

LITERACY AND ESTABLISHING CHURCHES IN MELANESIA

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Introduction: Brethren Missionaries in PNG

Brethren missionaries first began working in Papua New Guinea (PNG)¹ in 1951, under the name of “Christian Missions in Many Lands” (CMML).² Over the next few years, more CMML missionaries came, mainly from New Zealand. The 1950s were characterised by pioneering missionary work: language learning, making initial contact with groups of people, opening up new stations, building houses and airstrips, trekking around villages, giving regular systematic Bible teaching to build a foundation for understanding the Christian gospel, starting medical and literacy work, and English education.³ By the beginning of 1960, eight mission stations had been opened up in Sandaun Province,⁴ with a ninth in the process of being opened.⁵

¹ Until Independence in 1975, the northern part of the country was known as New Guinea, the whole country was known as The Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG).

² They were known as CMML until the early 1990s, when they came under the Christian Brethren Churches (CBC). From that time they have been known as CBC missionaries, or CBC Missionary Association (CBCMA).

³ A report of four decades of Brethren missionary work in PNG was given at the reunion at Totara Springs, NZ, on October 26-28, 1990. See Les Marsh’s report, “Consider the Past: Prepare for the Future”, in *Treasury* (December 1990), pp. 248-251.

⁴ This was known by the name “West Sepik District” at that time.

⁵ Dennis Thorp, and Barbara Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea 1951-1995: How did it all happen?*, Auckland NZ: Dennis & Barbara Thorp, 1966, p. 67.

During the 1960s, the CMML work continued to grow. More missionaries came from overseas. More stations were opened up, this time in the Highlands. While some pioneering work was still going on, large number of conversions and baptisms were taking place, with infant churches being formed. The work was mushrooming. A major concern of the missionaries in the 1960s was to establish vibrant indigenous churches, which had mature spiritual leaders, and which would be able to edify themselves from the scriptures.⁶

The area, in which the CMML missionaries worked, was a rural society, where people were either semi-nomadic or subsistence farmers. They were part of an oral society, and had no need for reading and writing. And so they were non-literate. One of the ways, in which the missionaries prepared to establish the church, was through teaching literacy.

Before arriving in PNG, the majority of CMML missionaries, between 1952 and 1963, had undertaken a three months' linguistics course, run by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)⁷ in Melbourne, Australia.⁸ While SIL provided linguistics training for the missionaries, a major part of the syllabus was training in literacy methods. Their commitment to Bible translation was matched by a commitment to literacy. Consequently, CMML missionaries arrived in PNG with the expectation that literacy would be an integral part of their ministry.

⁶ Kay W. Liddle, "The Kinds of Churches Needed in New Guinea", in *God at Work in New Guinea*, Kay W. Liddle, John M. Hitchen, Lewis Larking, eds, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, [1969], pp. 38-48.

⁷ The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) could probably be described as the "professional face" of Wycliffe Bible Translators working overseas. It is an organisation, which works in countries by invitation, making scientific surveys, reducing languages to writing, producing grammars, primers, and other basic educational tools, as well as translating scriptures. SIL also trains linguists in USA, Britain, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand, and gives intensive linguistic training to many missionaries serving worldwide. See J. Herbert Kane, "Wycliffe Bible Translators", in *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission*, Stephen Neill, Gerald H. Anderson, John Goodwin, eds, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1971, pp. 667-668.

⁸ Les A. Marsh, *In His Name: A Record of Assembly Missionary Outreach from New Zealand*, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, 1974, pp. 308-342.

The missionaries, themselves, taught literacy classes. Nationals, who had learned to read, were then encouraged to teach others to read. The missionaries trained national men to become literacy teachers, and set up literacy schools. Teaching literacy became an early priority in the work in each mission station area. Literacy was also closely associated with their Bible teaching programmes. The two activities often occurred side by side. There were “literacy Bible-schools” and “Bible literacy-schools”. Literacy was also a pre-requisite for acceptance into the central Bible school, established in 1967, for training Christian leaders, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Non-literate people did not qualify for entry into the school.

Since literacy had such a high profile in the CMML work in the 1960s, this paper will look at some of the strategies they used. It will investigate why they thought literacy was so important, and evaluate it as a strategy for establishing indigenous churches.

1. CMML’s Involvement in Literacy

A. Literacy and Bible Teaching

CMML missionaries believed that regular, systematic Bible teaching was important for providing a knowledge of God, from which faith could develop; for teaching new Christians the basics of the Christian faith prior to baptism; for the newly-formed churches, so that they could grow in the knowledge of God, and in the Christian life; for the leaders, so that they could learn what Christian leadership in the church was all about. Bible schools were one way of providing this systematic teaching. When a full-time Bible school, for the training of church workers, was first mooted, the missionaries felt that short-term Bible schools in each area would be of greater initial benefit.⁹ However, there were two major roadblocks for a Bible-teaching programme to be carried out effectively. One of these was the lack of vernacular scriptures. The other was widespread illiteracy.¹⁰

CMML missionaries recognised these two roadblocks, and took active steps to overcome them. In an effort to provide scriptures, some of them began reducing vernacular languages to writing. Others translated,

⁹ CMML Committee minutes, July 1959, p. 6; CMML Conference minutes, July 1960, p. 5.

