions that are open enough to allow participants to explore the text in a way that seems sensible to them, while at the same time directing their focus to particular aspects of the text. As I found out, with some frustration, achieving that balance turned out to be more difficult with this text than it usually is with narrative texts.

14 Naturally, there is always a possibility for participants to notice this and to push this consideration into the Bible Study, in which case I would have to deal with it. However, the lack of frequent feedback units that the time framework imposed on the design meant that the chances of that happening were slim.
The first stage is standard in CBS: "what is this text all about?" The question is deliberately phrased in this vague fashion (and this is reiterated verbally) to enable participants to open up: Anything and everything that participants regard as being related to the text can come up here – both textual and life-context matters.

The second stage was designed to encourage an awareness of the literary context of the text, as well as its structure. To this end, I created a visually structured and slightly modified NRSV text (see Appendix 2), which was handed out at this point. Specifically, the second stage was designed to direct the participants' attention to three aspects of the text: the embeddedness of 5:22-33 in the broader section starting at 5:15; the structure of the text itself (especially the link between the 5:22-33 to 5:21); and the potential for meaning creation that arises from a reading of the text in the context of Ephesians as a whole. At this point it became clear that the questions I was able to create had to become more leading than I was happy with: for example, the very fact that I had to state what I regard to be a major theme of Ephesians is a major intervention on my part. It is also became clear that the questions tended to be long, which far from ideal.

The third stage, in this case following a morning tea break, concentrated on the detail of the text of 5:22-33. This was designed in three parts, each of which encouraged participants to consider not just what the text exhorts particular groups to do, but also why. This includes reflections on how the Christ-analogy in the text actually works, which itself produces useful intertextual reference points. I chose to begin with a focus on the husband (5:25-32), which is the longest part of the text – in part because it spells out the theological argument in more detail, but also because most participants would be used to focus on the briefer section on wives, and then ignore or belittle the longer part on the husbands. For that second part on the wives, I tried to engage participants in thinking about just what 'subjection' might mean in the context of this text: Since the tendency of readers would be a narrow focus on individual sentences and phrases, I hoped that reading 5:22-24 and 5:25-33 respectively could be related to the overall context. In the third and final part, I chose to direct the groups' attention back to a major structural issue, which constitutes the primary tension in the text, namely the contrast between the mutual subjection theme of 5:21 and the section that follows. The whole of stage 3 deliberately aims to shift the readers / listeners' attention away from a narrow focus on individual words and phrases, since that focus tends to result in free word associations.
which move the focus away from the text, and therefore favours existing stereotypes rather than engagement with the text. Rather, I tried to redirect attention to the possible meaning of words and phrases in larger textual-rhetorical contexts, which enables new connections to be made.

In the fourth and last stage, I asked the groups to return to the question that caused us to look at the text in the first place: is violence against intimate partners justified by this text? In a way, this served as a way of concluding the interpretative process. However, this would not be complete (in terms of the design of a CBS) without an action plan. Given that this was an arbitrary group which would probably never meet again in this form, the usefulness of such an action plan is naturally limited. Nevertheless, I hoped that it might generate sufficient momentum to create some kind of concrete action plans among at least some participants, both individually and collectively.

Finally, since I anticipated that participants would want to hear what I thought about the text, I prepared a two-page (A4) summary of my own thinking about the text which related to the design of the Bible study process (see Appendix 3). This is not normally part of a CBS in the South African context, but in the Fijian context, I expected this request to come – and indeed, it did.

On the whole, I tried to design a process that would cover (a) a fundamental 'must' which I hoped all participants would come to realise, and (b) a secondary aim which I hoped at least some participants might begin to grapple with:

(A) The fundamental insight I hoped for is that the justification mechanism for violence is broken: the text does not in any way justify violence against women, whatever the excuses or pretexts might be. Not only is the subjection concept itself on no account a possible pretext for violence; the love paradigm, however it is understood (love is always a cultural concept), also cannot serve in that role once it is read in the context of the Christ analogy.

