

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MELANESIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES?

A Study in Ecumenical Organisation

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[In the original printed version of this issue, the endnotes were incorrectly numbered. Endnotes 31a to 36 have now been renumbered 32 to 37 for this online version. –Revising ed.]

“How has one of the country’s most important institutions sunk so low that it has to take money from development projects to keep its own creaky bureaucracy going – a bureaucracy that isn’t even efficient enough to ask for funds for itself?”ⁱ It is a sad day for the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC) when these, and other equally scathing comments, appear in Papua New Guinea’s authoritative weekly newspaper. In this study, I should like to recall the early history of MCC (1), examine the difficulties if encountered in post-independence Papua New Guinea (2), and formulate what I think is its as-yet unrealised potential (3).

1. The Founding of MCC

If the birth of organised ecumenism in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands dates from the formation of MCC in 1965, its conception goes back to a Pacific-wide conference of missions and churches on Western Samoa in 1961, held under the auspices of the International Missionary Council.ⁱⁱ Ever since the Edinburgh Conference of mission organisations in 1910, and the subsequent founding of the International Missionary Council, it became customary in many “foreign mission fields”, as they were then called, to form missionary councils, both to counteract the confusions and divisions arising from the diversity of competing

missionary groups, and to facilitate dealings with colonial administrations and, later, independent governments.ⁱⁱⁱ So it was also in the then Territories of Papua and New Guinea. In both, the stage was reached where the administration and the churches agreed upon “mission zones”, or spheres of influence, to which the various missions voluntarily restricted themselves, though the Roman Catholics refused to be a party to any such agreement.^{iv} It was the administration, ironically, that gave the impetus for closer cooperation: in 1949, the Administrator called a joint conference with the churches and missions, in order to be able to relate to a single Christian body rather than a multitude of competing ones. In 1955, the Lutheran Mission explored the possibility of a missionary council for Eastern New Guinea; in 1959, the Christian Council of Papua and New Guinea was formed to coincide with the regular mission-administration conferences.^v

These relationships were raised above the level of mere pragmatism by the above-mentioned conference of Pacific churches in 1961.^{vi} A continuation committee of this Samoan conference was formed, chaired by the Revd S. A. Tuilovoni of Fiji, with the Revd Vavae Toma of Western Samoa as secretary. There was also a New Guinea Continuation Committee of the Samoa Conference, of which Dr Ian Maddocks of the Papua Medical College in Boroko, Port Moresby, served as secretary. This voluntary committee of interested churchmen (I have not found any records of women members!) was the immediate forerunner of MCC.

The work of the Continuation Committee bore fruit in an inter-church study meeting held at Bumayong Lutheran Boys' Boarding School near Lae in January, 1963. The chairman, the Anglican Bishop David Hand, justly described it to the press as “the first-ever such ecumenical gathering in the Territory”, as the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Papua Ekalesia churches were represented by delegates, who “(w)ith the exception of one in each team . . . were all indigenes”.^{vii} The meeting addressed itself to issues, such as training for the ministry, education, medicine, and political and

economic development; properly theological matters were apparently left in the background.

At a meeting of the Continuation Committee, held at the Koki Anglican Mission, Port Moresby, on October 28, 1964, those present (all expatriates), after having consulted the heads of the five churches represented, constituted themselves as the executive of a Melanesian Council of Churches, pending the calling of a general meeting of the same. In the minutes, it is noted that the existing Christian Council of Papua and New Guinea "is not at present an operative body", and that the "Pacific Council (sic) of Churches" has been established, the implication being that neither body was felt to meet the needs of the churches in Melanesia.

It was, thus, no more than the logical development of these initiatives, when representatives of the same five churches, joined later in the meeting by the Salvation Army, came together at Boroko Baptist church, Port Moresby, on June 23-24, 1965, to form the Melanesian Council of Churches. Invitations were also sent out to a number of the smaller, more-evangelical missions, such as Unevangelised Fields, New Tribes, Swiss Evangelical, South Sea Evangelical, and Church of the Nazarene, but, in the event, only the Salvation Army accepted. Had the overseas sending organisations of these evangelical groups seen fit to allow them to participate, it may have been possible to reduce the religious tensions between them and the MCC member churches, which are still rife throughout Melanesia. However, noting that the proposed MCC constitution provides that the Council "will keep in touch with interdenominational or ecumenical agencies . . . but will not be formally affiliated with such agencies", the minutes of the inaugural general meeting of MCC, at least, go on to state: "In particular, the MCC affirmed its desire to maintain a close fraternal relationship with the Evangelical Alliance" (of the South Pacific Islands, founded in 1964).