¹⁰ Liddle, “Kinds of Churches Needed in New Guinea”, p. 44.

and duplicated, selected portions of scripture, and Bible stories in Pidgin.¹¹ At the same time, they began producing primers, and teaching literacy. As we examine their involvement in literacy, two characteristics become evident. Firstly, literacy was rarely an end within itself, but a means to an end: for evangelism, for nurturing new Christians, for building up the leadership, and training for ministry in the church. And secondly, it pervaded every level of the Bible-teaching programme.

In earlier years, literacy was used as an evangelistic tool. Regular literacy classes gave opportunity for regular pre-evangelistic Bible instruction, through which it was hoped many would come to faith. Owen McKirdy ran a school at Nuku in 1961. His intention was that village representatives, who came to his school could be taught the gospel, and be sent back to evangelise their own people.¹² Neville Pethybridge used his literacy class at Yebil to disciple men, over a period of two years. He took in men from villages further afield to live on the station. His aim was to teach them to read Pidgin, and also to teach them God's Word daily. He reported that many of them had trusted the Lord, and that they were going back to teach their own people.¹³

As more people turned to the Lord, and infant churches were formed, literacy took on a new role of helping to establish new Christians in their faith. In the mid-1960s when large numbers of people in the Highlands responded to the Christian message, Kay Liddle stressed the need for adequate Bible teaching, and for literacy programmes to implement it.¹⁴

Inherent in this emphasis on literacy is the belief that every Christian should be able to read the scriptures for themselves and have personal devotions. Dennis Thorp came to PNG from a Navigator background, and believed that being able to read the scriptures was essential, if Christians

¹¹ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 27.

¹² Owen McKirdy, *Treasury* (February 1961), p. 54, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹³ Neville Pethybridge, *Treasury* (January 1962), p. 18, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹⁴ Liddle, Kay W., *Treasury* (September 1966), p. 17, [Details of title of article are unknown]; *Treasury* (October 1970), p. 306, [Details of title of article are unknown].

were to pass on their faith effectively to their own people.¹⁵ Alan Nicholson commented about a literacy class in Duna, at Kelabo, in 1966, “It is a thrill to hear adults reading. My prayer is that these people will read the scriptures for themselves.”¹⁶ A similar comment was made by Rosalie Smith, from Auwi, some years later, when she wrote: “What advice would you give a new Christian? That he read the Bible for himself.” She then went on to talk about the need at Auwi to teach the Christians to read their own Duna language.¹⁷ Kay Liddle, in writing about the kind of churches needed in PNG, said, “We need churches, which can edify themselves from the scriptures. This applies to the church, as a corporate body, as well as to the individual believer’s personal devotional life.”¹⁸

Literacy was considered essential for developing leadership. Bob Dobbie, in prioritising his work at Pori, among the Huli people, listed, as a high priority, the teaching of literacy to elders, so that they could read the scriptures.¹⁹ Colin Cliffe initiated a regular “Bible and literacy” course at Anguganak, for leading Christian men in the area. It was held one week every month, with the purpose of developing competence in “handling the Word of God, and conducting the Work of God”.²⁰

Fluency in Pidgin literacy was a pre-requisite for acceptance into the full-time Bible school, which started in 1967.²¹ In the early years, the school struggled with low academic standards.²² Missionaries were frequently reminded that prospective students needed help with literacy, so that they would be adequately prepared for Bible school.²³

¹⁵ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 20; personal correspondence, March 3, 1998.

¹⁶ Alan Nicholson, *Treasury* (May 1966), p. 24, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹⁷ Rosalie Smith, “Literacy: a Priority”, in *Treasury* (August 1974), p. 156.

¹⁸ Liddle, “Kinds of Churches Needed in New Guinea”, p. 44.

¹⁹ Marsh, *In His Name*, p. 320.

²⁰ Colin Cliffe, *Treasury* (December 1965), p. 22, [Details of title of article are unknown].

²¹ CMML Conference minutes, July 1966, pp. 4.

²² *Ol Minit Bilong Komiti Bilong Baibel Skul*, translated by JEAF, March 1967; CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, p. 5.

²³ CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, p. 5; CMML Conference minutes, August 1969, p. 3.