(B) In a secondary move, I tried to open up a path that questions the status-based domination strategy that undergirds the violence-legitimating argument in the first place. By placing 5:22-33 in the context of the overarching demand for mutual subjection (5:21) in particular, I hoped for some reflections on the tensions within the text (see above) which, in the end, destabilise the common one-way subjection reading.
4.3 Brief Evaluation of the Event and the Design

I did not initially set out to evaluate the Bible Study: The idea of reflecting on it in this form only occurred to me after the event. As a result, I did not arrange the group work and feedback in such a way that a proper basis for results or findings is warranted. However, a few comments on impressions gathered may be in order.

Obviously, the limitations of the event, some of which I pointed out above, created unavoidable problems. Lack of time was the biggest problem: this is a common challenge when creating community Bible studies of this kind when the time framework is beyond the facilitator's control. Doing Bible studies in groups takes time, especially when a large number of people is involved, and this is often underestimated. I suspect that more time for stages 2 and 4 in particular would have been useful.

The second stage of the Bible Study seems to have been the least successful, judging by the feedback that came from groups. Perhaps there are better ways of introducing that stage; perhaps it has to do with people's prior reading experience; perhaps even with the short period of time available for this stage. Either way, all groups seemed to struggle with this stage, and the outcome was limited. During the design process, I did consider replacing stage 2 with a much briefer 'information' point, but this tends to fly in the face of the principle of such Bible studies as I understand and aim to practice them: That is, to minimise the 'leading' aspect of the questions put to the groups – which are, after all, designed to open up space rather than force people into a narrow avenue for group work.

The third stage was marred, in my view, by my overly long questions in the group handouts. I became caught here between my aim of directing attention to the detail of the text – specifically, the kind of detail that I had reason to suspect would normally be overlooked – and the overall aim of CBS work, which is to keep questions short and manageable, both because it makes them easier to comprehend, and because it limits the 'leading' aspect of questions.

Although I see much need and scope for improvement in the design and the detailed planning of this Bible Study and the process, I still hold to the fundamental concept of working with Eph 5 in this way. In what follows, I would like to reflect a little more, however tentatively, on some implications.
5 Initial Explorations of Some Implications

5.1 Ethics and Hermeneutics

Given the context of gender-based violence, a primary consideration for the purpose and therefore design of the Bible Study is to provide a framework that encourages theological-ideological possibilities to overcome patterns of domestic violence, and, if possible, practical strategies to subvert and prevent the ideologies that undergird such violence. I would argue, perhaps a little provocatively, that a Bible Study approach that does not aim to foster this is unethical.

This means in practice that any reading strategy that is encouraged in a Bible Study must, given the context of a particular reading community, enable and empower that community to engage with the text in such a way that such a basic outcome becomes possible. I would argue that my own earlier background (i.e., how I would have related to this text about 15 years ago) did not fully enable me to do that: As a young adult, whether in Germany or in South Africa, I grew up in a subculture – and therefore a particular ideological environment – which effectively rejected, and then essentially ignored texts such as the household code in Ephesians.

There were (and are) three somewhat related strategies from that context which essentially achieve this (see below). All of them are additionally beset by a more fundamental problem, namely that they make the reading community completely dependent on the supposed historical knowledge of an outsider expert.

Firstly, a fairly common cultural-hermeneutical model is to relativise (and therefore effectively reject) a text like Eph 5:21 – 6:9 as something that is important or relevant only within a specific cultural-historical context. I have frequently encountered this, across continents and churches, including the Pacific. It is possible to do this in quite sophisticated ways, and from a fairly broad range of theological perspectives. Yet the fundamental problem with this approach is that it can be used to relativise virtually any text.

Secondly, a few scholars (e.g., Munro 1972) have argued that texts like Eph 5:21 – 6:9 are later additions to the text of Ephesians (“interpolations”). Neither I nor the vast majority of scholars are persuaded by such arguments, which are based on far too rigid and narrow perspectives. Even Gordon Fee’s approach, which comes from a moderate evangelical perspective, eventually falls into this mode (Fee 2002).
streamlined a view of what 'the original text' as written by 'the original author' could have looked like. In essence, it seems far too easy and simplistic to me to 'edit out' texts that do not appear to fit a predetermined pattern of what scholars think Paul (or whoever the writer of Ephesians is supposed to be) generally writes. This is not to suggest that interpolations in Biblical texts should be ruled out \textit{per se}, but rather that we need more evidence to support this kind of possibility than a supposed internal contradiction, or preconceived ideas about the historical development of early Christianity in the first century.