The draft constitution opens with the conviction "that co-operative study and action in many areas of our activities will be

beneficial to our common expression of the Christian faith in this land”, which must be a “visible expression” of an “already existing unity”.^{viii} The ecumenical goal of the Council is thus set at a very high theological level. A first test of its ecumenical purpose was already at hand: the founding of MCC coincided with preparations for the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea, and negotiations were under way with its Interim Council on the role of the churches and the place of theology in the new university. The inaugural meeting of MCC called for “a Department of Religious Studies within the Faculty of Arts”, empowered to hold external examinations in theology for students for the ministry, and to be regarded as the forerunner of a Faculty of Theology. Despite correspondence with the Revd James A. Bergquist of the WCC’s Theological Education Fund, an impressive memorandum on the right of theology to take its place among the liberal arts by the Revd Frank Engel of the National Missionary Council of Australia, and strong support from the Revd Davis McCaughey, Master of Ormond College in the University of Melbourne, the authorities remained unmoved.^{ix} The problem of adequate church participation, and a religious studies department appropriate to the rich religious life of Melanesia, remain unsolved to this day.

This was not a very encouraging start to the MCC’s role in Territory affairs, though in other areas, such as communications media, youth work, health, education, and pastoral training, it gradually began to animate and coordinate activities. It received a further infusion of strength, when, meeting at Nobonob, near Madang, on July 10, 1969, it invited the Roman Catholic church to join the Council. This was approved by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in 1970, and Roman Catholic membership was formalised in February, 1971.^x In April of that year, the New Guinea Lutheran Mission – Missouri Synod (now Gutnius Lutheran church, Wabag) also applied for, and was granted, membership. As the Methodist Mission and the Papua Ekalesia had coalesced on January 19, 1968, to form the United church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the MCC now included the seven major churches

of Melanesia, representing roughly three-quarters of the Christians in its geographical area.

It is time now to pause and assess these developments. There can be no doubt of their significance. In a remarkably short time, considering the bitterness of post-war rivalry, and the lateness of the Roman Catholic church's repudiation of proselytism, and acceptance of ecumenism, at the II Vatican Council, the churches in Melanesia had erected a promising structure for ecumenical cooperation. This structure, however, had at least one fatal flaw. In contrast to the Samoan Conference, whose continuation committee for the whole Pacific included a majority of indigenous churchmen (and one woman!), and the Pacific Conference of Churches, to which it gave rise, whose General Secretary was a Fijian woman, Mrs Lorine Tevi, the MCC, in its initial stages, was almost entirely an affair of expatriates. One searches in vain in the minutes of the New Guinea Continuation Committee for evidence of indigenous participation, and during consultations with the Interim Council of UPNG in February, 1966, the MCC's Inter-Church Committee was chided for not including one Papuan or New Guinean, which was admitted as being a "tactical error"!^{xi} In a minute dated March 22, 1963, and entitled "Submissions to University Commission", the two indigenous participants are conspicuously labelled "a Papuan" and "a New Guinean", as if their presence were something quite exceptional.

The problem goes deeper than this. The whole basis for the differences between the competing churches and missions was rooted in the history of Europe, and, in the wake of the ecumenical movement, these were becoming a matter of burning importance to certain expatriate church people. It would be interesting to know whether Melanesian Christians at that time saw them in the same light, but no one seems to have asked them. Again, the churches themselves were set up as faithful models of their European counterparts. It, thus, seemed natural that a "Council of Churches" should provide the framework for their working and growing together – but it was a framework designed to facilitate the

interaction of the church bureaucracies within it, and, through it, with the already burgeoning administrative and educational bureaucracies at national level. “Localisation”, of course, proceeded apace. The first indigenous Anglican Bishop, George Ambo, had represented his church with Bishop Hand, the first chairman of MCC, at the Bumayong study meeting; from 1971, the first indigenous Lutheran Bishop, Zurewe Zurenuoc, of the Evangelical Lutheran church, was an active and interested chairman of MCC; and Fr Kingsley Gegeyo, an Anglican priest, became its first indigenous general secretary. But the substitution of brown faces for white did nothing to change the structure of the Council, and its underlying presuppositions. Although dialogues were initiated between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and the Lutheran and United churches, the former reaching a documented conclusion,^{xii} while the latter was broken off after producing papers on baptism and eucharist; and, despite the insistence of Bishop Zurewe, in particular, that local churches must make every effort to achieve true autonomy, little provision seems to have been made for serious theological work. The “indigenous theologies” that must have been fermenting in many a village community were not drawn upon to suggest alternative forms of liturgical life and church organisation.

The possibilities opened up by MCC of ecumenical contacts at national and international level compensated to a certain extent for these deficiencies, though, in practice, little use seems to have been made of development loan and scholarship schemes offered by the WCC. The two weaknesses of MCC at its inception, the alien bureaucratic structure, and the lack of theological initiative, lie at the root of its subsequent problems, to which we must now turn.