When the Bible school started, provision had to be made for wives. Those, who were already literate, did the full Bible-school course as students. Others had literacy classes, and studies relevant to women. In 1968, three wives were counted among the students, while the rest did literacy.²⁴ In 1972, five of the wives did the full course with their husbands, while the other eight attended classes in literacy, Bible study, and scripture memorisation.²⁵

B. Providing for Literacy as an Ongoing Ministry

CMML missionaries, working in PNG, engaged in a programme to train national Christians to teach literacy, greatly increasing the number of people learning to read and write. They also developed literacy materials, and participated in translation of scriptures, all of which contributed to the ongoing literacy programme.

The training of “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2) was a recurring theme in the CMML work. This text was quoted in a number of papers and publications relating to their training programmes, and was particularly true of literacy work.²⁶ Young literate men came specifically to train as literacy teachers, and then went back to their own areas to run literacy schools. Prior to 1960, Wally and Ruth Sim, of Eritei, took in young men from Green River, Inebu, and Yebil, and trained them, using small groups of pupils for teaching practice.²⁷ In 1963, Dennis Thorp and Bev Sundgren, together, ran the first Pidgin literacy teacher-training school at Yebil.²⁸ Later on, Bev Sundgren became a key

²⁴ CMML Committee minutes, March 1968, p. 5.

²⁵ Crowther, *Tidings* (June 1972), [Details of author’s full name, and title of article, are unknown].

²⁶ John M. Hitchen, “Training Leaders for Melanesian Churches”, in *God at Work in New Guinea*, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, [1969], p. 49; Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 28; Dennis Thorp, “Fruit of New Guinea Indigenes Faithful Witness”, in *Treasury* (August 1966), p. 29.

²⁷ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 5.

²⁸ Marsh, *In His Name*, pp. 330, 312, 333.

person in Pidgin literacy teacher training, continuing this work until the late 1990s.²⁹

The training of literacy teachers was accompanied by the development of literacy materials. By 1960, Wally and Ruth Sim had produced *Kowi na Sita* primers, for use in learning to read in Pidgin.³⁰ Later, the Sims and Bev Sundgren worked together to upgrade the literacy materials, for more effective teaching of adults.³¹ The outcome of this was the *Kisim Save* Pidgin literacy course, with four primers and two teachers' manuals, which were being used by most missions throughout the country.³²

Translation of scriptures into Pidgin was an early priority for CMML in the Sepik. Some missionaries made an effort to learn vernacular languages, and produce portions of scripture in those languages. David and Muriel Bailey worked in the Abau language at Green River, and Don McGregor worked in the Wapi language at Lumi.³³ However, much of the missionary work in the West Sepik was carried out in Pidgin, because there were small, isolated groups, each speaking a different language.³⁴ It was felt, therefore, that producing scriptures in Pidgin was more strategic.³⁵ In 1960, the Liddles, after attending a translation conference, reported that the four gospels in Pidgin were completed, and would be released the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³⁰ Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 5.

³¹ *Treasury* (November 1967), p. 24, [Details of author's full name, and title of article, are unknown].

³² Beverley Sundgren, Wally Sim, and Ruth Sim, *Kisim Save, Buk 1-4*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1970; Beverley Sundgren, *Kisim Save, Buk Tisa 1 na 2*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1971; Kay W. Liddle, "Papua New Guinea: Tribalism to Nationhood", in *Treasury* (March 1972), pp. 90-92.

³³ Liddle: "Tribalism to Nationhood", pp. 91-92.

³⁴ Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: The Day-by-Day Guide to Praying for the World*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1993, p. 438, gives statistics of 1,000 "peoples" and 862 languages. PNG is described as the world's most complex nation. Most of the language groups in the CMML area comprised of 1,000 to 5,000 speakers, according to Kay W. Liddle, "New Guinea: A Survey of Assembly Missionary Work", in *Treasury* (May 1960), p. 170.

³⁵ Liddle, "New Guinea Survey", p. 170.

following year.³⁶ In 1963, Cecil Parish started doing Pidgin Bible translation, working, first of all, on the New Testament, which was released in 1968.³⁷ This was followed by Psalms and the Old Testament. He engaged in this work, until the completion of the whole Bible in 1988.³⁸

In contrast to the Sepik, in the Highlands there were two major tribes, Huli and Duna, for whom scriptures needed to be available in the vernacular.³⁹ Glenda Giles, a CMML missionary, who went to PNG in 1967, translated the Duna New Testament, which was published in 1976. Much of the translation of the Huli New Testament, published in 1983, was done by missionaries of APCM, with CMML missionaries helping in the checking process. Since the release of these New Testaments, the whole Pidgin Bible was published in 1989, and the completed Huli Bible is to be published in 1998-1999.

With the publication of these scriptures, the churches in the Sepik, and in the Huli and Duna tribes of the Highlands, now had the Word of God in either their own vernacular, or in Pidgin. Literacy was the means by which they had access to it.