This takes me to the third, and in fact fairly common hermeneutical strategy, which is based on a particular historical understanding of the New Testament. A good example is provided by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (Thistlethwaite 1985) when she argues that

\begin{quote}
Liberation from ... [Eph 5] requires a recognition of its location within the biblical materials and of the function this particular emphasis in Ephesians played in the history of the church. In the pseudo-Pauline epistles,\textsuperscript{16} a shift away from the egalitarian ethos of the Jesus movement can be observed.
\end{quote}

This is a fairly common approach, especially in 1970s and 1980s liberation-theological type readings, including feminist theology. It assumes that there was some kind of egalitarian first generation of Christians, which was followed by successive stages of cultural accommodation which moved away from those egalitarian origins. It is debatable whether this kind of argument is ultimately persuasive at the historical level, and also how such debates function at a meta-critical level, but that is another matter (cf. Beavis 2007). What is important in my context here in Fiji is that historical distinctions based on the model of 'egalitarian origins which are subsequently corrupted' are simply not persuasive. What people see is the canonical text as it stands; theological value distinctions based on historical models are usually outside of the scope of people's hermeneutical framework. This is not to say that historical arguments are never useful; neither does it deny that this is a persuasive reading in other contexts.

I am reminded here of Robert Allen Warrior's point about the conquest narrative in Joshua and its absence in first-generation liberation theology (Warrior 1989, 262):

\textsuperscript{16} Like many scholars, Thistlethwaite maintains that Ephesians was not written by Paul, but by a 'Pauline school', perhaps some years after Paul's death.
People who read the narratives read them as they are, not as scholars and experts would like them to be read and interpreted. History is no longer with us. The narrative remains.

Warrior's critique of liberation theology and the point he makes here is not without its own problems. Nevertheless, I would argue that a Bible Study approach in the community context that I find myself in requires careful attention to the text *as it stands*: 'the epistle and its text remains'. Put differently: If I were to choose a reading strategy for the Bible Study that is so alien to the community that people are not able to see *for themselves* what the text's potential for meaning disclosure is, both I and that approach would be a failure with potentially disastrous consequences for participants. Once again, this would constitute an unethical hermeneutical approach.

To return to Thistlethwaite's argument, pointing to texts like Gal 3:28 (as she does) is potentially more meaningful, though my own hermeneutical foundation for this would not be historical – which is hard to demonstrate in a Bible Study – but rather canonical-theological. The point is not to privilege a text because it stems from a time of supposed egalitarian origins, but rather to explore texts creatively that stand in tension. Ultimately this will result in privileging certain texts as well, perhaps even the same texts, but it will have to do this on a different theological foundation – and in the process, we might discover that texts which are at first sight fundamentally oppressive nevertheless hold some liberative potential in certain contexts.

One might say – and indeed, it would be unreasonable to do so – that my reading strategy is a kind of 'reading against the grain' (Domeris 1991; Reid n.d.; Wire 1990; West 2004b), at least from the perspective of the specific academic interpreter who designed the Bible Study. In other words, I read the text 'against the grain' of the interpretative tradition, and perhaps also against the grain of the text itself, if I think of the text historically.

Therefore, an approach which foregrounds rhetorical and canonical connections begins with the premise that no text, however problematic in a first reading, is rejected out of hand. Every text is to be pondered, researched, questioned with a view to its liberative potential within its canonical and life contexts. To be sure: not all texts will reveal something along those lines. Nevertheless, my approach is that of Jacob at Jabbok, adopting the phrase and
attitude of: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Gen 32:26, NRSV).

5.2 Theological-Methodological Explorations

I am encouraged here, however, by something that a key feminist scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, wrote some 30 years ago (1984, 175). She argued in *Bread, Not Stone*, that she sought to empower religious wo/men who, for whatever reasons, are still affected by the bible to read 'against the very grain' of its patri-kyriarchal rhetoric.

Whether or to what extent my own reading strategy is related to hers is another matter, which I will not explore here. I will also ignore that somewhat pejorative word 'still' in that sentence. What is important to me is that, in any given community context, I try to find methodological approaches to the text which take seriously where people are at, and to select an approach which 'works' within that environment.