2. The Crisis of MCC

In the 1970s, after it had hit its stride, the MCC began to make its presence felt in the emerging independent nation of Papua New Guinea. In three years as the Council’s agricultural officer, David Williams, helped to launch the now world-famous *Liklik Buk*,^{xiii} and laid the foundations for the adoption of a WCC “Country Programme” for comprehensive development in 1976, known as the

“Long Range Programme”, and embracing rural and urban development, evangelisation, and socio-political awareness projects, while remaining completely autonomous in its allocation of funds from an annual block grant. Significant conferences were organised, some in conjunction with the Evangelical Alliance.^{xiv} As the time of independence drew near, some of those involved in drafting the constitution and setting the stage for political activity in a framework of parliamentary democracy, such as Fr John Momis and Mr Bernard Narakobi, had an active interest in MCC.^{xv} By the end of the 1970s, the MCC secretariat consisted of a general secretary (formerly executive officer, at this time, a very capable United church pastor, the Revd Dick Avi), a social concerns and development secretary, responsible for administering the Long Range Programme with the help of committees on Social Concerns and Development and Finance and Project Screening, an administrative officer, and a clerk/typist. On the departure of Dick Avi in April, 1981, however, things began to unravel quickly, so that by the time I arrived to take up an appointment as ecumenical research officer in mid-April, 1983, the social concerns and development secretary, Mr Moi Eno, was the only staff member remaining, and the work of the Council was all but paralysed. How could such a thing happen to what had seemed a promising ecumenical body?

Though it is not easy to reconstruct the process which led to this sorry state of affairs, as the MCC archives are in almost total disarray (itself a reflection of the state the Council was in), I suggest that it derives fairly directly from the changing role of the churches in independent Papua New Guinea. No longer responsible to the extent that they had been for the educational, medical, and, in some cases, economic infra-structure of whole areas of the country, and thus with much diminished political influence, they became less certain of their public role, and, hence, less definite in their commitment to MCC. In addition, many of the churches were forcing “localisation” in their own ranks, with its attendant problems of ill-prepared personnel failing to cope with the demands of the alien and abstract administrative structures they had inherited. It is thus little wonder that qualified indigenous staff were jealously kept

for the churches' own use, so that the MCC had the greatest difficulty in attracting any staff at all, or even in finding representatives to sit on its executive and committees. In short, each member church became engrossed in its own affairs, which tended to be dominated by administrative concerns. The indigenous leaders, with notable exceptions, such as Bishop Leslie Boseto of the United church, the Catholic Bishop Herman To Paivu, and the Revd Joshua Daimoi, a Baptist minister from Irian Jaya,^{xvi} tended to look on ecumenism as a luxury that could safely be left to a few enthusiasts. Far from its being a source of leadership and inspiration, awareness of the very existence of MCC seemed to have dwindled almost to nothing in the Highlands, and along the New Guinea coast, except perhaps as a political lobby useful for pressing church interests on an increasingly secular government, or as a handy source of extra funding.

One is tempted to ask: if Melanesian Christians had been allowed to be ecumenical in *their* way, would they even have needed an MCC? What ways would they have found to express their common Christianity, if they had not been taught that denominational differences were so important that they needed to organise – yet again! – to overcome them? Under present circumstances, of course, the question is idle. Though we may hope that one day Christianity in Melanesia will find an ecumenical identity of its own, at present, there seems to be no alternative, but to revitalise existing structures.^{xvii}

In conclusion, I would like to examine the ecumenical potential of MCC in the context of the world-wide development of so-called “conciliar” structures.

3. The Potential of MCC

The above analysis of MCC's present distress may seem rather harsh, but we may take comfort from a general observation made about Christian Councils as early as 1972: “Few of them, if any, fully live up to the intentions and potentialities of their constitution. Their weakness, however, is the fault of the churches rather than of

themselves.”^{xviii} In Melanesia, the ecumenical enthusiasm, so evident in the early 1970s, has waned considerably in the early 1980s, but this is partly due to the realisation of just how serious a business ecumenical dialogue is, requiring complete honesty with oneself and others.^{xix} MCC has undoubtedly proved useful in the field of practical cooperation, whether in development, or in liaison with government, but for that very reason, in the words of Lukas Vischer, it is in danger of becoming “a structure alongside the churches” rather than “an instrument of unification”.^{xx} “The less the churches focus their joint work on the central spiritual questions, the more inevitable is that sterile vis-à-vis of councils and churches, which cripples the work of so many councils today.”^{xxi} A WCC Consultation on Christian Council, held in 1971, recommends “that councils pay more attention to worship and to ‘spiritual ecumenism’”, insisting that they should neither “avoid the celebration of the eucharist by a member church within a council programme” nor “hesitate to examine questions of Faith and Order”.^{xxii} As Nikos Nissiotis points out in the same context, “one has to grasp the deeper ecclesiological issues, which are inevitably raised by this very pragmatic basis” on which most councils were founded, because: “No other purpose and activity of local councils should make them lose sight of this, their first and most important service to the ecumenical movement, namely, to realise the fellowship of the church locally.”^{xxiii}