C. Literacy, Translation, and Bible Teaching

To sum up CMML's involvement in literacy, let us consider the views of two different missionaries working in the Highlands in the 1970s.

Ossie Fountain worked at Koroba, from 1971-1984, as a cross-cultural missionary and Bible teacher. In planning for a conference on Bible teaching programmes, he drafted a diagram, in which he listed evangelism, church planting, and church establishing, under "essential ministries" and Bible translation, literacy, and literature production and

³⁶ Liddle, *Treasury* (December 1960), p. 419, [Details of title of article are unknown].

³⁷ Sim, *Treasury* (December 1967), p. 30, [Details of author's full name, and title of article, are unknown]; Bielby, and McCullough, *Treasury* (May 1969), p. 24, [Details of authors' full names, and title of article, are unknown].

³⁸ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 30.

³⁹ The Huli tribe had approximately 80,000 speakers, and the Duna 30,000.

distribution under “support ministries”.⁴⁰ In designating these as support ministries, he assumed that they might be needed at some stages, but not at others. This allowed for non-literate methods of teaching within an oral culture, or for the fact that, within a literate culture, scriptures may already be available, and the learners already literate. In this sense, his plan could be seen to be universal.

Glenda Giles was involved in both translation and literacy. She believed that they were not an optional extra, but an integral part of any Bible-teaching programme. At the CMML missionary conference in 1977, she presented a paper on their relationship.⁴¹ She said,

As our belief is entirely Bible based, and the Bible is a book, this places literacy and Bible translation *bang* in the middle of any Bible-teaching programme . . . If [people] have the Book, and are able to adequately understand and apply its teachings, they have reached the source, and are as equipped as their missionaries.⁴²

In terms of literacy itself, Glenda was convinced that, by helping people to become literate, the missionaries would be developing reading and study skills, and empowering them to have access to the very Word of God.⁴³ Her view could be seen as a universal approach to non-literate peoples.

Whether literacy is seen as a support ministry to the Bible-teaching programme, or as an integral part of it, the evidence is that there was a high priority given to it. We move on to consider the question, “Why literacy?”

2. Why Literacy?

The scriptures refer to “listening” to the word, not to “reading” the word (James 1:22-23). Paul spoke of the word of God, “which you heard

⁴⁰ Ossie Fountain, “A Strategy for Bible Teaching Programmes”, unpublished draft paper for conference planning on Bible teaching programmes, [1976?].

⁴¹ Glenda Giles, “Literacy and Bible Translation in the Bible Teaching Programme”, unpublished paper presented at CMML Conference, 1977.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

from us” (1 Thess 2:13), and “what you have heard from me, keep” (2 Tim 1:13), and again, “What you have heard from me . . . entrust to reliable men” (2 Tim 2:2). In Romans, faith comes through “hearing the message” (Rom 10:17). The references in scripture to “reading” are usually the public reading of the Word. Timothy was encouraged to devote himself “to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).

There is only one reference to a group of people, the Bereans, who “examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). But, even then, it is unlikely that each person had access to scriptures, and could individually examine them. The venue would have been the synagogue, in which there were scriptures available. The “readers” would have been literate males, over the age of 12, or, possibly, the teachers among them. After the public reading of the relevant scriptures, discussion probably went back and forth, as people grappled with the question under examination, and came to a combined decision.

Andrew Walls explains that the early church began within the literary culture of the Graeco-Roman world, in which there was a relatively large literate community. Despite that, the Christian scriptures were intended for oral recital within that literate culture. He states that the public reading of scriptures was a natural continuation of synagogue practice, and that this was normative for the early Christian communities.⁴⁴

The question needs to be asked, then, why did the CMML missionaries expend so much time and energy in teaching people to read? Was it because they, themselves, came from a literate culture, where the personal study of the scriptures is the norm, and, therefore, they assumed that this should be the norm elsewhere? When they entered a non-literate society, did they believe that teaching the people to read was the right thing to do? Did they consider the possibility of alternative methods being more relevant in an oral culture? Did they see literacy as a strategy for contacting and evangelising people, just as medical work, and formal

⁴⁴ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1996, pp. 36-37.

education, was? Or is there a deeper, underlying principle, which motivated them to teach people to read?

Let us look, firstly, at the missionaries themselves, their assumptions and motivation, and the traditions, and history, that formed their worldview. Then, secondly, let us look at the Melanesians, their culture and worldview, and explore whether there could have been some other effective ways of building the church in PNG.

A. The Missionaries

CMML missionaries went to PNG with certain assumptions and expectations. These were shaped, firstly, by their Western cultural background, and, secondly, by their Christian beliefs and practices, which had come down to them through the centuries of Christianity, through the reformation and 18th-century evangelical revivals, and experienced within their own particular denominational setting. This section will explore some of these assumptions and expectations.