This creates a certain tension for me as an interpreter who reads and interprets in a scholarly tradition which is fundamentally based on historical hermeneutics, and specifically methodologies which foreground social aspects: in a nutshell, socio-historical and social-scientific criticism informed by a liberation-theological hermeneutic. However, I would argue that in certain contexts – and with certain texts – the kind of rhetorical-canonical approach I took in this Bible study is equally valid, even though it may lead to a different kind of interpretative conclusion with regard to the same text.

It is important for me that this is not simply seen as a strategic or tactical choice: it is also a theological one. I wish to explore texts in a way that looks for whatever liberative potential there is in any given text, while recognising that some texts will not only resist this, but also make it impossible: after all, there are different voices within the Scriptures; the Bible is a site of struggle at a textual and historical, and not just an interpretative level.

The liberative potential of a given text does not exclude the recognition of dangers that may be perceived in the act of interpretation. For example, I read John's Apocalypse as a text that encourages and admonishes its readers / listeners in the first century to resist the temptation of falling for the ideologies and practices of the Roman empire; yet I am conscious of the dangers inherent in the
dualistic, sometimes violent, and certainly flatly condemnatory aspects of the text of Rev which have had a deeply troublesome history of effect.

Looking at a text like Eph 5, I think it is theologically appropriate to operate in two different modes when confronted with different contexts: both the rhetorical-canonical approach taken in the Bible Study I designed, and some of the historically based feminist approaches I mentioned from another context are expressions of a liberative reading which may be appropriate. Paradoxically, they both represent, as it were, the truth of the text.

5.3 Tentative Historical Questions

I am not primarily concentrating on historical arguments in this paper, since my primary focus is on a liberative reading in a given contemporary context. For example, I am not arguing that the tension between 5:21 and 5:22-33 is 'intended' by the letter-writer, nor that the first, primary audience would have inevitably seen that tension. Instead, my focus is on exploring what might happen for us as interpreters once we notice that potential tension.

Having said that, such an observation might also feed back into historical considerations. I am mindful here of the recent discussion of multiple and complex identities in real first-century congregations\(^\text{17}\) as well as the recent scholarly interest in the imperial context and the complex and diverse responses to that context especially among subjected peoples (something usually referred to as postcolonial criticism, though it is much broader than that).\(^\text{18}\)

The readers in the Bible Study in Suva no doubt constructed their own way through the text, and will continue to do so. In real life, this involves making complex and sometimes difficult choices at different points in life. A similar scenario was no doubt at play for a first-

\(^{17}\) Highlighted with reference to Ephesians, for example, in the recent work of Margaret Macdonald, to which I referred earlier.

\(^{18}\) Scholarly literature on empire (including postcolonial studies) is considerable; I refer only to a few examples from the field of Pauline studies, such as the often overlooked early work of Klaus Wengst (1987), but also a series of volumes edited by Richard Horsley (1997, 2000, 2008), and the useful recent collection of studies on Paul and postcolonialism edited by Christopher Stanley (2011). A useful summary is presented by Judy Diehl (2012).
century audience. I therefore wonder whether there is something in the reading direction I discussed above which might be of use in a reconsideration of the text in its first-century context: If (some of) the participants – and I – can see and gain inspiration from the prominence of 5:21 and the challenge of mutual subjection in relation to 5:22-33, can we exclude a similar interpretative choice amongst some early Christian readers? Various possibilities exist for this, which it might be useful to explore further: could this text conceivably be read through a 'hidden transcript' perspective (Scott 1990; Horsley 2004)? Are we reading the text at the level of the supposed intention of the writer, and/or the possible responses of the first audience – and what are the hermeneutical implications of this?

6 By Way of Conclusion

I ended the last paragraph with some tentative questions, and this mode of speech seems appropriate as an ending for this paper, which is essentially a reflection on practice. For that reason, I have also refrained from changing (in the sense of improving) the handouts and the Bible study design after the event: this is meant to be a look at the reflective practice of a theologian, 'warts and all'.

Writing this paper has turned out to be a useful exercise for me; as to whether it is something of interest for anyone else – that is up to the reader to decide.

7 Bibliography


Appendix 1

This is the handout for participants at the Suva Bible study. Cutting lines are indicated. The original was designed to fit on two A4 sheets.