Just as there are numerous examples of truly ecumenical cooperation at national and regional level within the “space for dialogue” created by MCC,^{xxiv} it is equally beyond doubt that, in many cases, excellent and profoundly ecumenical relationships exist between individual pastors and congregations of different denominations at village level in Melanesia. In between these two extremities, however, at the level of parish and diocese or district, and circuit, ecumenical organisation is desultory at best.^{xxv} Yet, if the churches are not animated to go beyond piecemeal pragmatic cooperation at this intermediate level, and engage in serious dialogue, the channel of communication linking church leaders and church members across denominational lines is broken. The Vatican

Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with characteristic caution, insists: “What really matters is not the creation of new structures, but the collaboration of Christians in prayer, reflection, and action, based on common baptism, and on a faith, which, on many essential points, is also common”;^{xxvi} yet “base” groups, exploring new ecumenical territory, must remain in touch with “the more organised or formal expressions and structures of the ecumenical movement.”^{xxvii} There is a tendency here to spiritualise ecumenical innovation, and bind it to ecclesiastical authority,^{xxviii} but experience in Melanesia has already shown that, unless there is freedom – and motivation! – to create new ecumenical structures at the intermediate level, linking village communities to national church bodies, well-meant initiatives from either end will never reach the other.

The theological principle underlying these developments has, in recent years, been called “conciliarity” (not to be confused with mediaeval “conciliarism”, which tried to set the authority of general councils alongside, and even against, that of the pope). The Second Vatican Council served to reawaken a dormant tradition of intermediate conciliar structures in the Roman Catholic church, which, since the Reformation, had been oriented ever more exclusively to the papacy as the source of all authority, and the solution to all problems. The Council insisted that the church, in the first place, is the whole people of God, and is realised in its fullness in each local eucharistic community. The bond of communion (*koinōnia*) is expressed in the “collegiality”, or mutual support and collaboration of the bishops, as the leaders of these communities, among whom the pope retains his traditional pre-eminence. This new emphasis led to the creation of new intermediate structures, such as parish councils, senates, or priests, national episcopal conferences, and regional and general synods of bishops.

At its General Assembly in Uppsala (1968), the WCC took up the theme of “catholicity”, seeing in it the key to the working of the Holy Spirit in the church to make it “the sign of the coming unity of mankind” (I, p. 20; cf. *Lumen gentium*, p. 1: “By her relationship

with Christ, the church is a kind of sacrament or sign of ultimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind”). The Assembly urged Christians to “make visible the bonds which unite (them) in universal fellowship” (I, p. 18), and it unfolded a vision of the ecumenical movement, which was to have considerable influence:

The ecumenical movement helps to enlarge this experience of universality, and its regional councils, and its World Council, may be regarded as a transitional opportunity for eventually actualising a truly universal, ecumenical, conciliar form of common life and witness. The members of the World Council of Churches, committed to each other, should work for the time, when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians, and lead the way into the future. (I, p. 19)

In other words, the practical goal of the ecumenical movement is to create the conditions under which a truly “ecumenical” council in something like the traditional sense – and that means: with eucharistic communion as the source and guarantee of its unity – could take place. In order for this to happen, a “conciliar” way of life would have to develop at all levels in all churches. Another way of putting this is to say that the consensus, which lays the foundation for unity in all its dimensions – in common action, in the deepest meaning of our beliefs, in the truth of our confessional statements – would have to be articulated and institutionalised at all intermediate levels, so that the necessary communication could flow back and forth between the local churches and the church universal: *communicatio e communione*.^{xxix} The WCC’s Commission of Faith and Order has now embarked on a study project entitled “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today”. In the minutes of preparatory meetings for this project, we read: “The purpose of the whole study project would be to prepare for a kind of ‘preliminary plateau’ of common confessing that would be necessary and sufficient to convene a universal ecumenical council” (Standing Commission, Crete, 1984, quoting Annecy, [Publication unable to be identified], 1981).

Many aspects of this bold programme, of course, are highly controversial between WCC-oriented “ecumenicals” and the “evangelicals” organised to confront them in the world-wide Evangelical Alliance. This is true, in particular, of the emphasis on the eucharist as the source and seal of unity, and of the very idea of efforts towards re-expressing the apostolic faith, as opposed to the plain meaning of scripture. Perhaps the greatest stumbling block, however, is the World Council’s insistence on the “unity of humankind” as an integral part of the ecumenical goal, one of several positions it has in common with contemporary Roman Catholic theology. These divisions run very deep, much deeper than has yet been realised by the a-theological, pragmatic, “polite ecumenism”, hitherto practised in Melanesia. There is thus all the more reason for a strong MCC to enter into serious dialogue with the churches of the Evangelical Alliance and – if feasible – the National Council of Pentecostal Churches (founded in 1979).