Their Assumptions

First and foremost, all CMML missionaries went to PNG from a literate culture. This does not mean that they were merely able to read and write. Fundamental to a literate culture is the dependence upon, and the authority of, the written word. Information is recorded, and passed on, in written form. Learning is dependent upon seeing, as well as hearing.⁴⁵ Written statements, and written consent, have binding power. The recording of minutes of meetings, and constitutions of organisations, are examples of this. Lasting agreements, such as wills, and employment contracts, are made in written form, and written signatures have authority.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The author, in teaching Maori language in an oral form, according to the philosophy of Te Ataurangi, to a group of European adults in NZ, found that the students needed to have the words written in front of them. Seeing the word was essential to their learning. Some of them seemed unable to hear and remember through purely aural methods.

⁴⁶ D. F. McKenzie wrote about the contact between European and Maori cultures in the 1830s and 1840s, and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. He commented on the absurdity of expecting Maori, within a few short years, to have so changed from their oral culture, and to have entered so fully into a literate culture that they were ready "to accept a signature as a sign of full comprehension and legal commitment". *Oral Culture, Literacy*

It was with this background of a literate culture, then, that CMML missionaries went to PNG, with the expectation that their converts needed to become literate. They, themselves, were probably less aware of their own cultural assumptions than they were of Melanesian assumptions!

Their Motivation

In earlier missionary work in Africa and the South Pacific, there were deliberate attempts to “civilise the natives” by dressing them in European clothing, and teaching them to read. However, the emphasis in the developing, and soon-to-be independent, country of PNG, in the 1960s, was more on economic development, and building strong, independent, indigenous churches. Thus, missionaries were motivated to meet the specific needs of the PNG people, as well as carrying out the “great commission”.

a. Meeting Needs

One motive for missionaries, in teaching literacy, was to meet the needs of the people. A holistic worldview recognises that the spiritual, physical, social, and emotional aspects of a person’s being are all inter-related. Some missionaries engaged in certain activities, because they met perceived “felt needs” among the people. Medical work and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) were two of these. Formal education, catering for children and young people, was another. Non-formal adult education was another activity, especially in the area of literacy. Practical projects, to develop skills in agriculture, building, and other trades, and running small businesses, was yet another. Some CMML missionaries were professionally trained as doctors and nurses, and as teachers. Others were skilled in trades and agriculture. They were involved in meeting some of the felt needs of the people.⁴⁷

and Print in Early New Zealand: the Treaty of Waitangi, Wellington NZ: Victoria University Press, 1985, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Kay W. Liddle, “The Task in Perspective”, in *God at Work in New Guinea*, Kay W. Liddle, John M. Hitchen, Lewis Larking, eds, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, [1969], pp. 9, 10.

With PNG being a late-developing country, the government depended on the network of missions through the country for effective communication, for educational and health work. Without the involvement of Christian missions, the government would not have been able to achieve the level of development that it has to date.

In other parts of the world, the term “illiteracy” has been equated to ignorance, poverty, hunger, disease, paganism, fear, and oppression. David Mason⁴⁸ called illiteracy a “contagious malady”.⁴⁹ He claimed that:

Adult literacy strikes at the grass roots of poverty. It destroys the vicious circle of ignorance-poverty-ignorance by striking at the weakest point of the circle – illiteracy. . . . New nations, as well as old, realise that literacy is a precondition to modernisation. Fighting a war on poverty, without adult literacy, is like fighting a shooting war without bullets.⁵⁰

Mason goes on to say,

If you feed a man, he will be hungry again. If you clothe him, his clothes will wear out. If you heal him, and he returns to his old life, he may get sick again. But teach a man to read, and he can help himself. He can learn how to plant, and grow food. He can learn to earn enough to clothe his family. He can deal with disease, and learn how to help his village, or neighbourhood, to health. . . . One of the most far-reaching, and long-lasting, acts of service, Christians can perform, is to teach the world to read.⁵¹

b. A Bridge for Evangelism

A second motive for missionaries, in teaching literacy, is to build a bridge for evangelism. This was true for a number of the early CMML missionaries. Pethybridge and McKirdy openly speak of this as a motive in

⁴⁸ David Mason was the executive director of Laubach Literacy, Inc., in the 1960s.

⁴⁹ David Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion: the Opportunity of Literacy Missions*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1967, p. 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

the first section of this paper. This is also the experience of others on the wider world mission scene.