Bible Study on Ephesians 5:21-33

First, someone should please volunteer to act as a time-keeper (who reminds you that it is time to move to the next stage). Also, someone should act as a scribe who takes notes so that the group can report at the end – though it does not have to be the same person for the whole Bible Study.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers as such: the point of this Bible Study is to allow people to speak as freely and honestly as possible. It is unlikely that we will be able to explore all aspects of this text – but we can make a good start.

Be prepared for different views in your group. If groups are large, bear in mind that everyone should be able to speak, if they wish to – therefore, please keep your own contributions reasonably short and to the point, and listen carefully to others.

Finally, please don't forget that the text comes from a letter with a complex argument: be prepared to read carefully. Do not be afraid to ask searching questions of the text.

Stage 1  (15 minutes)

Having heard read Eph 5:21-33 being read aloud, please consider this question:

- What is this text all about?

This is an open question: feel free to bring up anything that comes to mind when you read this text.

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Bible Study on Ephesians 5:21-33 (in the context of 5:15-33)

Stage 2  (20 minutes)

A. Take a look at the structure of the text of Eph 5:15-33 in the handout. The structured text handout is designed to show how vv. 21-33 fit into the context of the argument in 5:15-33, and also how the argument of the whole text flows.

- What can we learn from vv. 15-20 about vv. 21-33?
- What can we learn from the structure in the handout? Is it useful? Are there other ways of structuring the text which would perhaps better represent what it has to say?

B. The theme of Ephesians could be called "overcoming enmity" (division based on hate), first between Jew and Gentile, but then also beyond that: perhaps one person could read aloud 2:11-22, especially vv.14-16. The letter writer later relates his very own purpose of existence to that theme (3:1-13, especially v. 6). As a result, the encouragement to live well and just (Eph 4-6) is also based on that theme (read 4:1-3).

- How does our text (5:15-33) relate to the letter's overall theme of 'overcoming enmity'?

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Bible Study on Ephesians 5:21-33 (in the context of 5:15-33)

Stage 3  (45 minutes)

A. Focus on 'the husband'.

- The longest part of the text is addressed to husbands (vv. 25-32). What are husbands meant to do, and why?
- The fundamental analogy that supports the argument in this whole text is this: the husband-wife relationship is like the Christ-church relationship. But what is actually said about Christ-church relationship?
• How does Christ love / relate to the church, according to this text? (Also see: Eph 5:2)
• Beyond this text, what does Christ do for the church / people? Think of the gospels, for example: do any texts come to mind that are similar to Eph 5:2 and our text?
• Summarise what we can learn from all this.

B. Focus on 'the wife'.

• What are wives meant to do, and why? Consider, for example:
  • What does it mean that the wife is 'to subject' herself (vv. 22-24) in the context of this text? What reasons are given?
  • "... just as Christ is the head of the church": how is Christ the head of the church? How does the analogy to the wife-husband relationship actually function?

C. The whole section of vv. 22-33 may be considered as an extension of the end of v. 21: "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ".

• What can we learn from the relationship between v. 21 and vv. 22-33?

Related to this:

• Does the wife's subjection to the husband mean that she does not love her husband? Why / why not?
• Conversely, does the husband's love of his wife mean that he is not subject to her? Why / why not?

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Bible Study on Ephesians 5:21-33 (in the context of 5:15-33)

Stage 4  (30 minutes)

A. Bearing in mind everything we have discussed so far, please consider this questions:
• Is violence towards the marital partner (or anyone else) justified in Eph 5:15-33? Why / why not?

B. What are you going to do about what you have learned?

Think about this both personally / individually, and collectively. Please do not concentrate exclusively on what others (for example, “the leaders”) should do, but also on what you can do.

Appendix 2

This is the handout on the structure of the text (see Stage 2). The original was designed to fit on a single A4 sheet.

Ephesians 5:15-33

Translation: NRSV (paragraph structure adapted to show the sense units and their relationships to each other). I have made a couple of changes to the NRSV wording (changes in italics) in order to reflect the Greek text better, with the replaced NRSV text in brackets.

Feel free at any point to compare individual text sections with the Bible translations you brought with you.
Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise. Therefore (so) do not be without understanding (foolish), but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit:

19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,
20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
21 being (be) subject to one another out of reverence for Christ:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as you are to the Lord.

