

Editorial: Spiritual Formation

The papers in this edition were given at a Melanesian Association of Theological Schools workshop on Spiritual Formation, held in May 1989. Christians from a wide variety of traditions were present. Some Christian traditions emphasise that each person needs to be free to respond to the Holy Spirit of God in their own way. Other traditions emphasise that the community provides each person with forms by which they may better express their response to the Holy Spirit. Both emphases need each other. Without forms, experiences become disconnected, and each individual is isolated from the community, and fragmented within themselves, trapped by particular incidents, which come to have a distorting influence on their lives. On the other hand, the forms handed on by the tradition of the community must be interpreted in a way that does not cramp the person using them, but enables them to cope more fully with the situation, and to integrate it into their own lives, and the life of the community. So, spiritual formation is about integration of the personality. Yet, true integration, true wholeness, can only be the work of God, who is Lord of all, and so, alone, can bring all things together. The Father has revealed His plan to bring all things together in His Son, and He is bringing the plan into effect by the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, spiritual formation is based on the proclamation of the gospel in community.

The gospel is proclaimed by preaching the word, and celebrating the sacraments. It is in the different ways in which they hand on the tradition of word and sacraments that the various Christian denominations diverge. The more “catholic” denominations, such as the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans, would stress the form given to the expression of word and sacrament by the community. The more “Protestant” denominations would stress the need for freedom of conscience of the individual, to respond directly to word and sacrament. At the workshop, “catholic” and “Protestant” had the chance to learn from each other, and to recognise their common base in the gospel.

The workshop began with a paper by Bishop Paul Richardson, on the use by Anglicans of the forms of daily office, frequent communion,

and personal meditation. The paper will be printed in full in a future issue. A brief personal impression is given here to maintain the balance of the articles from the workshop. In his paper, Bishop Paul referred to a recent book on the daily office by George Guiver, *Company of Voices*. George Guiver suggests that, at its simplest, the daily office grew, not out of a specific set of customs, but from the teaching and example of Jesus, that we should be constant in prayer. It would, therefore, have its counterpart in the more “Protestant” practice of regular prayer meetings, just as personal meditation has its counterpart in the “quiet time”. Jewish customs influenced the daily office, but they did not set a fixed law of behaviour. The Psalms of the Old Testament provided the bulk of the content of the office, since they seem to have something to say about every aspect of God’s relationship with men. The daily office does not consist in the repetition of set words within the cramped conditions of a church pew. It has included the use of dramatic symbolic actions, such as the lighting of lamps, and moving in procession. It allows for variety in the use of music, and various forms of prayer. It has been adapted to suit a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. Bishop Paul spoke, with approval, of George Guiver’s recommendation of flexibility in the use of the office.

Bishop Paul provided complementary poles, which he said needed to be kept in balance in the use of traditional forms of spiritual discipline. In the first place, stability needed to be balanced with readiness for change, rootedness with pilgrimage. In the second place, detached reflection should be balanced between the local and universal. Then there should be balanced with social involvement. Thirdly, there should be between the local and universal. Then there should be a balance between the priestly and the lay. It was added, that, in a theological college, there needed to be a balance between the academic and rational, and the practical and intuitive. Bishop Paul spoke of how the daily office gathered life into a connected whole, and provided order to experience. He spoke of it as something objective, which did not merely cater for subjective needs, but was done, regardless of how a person felt, as an offering to God. It may be asked whether Bishop Paul over-stressed the objective nature of the office, as if a particular form had a definitive status, which only needed the use of discretion to adjust it to human circumstance. At least one Melanesian Anglican hinted at the possibility

of relating the office to local culture, to prevent the formation of stiff Anglicans.

The other papers from the conference are printed here. Joel Ingebritson spoke of how society formed people, and people formed society. By understanding better what society is doing, and what we can do about it, we can gain more responsibility for our own spiritual formation, as well as that of others. William Liebert spoke movingly of the need for adequate spiritual formation, to cope with the pressures of a modern Papua New Guinea society. Joshua Daimoi gave a vivid description of traditional, preChristian spiritual formation, in a way that raised, sharply, the question of the relation of gospel to culture. He stressed the need for a spiritual formation that would deal with every area of life, from the formal to the informal.

Also in this issue, we include a paper given at the workshop by Sr Noela Leamy, on her work to implement the proposal, discussed in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 3-2, that there should be a Department of Theology at UPNG.

Fr Theo Aerts provides us with a biblical study, showing that we cannot have peace without justice, and Meg Maclean reflects on stories told to her by Papua New Guinea Anglican Christians.