Mason, having talked about breaking the cycle of poverty, also saw literacy as opening people to evangelism. The title of his book, *Reaching the Silent Billion: The Opportunity of Literacy Missions*, is, in itself, a plea for literacy evangelism. His philosophy is, “by teaching an illiterate to read, one opens his heart, wins his love, and makes him good soil for sowing the seed of the Christian gospel”.⁵²

Loewen wrote about his experiences with the Choco Indians, in the Darien of Panama, near the Colombian border.⁵³ His rationale was: “In pre-literate societies, the teaching of reading can serve as a perpetual communications bridge . . . not merely as a point of contact, but also in the development of a relationship between two individuals, which permits and fosters . . . meaningful conversation, and exchange of ideas”.⁵⁴ He goes on to describe how this “bridge” worked, and why it was considered a “perpetual” bridge. Many of the Choco Indians had attended Spanish schools, but were never able to master reading. Loewen, and a coworker, taught these same people to read in their own language. One immediate by-product was that they were also able to read Spanish. This program, “each-one-teach-one”, led to literacy for many people, and also became a tool, through which churches had been started.

After the student had completed the seven primers, he received his first reading book. This was a book of simple Bible stories [God’s Little Word] designed to provide the reader with a synopsis of scriptural truth. Reading this “news” from God soon led to many questions, and, before long, the teacher . . . found himself explaining the meaning of the items that had attracted the new reader’s attention.

⁵² Ibid., p. 6.

⁵³ Jacob A. Loewen, “Literacy: Bridge in Choco Evangelism”, in *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1975, p. 382.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 378-379.

As soon as one person had learned to read, then the new literate taught another, and introduced “God’s Little Book”, and so perpetuated the “bridge”.⁵⁵

c. Reading scriptures is Essential for Nurture of New Christians

A third motivation for missionaries to teach literacy was to nurture new Christians. This was evident among the CMML missionaries in PNG. Liddle, Thorp, Nicholson, and Smith are four, mentioned earlier in this paper, who specifically stated that literacy was important, so that new Christians could read the scriptures for themselves. Underlying this motive, was their belief that the Bible was central to faith, and that all Christians should have access to it.

Donald McGavran, in speaking of the “illiterate masses”, strongly urges that Christians be taught to read, so that they can read the Bible, as a religious duty. He believes that providing for believers to participate in the Word of God is just as important as providing for them to participate in the Lord’s Supper. He thinks that the Christian masses should become “bible-reading communities”, and that literacy classes should be in church buildings, and closely associated with church programmes. He advocates a “sharply-worded doctrine”, where Bible reading is recognised as a normal Christian duty.⁵⁶

Mason, in his promotion of adult literacy education, sees it as essential for building a mature and stable church. He states that, “Because of the centrality of the Bible, a Christian, who cannot read, is a cripple.” According to him, when a church in an educationally-deprived area has a literacy campaign to upgrade its literacy level, it is invigorated; literacy education is a stabilising force in the church; a church with a literate membership is a stable, mature church. He comments that many African converts, who were not literate enough to continue reading their Bibles,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 382-385.

⁵⁶ McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970, pp. 266-267.

drifted back into paganism: “Literacy is a powerful instrument in the preservation and the growth of a Christian outlook on life.”⁵⁷

Paul Culley, in writing about the goal of world mission, discusses the educational objective. Making disciples includes instructing Christians. This is also a part of “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). And thus, “To teach them to read, and give them the Bible in their own language, must have a high priority in the missionary’s responsibility to his people.”⁵⁸

d. Building Churches which can Edify Themselves from scriptures

A fourth motive for teaching literacy was to build churches, which could edify themselves from the scriptures. Liddle expressed this, when writing about “the kind of churches needed in New Guinea”.⁵⁹ We discussed, earlier, that illiteracy was a roadblock, both to the corporate life of the church, and to the individual’s personal devotional life. Liddle also talks about “the need for trained pastor-teachers to feed the flock of God”. He goes on to say, “As the pastor-teachers fulfil their ministries (part of which will be teaching others to read), so the churches will be edified, further gifts will be developed, and opportunities be provided for its [sic] exercise.”⁶⁰

Culley, after talking about fulfilling the “educational objective” for new Christians, goes on to apply it to church leadership. He says, “Anything less than strong Christian leaders, able to teach others, is unacceptable as a goal for the missionary church” (Heb 5:12; 6:1). He points out that special attention needs to be given to the spiritual growth of leaders, whom God raises up in each local church. He reminds us of Paul’s word to Timothy that, what he has learned, he must, in turn, commit “to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).⁶¹

⁵⁷ Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁸ Paul G. Culley, “The Motives and Goal of World Missions”, in *Facing Facts in Modern Missions: a Symposium*, Milton Baker, ed., Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1963, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁹ Liddle, “Kind of Churches Needed in New Guinea”, pp. 38-48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

⁶¹ Culley, “Motives and Goal of World Missions”, p. 31.

Their Evangelical Roots and Heritage

Much of what CMML missionaries did in PNG had roots, not just in their culture, but also in their evangelical roots and heritage. Their theology, and the way in which it has come to them, right from the New Testament church, through church history, to the reformation and revival movement, to the Brethren Movement today, have all contributed to their beliefs, motives, and missionary methods. A consideration of these, helps us to understand why they put so much emphasis on the reading of scriptures, and, hence, the teaching of literacy.⁶²

a. Evangelical Theology

Fundamental to the question under investigation are four aspects of evangelical theology. These include the fact that God reveals Himself to men and women; the Bible is the word of God; the Holy Spirit indwells all believers, bringing about life changes, and gifting them for service in the church; and also the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers”.