22 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives,

25 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word,
26 so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

27 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

28 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it:

just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body.

29 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 30 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

31 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Notes

† “the body of which he is the Saviour” = (Christ is) the Saviour of the body (that is, the church)”

* "mystery": the English word is misleading in the sense that the Greek mysterion refers to an aspect of true reality which can only be understood through divine revelation.

‡ “I am applying it to” = more literally, this translates as “I say (this) with regard to”

Holger Szesnat, 4 December 2014
Appendix 3

At the very end of the Bible study I was asked to comment on the text myself, which I did with reference to this handout, which I had prepared in order to be ready for this eventually. The handout was originally designed to fit on two A4 pages.

Comments: Bible Study on Ephesians 5:21-33

Holger Szesnat, 4 December 2014

The following short notes were written to follow on structured group work on Eph 5:15-32 in the context of gender-based violence. My comments are not meant to be 'the final word' on anything. Perhaps one could think of it as giving me the opportunity to say something, too, now that everyone else has had their say. Of course, that is not the whole story: after all, I have probably influenced you in some way already, simply by structuring the group work, offering questions and focus areas. Nevertheless, a few thoughts on the topic – but only as much as I can fit on two pages.

1. I begin by picking up an area I put last in the Bible Study: does this text justify violence? If we read the text carefully, I have no doubt that the answer has to be 'no'. Eph 5 does not in any way justify violence; indeed, what it encourages or expects is the very opposite of violence. If we look at the whole of Ephesians, that becomes even clearer: the letter states that enmity among humankind has been overcome by or through Christ. Violence has absolutely no place among Christians. Nevertheless, I have heard arguments among Christians (both men and women) along the following lines: Eph 5 (and a few others texts in the Scriptures, such as Gen 3:16) are used to claim a status-based difference between men and women, husbands and wives. Based on that supposedly fixed status hierarchy, it is then claimed that a woman who does not do what her husband tells her to do deserves to be beaten. But whatever we make of the issue of status (more about that later), the claim that 'disobedience', or whatever we may call it, somehow calls for violence has no basis in this text. In fact, there is nothing in the Scriptures I can think of that justifies husbands beating their wives. In the sense that the Scriptures use the terms, neither 'love' nor 'respect' can in any way include violence between men and women, let alone husbands and wives.
2. Nevertheless, Eph 5 (as well as a number of other texts) is often used to justify the foundations of that chain of argument, namely that there is a hierarchy between men and women, or more specifically, husbands and wives. This is a complex question, and the Bible Study I invited you to work through was largely designed to explore this. There are indeed a range of opinions on this matter among Christians. (a) Some people argue that texts like Eph 5 establish some kind of fixed divine order that establishes a hierarchy between men and women (and specifically: husbands and wives): let's call this the 'fixed gender hierarchy' approach. (b) Others suggest that the scriptural texts we are reading were written in a cultural context which already assumed that women were inferior to men: therefore, it is said, the writers of the Scriptures addressed something that may have been appropriate within that context, but this is not a fixed, eternal matter. If society changes (and not all change is negative), such texts become irrelevant. One could call this 'the cultural context approach'.

3. I am not inclined to follow either argument. Let me start with that 'cultural context approach'. While it may be attractive at first, it also bears its own dangers. For example: if we follow the cultural argument, we would also have to follow this line of thinking for any other matters in the Scriptures which happen to be in line with the culture from which it comes. Logically, this would mean we could only take things in the Scriptures as 'relevant' that contradict the cultural environment. I am not convinced that this is a useful approach.

On the other hand, I am not convinced by the 'fixed gender hierarchy' approach either. This is because the study of the Scriptures does not, in the end, convince me that gender hierarchies are ultimately fixed – nor, indeed, any human hierarchies, or any status-based thinking. Obviously, this is a big claim which I cannot fully support in a short paper like this: one would need to write several books to do so properly. Still, I base my claim on a careful reading of the Scriptures, and I would like to offer a few notes on Eph 5 in this respect. It is worth noting here that the letters of the New Testament are essentially propositional: that is, they are largely arguments meant to persuade their readers. At first sight, Eph 5 seems to state clearly how husbands and wives are meant to relate: wives, respect your husbands; and husbands, love your wives (Eph 5:22-33). But once we start to look more closely, I suggest, we will find that this is less clear than what a first reading seems to find:
4. The structure of the argument clearly suggests that vv. 22-33 depend on v. 21 ("being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"), which is itself the last of a series of examples of what it means "to be filled by the Spirit" (v. 18): it is this imperative 'to be filled with the Spirit' that is the main point on which everything else hangs. The writer clearly thinks that mutual subjection of people is called for in a spirit-filled life. That is an idea we can find in many parts of the Scriptures, such as in the gospels (e.g., Mt 20:25-26), and Christ himself is, as in our text in Eph 5, shown to be a role model worth imitating (e.g., Phil 2:5-11).