Placed in this broader context, the present troubles of MCC seem insignificant, indeed, compared with the process in which the Council is meant to be participating. Emergency repairs to the organisational structure are the least that can be expected; incomparably more important is the growth of the communion and consensus, which that structure is to facilitate and express in a transitional way. “The ecclesial reality is not to be sought in the Christian Councils but in the communion among the churches, in their encounter with one another and with the world. As structures, Christian Councils have only *an instrumental ecclesiological significance* in the promotion of this communion, in bringing it to birth and helping it to grow.”^{xxx} Is this even remotely true of MCC at present? Can it, by any stretch of the imagination, be called “the thorn in the flesh of the churches . . . a constant reminder to the churches of the anomalous situation in which they live”? Is its “concern with the question of unity . . . a continuing matter of priority”?^{xxxi} If not, then all the other activities of the Council – the social programmes, the political interventions, the business meetings, workshops, and conferences – remain nothing more than pale imitations of what professionals in all these fields are already doing.

The MCC needs to give serious thought to the integration of its various roles, because its “two functions – service and unity – go hand in hand”,^{xxxii} though cooperation in service can pave the way for greater unity. The MCC is seldom able to explain the theological basis on which it takes its stands; but is this any wonder, when its members are not engaged in an ongoing theological dialogue? One result of this failure is that *The Times* could editorialise: “Typically disturbing is the MCC’s growing involvement with the Indonesian Council of Churches – a council that is forced to echo government policies.”

It would be sad, indeed, if the MCC succumbed to that “non-committal superficiality” which Lukas Vischer sees as a “danger”, which is “increasing today in the ecumenical movement”.^{xxxiii} Yet, we must not forget that at the root of such superficiality may well be the inappropriateness of MCC as a Melanesian expression of Christian unity. Not only was it imposed on Melanesians by churchmen, whose missionary forebears had imposed their alien confessional traditions on them, incapable as they then were of simply collaborating in confronting Melanesians with the one gospel;^{xxxiv} but many elements of the unity the Council envisages – or would envisage, if it were seriously concerned with defining it – are unacceptable to fellow-Christians of the more-recently-arrived evangelically- or charismatically-oriented groups. These include: the recognition of infant baptism, for the widespread practice of re-baptising adult converts destroys the basis for ecumenical dialogue before it has even begun; the growing appreciation of the frequent celebration of the eucharist in the framework of a liturgical spirituality throughout the ecumenical movement; and the vexed questions surrounding office and ministry in the church.^{xxxv} Dialogue on these problems, both among themselves, and with evangelicals, would not only be most fruitful for the MCC member churches, but would strengthen their resolve to provide spiritual and moral leadership in meeting the challenges now confronting Melanesian nations from within and without.^{xxxvi}

If these issues are not resolved, MCC may be condemned to remain an ecumenical alibi, a front for gaining access to international funding, “a kind of excuse for the local church leaders to do nothing more because ‘ecumenism is taken care of by the Council’ ”.^{xxxvii} The conviction is growing on me that *MCC is not ecumenical enough, because it is not Melanesian enough*. This may seem to fly in the face of the tendency to blame the localised secretariat staff for failing to cope with the routine business of the Council, but these difficulties are, in fact, the least of our worries. If the member churches, in their worship and theology, their ways of seeking consensus and making decisions, and their engagement with the problems of society and nation, were truly indigenous, *so would their Council be*. Again and again, the onus falls, not on MCC, as such, much less on its secretariat staff, but on the churches themselves to grow together in Christian unity by *being* churches in Melanesia. The MCC, as a “conciliar” rather than a properly “ecclesial” body, is, by its nature, provisional and transitory; but, in the present state of things, its task is by no means completed.

The Venice consultation of the WCC/RCC Joint Working Group on councils of churches in the ecumenical movement (1982) recognised “that councils in many places need to be supported in their efforts to achieve the visible unity of the church”. Councils, it asserted, are “servants of the ecumenical movement in its search for the visible unity of Christ’s church”, “structures of *koinōnia*”, with which “the churches . . . have to provide themselves”. Once the pre-ecumenical stage of “competition” and mere “coexistence” has been overcome, councils can enable the churches to enter into “cooperation”, and even go beyond this, to the stage of mutual “commitment”. “At this point, . . . they enter into a general, lasting, and deliberately open-ended agreement, under God, to do much of what they do as if they were limbs of the same body.” It is questionable whether MCC has yet reached this point, whereas its counterpart in Indonesia has crossed the threshold of the next stage, “communion”, renaming itself the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (though without the participation of the Roman Catholic church).