Firstly, we read, in the Bible, of God talking with our first parents, with Abraham, with Moses, and many others. In Hebrews 1:1, we read that, in the past, God spoke to our forefathers, through the prophets, then he spoke to us through His Son. John’s gospel speaks of Jesus Christ being the “Word”, which became flesh (John 1:1, 14). God wants to communicate with His people.

Secondly, the Bible is the Word of God. Because God has revealed Himself to His people through the ages, and because the Bible is the record of God’s dealing with His people, God reveals Himself through the Bible to us today. The whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about God’s plan of salvation, through His Son Jesus Christ. Through reading the scriptures, we come to know the Son, and hence we come to know the Father. Jesus, Himself, said that if we know Him, we know the Father

⁶² Two books, which have been formative in my understanding for this section, but not necessarily referred to, are: Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education: Theory and Practice in Historical and Contemporary Perspective*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1996; and Robert E. Clark, Lin Johnson, and Allyn K. Sloat, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1991.

(John 14:6). John, in his first epistle, claims that what he has written about Jesus is his own eyewitness account. He wrote it so that we, too, can share in it (1 John 1:1-4).

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the believer. Jesus, Himself, promised the Holy Spirit to live with, and in, those who follow Him (John 14:16). His role is to teach all things, and to remind us of everything that Jesus said to His disciples (John 14:26). It is the Spirit who brings conviction of sin, who makes known the truth, and brings glory to Christ (John 16:6-10, 13-15). As a person reads the Word of God, it is the Holy Spirit who brings about a change in that person's life. The Holy Spirit also gifts believers for works of service, so that the body of Christ maybe built up (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:11-12). All members of the Christian community, therefore, are expected to use their gifts, and be active in Christian service.

Fourthly, perhaps the greatest implication of "the priesthood of all believers", is that each person is able to relate to God directly. We do not need a priest, because Jesus Christ Himself is our mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Through faith, we have been justified, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1-2). Through Christ, we can enter into the very presence of God (Heb 4:14-16).⁶³ Another aspect of this doctrine, is that we are all to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5).⁶⁴ These include our bodies (Rom 12:1); our praise (Heb 13:15); doing good, and sharing with others (Heb 13:16); and our prayers (Rev 8:3).

Bebbington, in writing about Evangelicalism in modern Britain, writes about four characteristics, which have been the marks of Evangelical Christianity through the years.⁶⁵ These include: "*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; *crucicentrism*, a stress on

⁶³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, pp. 4-5, 1085-1086.

⁶⁴ P. E. Hughes, "Priesthood", in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984, p. 876.

⁶⁵ Bebbington distinguishes between an evangelical (the movement), and evangelical (as a description of certain characteristics).

the sacrifice of Christ on the cross”.⁶⁶ These four characteristics are implied in the beliefs just discussed. While emphases have changed over different generations, the characteristics have remained much the same. Bebbington quotes two leading Evangelical scholars of our generation. In 1977, when John Stott was asked the question, “What is an Evangelical?”, he replied, “We Evangelicals are Bible people”. In 1979, J. I. Packer put the supremacy of scripture first in a list of six evangelical fundamentals.⁶⁷

In the course of history, from the birth of Christianity, right up to the period of time of Brethren missionaries in Papua New Guinea, these four aspects of evangelical theology keep recurring. These beliefs underlie the premise that every Christian should have access to the Bible, and, therefore, the Bible should be made available to each new people group, through translation and literacy.

b. The Translation Principle in Christian History

We should note that, whenever scriptures are translated, the assumption is that there will be readers. The readers could be members of a literate class, or of a wider, literate society. Where there are no, or very few, literates, there has been an effort to create a readership, through the teaching of literacy skills. Translation and literacy have been integrally related.

Walls traces a “translation principle” through Christian history. He begins with the fact that incarnation was a divine act of translation. When God in Christ became man, “divinity was translated into humanity”. Christ became a person in Jewish Palestine. Thus, whenever scriptures are translated into a new language and culture, Christ is incarnated into that culture. Walls claims that “Bible translation aims at releasing the word about Christ . . . so that Christ can live within that context, in the person of His followers”.⁶⁸ Thus, when scriptures are translated into Melanesian

⁶⁶ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London UK: Routledge, 1989, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1996, pp. 27-29.

languages, it is so that Christ will live within Melanesian cultures. However, what is translated needs to be communicated, and this is the issue, which we are investigating.