5. When we turn to what is being said to wives (Eph 5:22-24) and husbands (5:25-32), it would appear that suddenly only wives are supposed to be subject (to their husbands), whereas husbands are meant to love their wives. This is puzzling: what happened to mutual subjection (v. 21)? For both wives and husbands, the reasons given for their relationship rest on the same fundamental analogy: that of the Christ – Church relationship. That however, raises the question of just how Christ and the church are related.

5a. It is useful here to start with the husbands, in part because much more is said about them than about wives. The key, it seems to me, lies in the very first point: "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25), which repeats a point that was made in Eph 5:2. Christ's love for the church (and as other texts indicate, the whole of creation) is characterised by what one could call his self-sacrifice. To illustrate that point, the writer first uses an image that we already see in the prophets (e.g., Ez 16): the people of God are like a bride to God in the sense that God is so in love with his people that God wants them to be radiant in splendour: that is, they radiate holiness. The second argument (separate, but linked) is based on what we might call a 'common sense' approach (5:28-29): we look after our own bodies; we 'tend and care for them'. This point is appropriate because the church is the body of Christ. The logic of the final point (vv. 31-32), which recalls Gen 2:24, is more difficult to understand, though it seems to me that it is designed to explain why Christ (or indeed God) loves people, and why the people of God are the body of Christ. – The outcome of all this is that the way a husband ought to relate to his wife is based on a self-sacrificing love which treats 'the other half' as carefully and lovingly as oneself. This whole line of reasoning in Eph 5:25-32 is in keeping, I would argue,
with the notion of mutual subjection: I subject myself to the other by loving the other.¹

5b. Wives are encouraged to subject themselves to their husbands as the church subjects itself to Christ. This does not make the husband Christ-like (the husband is not the Saviour of the wife; Christ is the Saviour of both!). Rather, the point of the analogy lies in the relationship aspect: the key point is "just as Christ is the head of the church" (5:23). But just how is Christ the head of the church? It is dangerous to jump to our own ideas here as to what this 'headship' is. I propose that it is more appropriate to look at how the text itself characterises how Christ is 'the head': the Scriptures frequently use concepts that seem familiar to us, but then firmly twist their meaning to subvert our assumptions.² It seems to me that the very thing that is said about Christ in respect of his love of the people (Eph 5:2 and 5:25) is crucial here: I subject myself to Christ precisely because of Christ's love.

6. In the end, mutual subjection is a logical impossibility: taken literally, it would create an eternal loop along the lines of "no, you first", -- "but no, you first", and so on, for all eternity. That hardly seems to be the point. Rather, mutual subjection has the effect of undermining the very basis of status-based thinking and action. Our text does not openly attack hierarchical structures in the way that, say, Gal 3:28 does: it is more subtle than that, but just as subversive of our human tendency to think in status terms.

Some literature

Good books are hard to get hold of in Fiji, but some have access to the internet (though much relevant material on the internet is dubious). I did not aim to be representative of all views; nor do I necessarily agree with the arguments offered.


¹ It may be useful here to think of what is said in 1 Cor 7:4 about the sexual aspect of the relationship between husbands and wives: "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." Clearly, the notion of mutual subjection is taken very seriously here.

² The very term 'Saviour' is part of that: the Roman emperor claimed to be the saviour of the world. By calling Jesus 'Saviour', the New Testament not only calls the emperor a liar, but also subverts the violent nature of the emperor's understanding of what a saviour is: Jesus' self-sacrifice is the supreme act of salvation; it is the 'slain lamb' (see Rev) that is victorious.


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Pacific Theological College
Private Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands

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