One paragraph of the Venice consultation is particularly apposite to the present predicament of MCC: “An indispensable element of ecumenical commitment by the member churches must be the provision of adequate resources to enable the council to carry out its work. . . . It is unhealthy, however, for this outside financial support to continue indefinitely, with the member churches taking little responsibility for financial support of the council structure.” The seven member churches of MCC have not succeeded in making the council truly *theirs*, their preferred instrument for working towards greater commitment, let alone communion. From this disappointing, but irrefutable fact, all the council’s present problems flow. Churches, which are, themselves, dependent on overseas aid, participating in a national economy, which is similarly dependent, cannot expect to be ecumenically independent. Until this dilemma is resolved, the MCC will continue to be a pale shadow of its former self.

NOTES

ⁱ “The Times Opinion”, *The Times of Papua New Guinea*, January 27, 1985; see also the front page story, “Koroma’s Corner”, and an interview with the present writer (p. 3) in the same issue.

ⁱⁱ At the New Delhi Assembly of WCC in 1961, the IMC was incorporated into the Council, and is now known as the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The Edinburgh Conference marked the historical beginning of the modern ecumenical movement.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a survey of this process in Africa, see N. J. Maro (former general secretary of the Christian Council of Tanzania), “National Christian Councils as Instruments of Mission and Renewal”, in *One in Christ* 8 (1972), pp. 167-174, esp. pp. 167-168.

^{iv} Both German and British colonial authorities tried to designate mission areas according to denominations. William Macgregor, Governor of Papua, persuaded the Protestants to acquiesce in this as early as 1880, though the Catholics successfully resisted him. The German administration drew a line separating Catholic and Methodist missions on the Gazelle Peninsular in 1890, which the Catholic Bishop Louis Couppé broke through after a long struggle in 1897, and the Rhenish Mission was directed to start work near Madang, while the Catholic Divine Word Mission was diverted from Astrolabe Bay further north-west to Aitape and the Sepik in 1896, though it eventually established itself at Alexishafen, just north of Madang. The line of demarcation even took the form of a fence separating Lutherans from Catholics on the island of Riwo, between Alexishafen and Madang! See Brian Schwarz, “The

Ecumenical Setting”, in *Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea: the First 100 Years 1886-1986*, Herwig Wagner, and Hermann Reiner, eds, (forthcoming); James Knight, “A New Era?: Catholics in the Ecumenical Movement of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands”, in *Catalyst* 12-4 (1982), pp. 282-296, esp. p. 283; Dick Avi, “Ecumenism and the Melanesian Council of Churches”, in *Catalyst* 10-3 (1980), pp. 185-194, esp. p. 186; Reiner Jaspers, “A Brief History of the Catholic church in Papua New Guinea”, in *Papers Prepared for the Visit of Pope John Paul II to Papua New Guinea, May 7-10, 1984*, pp. 1-6, esp. p. 4; and “Colonialism and Catholic Mission Activity on New Britain between 1890 and 1899: The Problem of the Mission Districts”, in *Papers Prepared for the Visit of Pope John Paul II to Papua New Guinea, May 7-10, 1984*, pp. 48-59.

^v Cf. Joseph A. Knoebel, “Der Aufbruch der ökumenischen Bewegung”, in *Heisses Land Niugini*, Rolf Italiaander, ed., Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1974, pp. 168-181, esp. pp. 169-172; and Schwarz, “The Ecumenical Setting”. The Roman Catholics did not become members of the Christian Council in 1959, though the Seventh-day Adventists did. In the 1930s, according to Schwarz, the SDAs were actively encouraged by the administration (as were the Anglicans, who declined) to move into the Highlands and counteract Lutheran (i.e., German) influence. After the war, Lutheran-Catholic rivalry intensified into a literal race for territory and converts, absurdly reminiscent of the gold rush of former years.

^{vi} Cf. Lorine Jevi, “The Pacific Conference of Churches”, in *Religious Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, E. Afeaki, R. Crocombe, and J. McClaren, eds, Suva Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, Univ. of the South Pacific, 1983, pp. 148-156, esp. p. 149.

^{vii} *South Pacific Post*, Port Moresby PNG, January 15, 1963; see also *New Guinea Times Courier*, Lae PNG, January 16, 1983. Bishop Hand’s reference to an “All-Pacific Conference of Churches and Missions” held “last year” (my emphasis) I assume to mean the 1961 Samoa Conference; this is a common slip of the tongue in the opening days of the New Year.

^{viii} For the text of the Preamble and Basis, as adopted in 1974, and revised in 1979, and the functions of MCC, as contained in the present constitutions, see Avi, “Ecumenism and the Melanesian Council of Churches”, pp. 189-190.

^{ix} The idea of establishing “Residential Colleges on an Ecumenical Basis” was also mooted, “in the hope that the Roman Catholic church might agree to unite also in this matter”, and provision was made for directing “priority spending” towards a “combined Religious Centre”. Alas, the reality, both financial and ideological, was otherwise! The whole vexed question of religious studies at UPNG deserves separate study, which I hope to give it at a later date. From about 1965 on, an Inter-church Committee for Religious Studies at UPNG, thereafter known as the Inter-church Committee for Liaison with the University, debated the MCC proposals and made representations to the university, but without practical effect. At one stage it envisaged a “Christian Institute” (May 6, 1967), though it withdrew the plan for residential colleges (February 5, 1966). Today, the whole question of the

relationship between confessional theologies and the study of local and world religions (e.g., Islam!) would have to be faced anew.

^x The role of the gifted Divine Word missionary, Fr Pat Murphy SVD, in bringing about this remarkable step would repay further study (according to Knight, "A New Era?", p. 285, "at the time there were only two instances of the Catholic church having become a member of a local or national council of churches", though a document compiled for the WCC in 1971 notes considerably more by then, cf. *One in Christ* 8 (1972), pp. 200-215). Fr Murphy's papers have now been recovered and deposited in the office of the Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference's Commission for Ecumenism, CBC Haus, Gordons, Port Moresby PNG.

^{xi} This expression is as indicative of the prevailing mentality as is the omission itself. A letter from Port Moresby ecumenical circles in the early 1960s advises an intending visitor from Australia that there would only be one or two Papuans there it would be worth his while talking to.

^{xii} *Report: The Work of the Joint Commission of the Anglican and Catholic churches in Papua New Guinea, 1970-1973*, Patrick Murphy SVD, Secretary, ed., July 31, 1974 (mimeograph).

^{xiii} *Liklik Buk: A Rural Development Handbook Catalogue for Papua New Guinea*, Lae PNG: Liklik Buk Information Centre, 1977, now also available in an expanded Pidgin translation by Ulrich Bergmann, *Save na mekim: buk bilong kain kain wok na kain kain samting bilong helpim sindaun bilong yumi*, (Lae PNG: Liklik Buk Information Centre, 1982).

^{xiv} E.g., the seminar on Religion and Development, jointly sponsored by MCC and the Melanesian Institute, 1978; and three workshops on Partnership in Mission and Development held with the cooperation of the Evangelical Alliance, in connection with the 1980 Melbourne Conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

^{xv} Though he did see a constructive role for MCC, albeit somewhat larger than the one it was already playing, Narokobi could be quite scathing on the divisive influence of the churches in Melanesia, see his *The Melanesian Way*, Henry Olela, ed., Port Moresby PNG: Institute of PNG Studies, 1980, pp. 153ff.; and his essay "Towards a Melanesian Church", in *Voices of Independence: New Black Writing from Papua New Guinea*, Ulli Beier, ed., St Lucia Qld: University of Qld Press, 1980, pp. 230-235.

^{xvi} Cf. Leslie Boseto, *I Have a Strong Belief: The Reverend Leslie Boseto's own story of his Eight Years as the First Melanesian Moderator of the United Church in Papua New Guinea*, Glen Bays, ed., Rabaul PNG: Unichurch Books; 1983, pp. 50-51, 62, 94, 172. On Herman To Paivu, see Knight, "A New Era?", p. 286. Joshua Daimoi has been chairman of both MCC and the Evangelical Alliance.

^{xvii} At its annual general meeting in February, 1984, the MCC formed a Review Committee, whose terms of reference called for a more effective administrative structure for the MCC secretariat. On October 26-29, 1984, a consultation of development experts from the member churches was held in Mt Hagen. It made far-

reaching proposals on the future of the Long Range Programme, which should concentrate its resources on a nation-wide Development Awareness Campaign, and on the decentralisation of MCC itself to allow wider participation by competent ecumenists from the different regions. In the course of 1984, I was able to call into being a committee on Theology and Melanesian Life (unbeknown to me, when I proposed this at the general meeting, the then general secretary, Revd Timo Ani, had circularised heads of churches and members of the executive on November 15, 1982, about the need for a "Faith and Order Committee at the National Level", with the specific purpose of responding to the WCC's Lima Document on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry). The Australian Council of Churches sponsored a retired accountant for two months to subject the finances of MCC to a much-needed thorough review. It remains to be seen whether these measures will have the desired effect.

^{xviii} Victor Hayward, "Editorial 1", *One in Christ* 8 (1972), p. 127, introducing a special issue on Christian Councils.

^{xix} Knight, "A New Era?", pp. 282-283, asserts this of Roman Catholics, but I believe it applies to others as well, particularly the Evangelical Lutheran church; see Schwarz, "The Ecumenical Setting", and my companion study in the ELC-PNG centenary volume, *The Autonomous Church in Independent Papua New Guinea* (forthcoming).

^{xx} Lukas Vischer, "Christian Councils: Instruments of Ecclesial Communion", in *One in Christ* 8 (1972), pp. 132-147; 137.

^{xxi} Vischer "Christian Councils", p. 137.

^{xxii} "Consultation Report", par. 11-12, in *One in Christ* 8 (1972), pp. 190-191.

^{xxiii} Nikos Nissiotis, "Christian Councils and the Unity of the Local Church", in *One in Christ* 8 (1972), pp. 158-166; 166, 164.

^{xxiv} Apart from the usual cooperative bodies, such as the Churches' Medical Council and the Churches' Council for Media Coordination, the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (founded April, 1969) and the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service (founded in 1970, with ecumenical participation since 1974) enabled ecumenical dialogue to be carried out in theological education and missiological research.

^{xxv} Once again, James Knight's perceptive comments on the situation in the Catholic church can be applied to others. He points out that local Christian councils do not function well in rural areas (like most other Western institutions!), and, in the towns, they are often overwhelmed by the numerous evangelical missions and sects, cf. "A New Era?", pp. 286-288. The latter seems to be the case in Lae, whereas, in Goroka, the Eastern Highlands Christian Council is restricted to the "mainline" churches, and has trouble cooperating with the evangelicals. And yet, Lukas Vischer insists: "To be regarded as a fellowship of yet-divided churches, a Christian council must include, as far as possible, all churches and Christians, who are engaged in the ecumenical movement in a specific area", "Christian Councils", p.

135, though, of course, to the more fundamentalist bodies, the ecumenical movement is a harbinger of the Antichrist.

^{xxvi} Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (Secretariat ad Christianorum Unitatem Fovendam), *Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National, and Local Levels*, Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1975, p. 27. This document was circulated to the National Councils of Churches by the General Secretariat of WCC in August, 1975.

^{xxvii} Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Collaboration*, p. 29.

^{xxviii} I give further examples of this aspect of the document in my essay, "Sprache de Einheit: Sprache der Zwietracht: Der Rassismus als Testfall ökumenischer Kommunikation", in *Ökumenischer Theologie: Ein Arbeitsbuch*, Peter Lengsfeld, ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980, p. 259.

^{xxix} For further development of these ideas, with references to the wider literature, cf. J. D. May, "Vorbereitende Überlegungen zu einer Konsens Theorie de Konziliarität", in *Una Sancta* 32 (1977), pp. 94-104; "Consensus in Religion: An Essay in Fundamental Ecumenics", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (1980), pp. 407-431; J. D. May, and H. G. Stobbe, "Übereinstimmung und Handlungsfähigkeit: Zue Grundlage ökumenischer Konsensbildung und Wahrheitsfindung", in *Ökumenischer Theologie: Ein Arbeitsbuch*, Peter Lengsfeld, ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980, pp. 301-337.

^{xxx} Vischer, "Christian Councils", p. 140.

^{xxxi} *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 141.

^{xxxii} "Consultation on the Significance and Contribution of Councils of Churches in the Ecumenical Movement", Venice, 1982 (mimeo).

^{xxxiii} Vischer, "Christian Councils", p. 142; cf. Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Collaboration*, p. 28: "It is not enough that the church simply have delegates in a council or other ecumenical structure; unless they are taken seriously by the Catholic authorities, the Catholic participation will remain purely superficial".

^{xxxiv} Those who may be inclined to think that this – the missionary method of Paul! (1 Cor 1:17) – is no more than an unrealistic pipe-dream, might like to consult the experiences of missionaries, who have tried it with success, such as the Lutheran pioneer of the Huon Peninsula in New Guinea, Christian Keysser, *A People Reborn* (English translation of *Eine Papuagemeinde*), Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1980), or the Catholic missionary to the Masai of Tanzania, Vincent H. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 2nd edn, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1982.

^{xxxv} A unique starting point for dialogue in these matters has now been provided by the so-called "Lima Document", *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1982, to which the MCC member churches should by now be responding; see also William H. Lazareth, *Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: A Study Guide*, Faith and Order Paper No. 114, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1983; *Towards Visible Unity: Commission on Faith and Order, Lima 1982, vol 1: Minutes and Addresses; vol 2: Study Papers*

and Reports, Faith and Order Papers Nos. 112 and 113, Michael Kinnamon, ed., Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1982; *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 116, Max Thurian, ed., Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1983; *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, Faith and Order Paper No. 117, Max Thurian, and Geoffrey Wainwright, eds, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1983; Günther Gassman, "Lima – Vancouver – und danach: Die Rolle von Glauben und Kirchenverfassung", in *Ökumenische Rundschau* 32 (1983), pp. 259-291; " 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry' and its Reception in U.S. Churches", in Jeffery Gros, ed., *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21-1 (1984).

^{xxxvi} Noting the reasons why the churches in Melanesia have become engrossed in their own administrations, *The Times*, January 27, 1985, editorialised: "In the face of these and other problems, most church leaders have opted out of a direct involvement in the MCC. So now, instead of speaking with their collective voice, decided after healthy debate, it tends to speak, when occasionally it does, only with the small voice of its own bureaucracy."

^{xxxvii} Basil Meeking, "Editorial 2", *One in Christ* 8 (1972), p. 130.