Christianity was born into a long-established literary culture, with a Mediterranean history. As it spread north, into tribes, which bordered the Roman Empire, among the new Christians, there was “no indigenous literary culture, no large literate community, and no market-orientated book production”.⁶⁹ There were different attitudes to translation, as Christianity spread. Two examples show contrasting patterns, but the outcome of their strategies led to a similar phenomenon with regard to literacy.

Ulfilas (c311-c380) is credited with translating the Bible into Gothic. But, before he could produce his translation, he had to design an alphabet for Gothic. He then created a literate class within what was, otherwise, an oral culture, in order for the Bible to be read.⁷⁰

Moving westwards, *Patrick of Ireland* (389-461) provided a different pattern. He made no attempt to translate the scriptures into the vernacular, but set about producing a small, literate community, who could read the scriptures in Latin. In so doing, he was establishing a common language medium for scripture and liturgy.⁷¹

Both these patterns have been evident, over the centuries, in the spread of Christianity. In fact, both of these patterns can be seen in PNG. In the Sepik, where there were many small, isolated groups, each speaking a different language, making the scriptures available in Pidgin, rather than the many vernaculars, follows the “Patrick pattern”. Whereas, with the Huli and Duna tribes, the translation of the scriptures into both Huli and Duna, follows the “Ulfilas pattern”.

However, what is more significant to this paper, is that both patterns originally led to a literate, clerical elite within the church, and to the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

masses, who could neither read, nor had access to the scriptures, thus setting the stage for the Reformation.

c. **The Reformation**

A number of key figures before, during, and after the Reformation, believed that the Bible was essential to Christianity, and that all Christians should have access to it. This led them to be involved, either in translating scriptures, or in promoting education of the masses, so that they could read scriptures for themselves, or both.

At the “Dawn of the Reformation”, *John Wycliffe* (1329-1384) declared the right of every Christian to know the Bible. This moved him to the logical conclusion of translating scriptures into English. He lived to see the first complete English translation of the Bible.⁷²

Erasmus (1467-1536), known as the “Forerunner to the Reformation”, believed every Christian should discern the will of Christ for his or her own practical life, by paying attention to the scriptures. Therefore, all people must have access to the scriptures in their own language. He claimed that the scriptures were fit for “the farmer, the tailor, the mason, prostitutes, pimps, and Turks”.⁷³ He wanted schools to cater for both the growth of Christian faith in the learner, as well as developing skills in speaking, writing, and living.⁷⁴ While there is no record of Erasmus translating scriptures into the vernacular, the first edition of the New Testament, published in Greek, was his translation.⁷⁵

Known as “Father of the Reformation”, *Martin Luther* (1483-1546) was foremost in wanting the ordinary person to be able to read the Bible. He wanted common people to “feel” the words of scripture “in the heart”.

⁷² Donald L. Roberts, “John Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation”, in *Christian History* 3 (1983), pp. 10-13; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, London UK: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954, pp. 662-664.

⁷³ Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, pp. 338-339, 342.

⁷⁴ Burgess, *Models of Religious Education*, pp. 45-46.

⁷⁵ Tony Lane, “A Flood of Bibles”, in *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, ed., Surry Hills NSW: Anzea Books, 1977, p. 67.

He held a high view of the inspiration of the Bible, calling it “the Holy-Spirit book”. He believed that, in the Bible, a living God confronts His people.⁷⁶ Luther was also an advocate of education. He believed that Christians needed education, in order to have access to the scriptures, and that they needed to attain maturity in the scriptures, if his idea of the priesthood of all believers was to succeed.⁷⁷ Luther translated both the Old and New Testaments into German, and it became the basis of all other German translations.⁷⁸

William Tyndale (1490-1536), known as the “Father of the English Bible”, observed, at first hand, the ignorance of the local clergy, and resolved to make the scriptures available to the common people, even to “a boy that driveth the plough”,⁷⁹ though it eventually cost him his life. He set out to translate the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek into English.⁸⁰ His New Testament was published in 1525. He also translated parts of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, before his death. His New Testament became the basis for the King James version and the Revised Standard version.⁸¹

The *development of printing* was a major influence during the 16th century, making possible the widespread ownership of copies of scriptures. Walls comments, “This opened the way for private, individual study to supplement public reading in the congregation. For many more Christians than formerly, private, rather than public, reading became the principal and most-potent form of encounter with scripture.” This was a major force in

⁷⁶ Timothy George, “Dr Luther’s Theology”, in *Christian History* 34 (1992), p. 19; James M. Kittelson, “The Accidental Revolutionary”, in *Christian History* 34 (1992), p. 17.

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers*, p. 384; Burgess, *Models of Religious Education*, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁸ Lane, “A Flood of Bibles”, p. 368.

⁷⁹ Tony Lane, “William Tyndale and the English Bible”, in *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, ed., Surry Hills NSW: Anzea Books, 1977, p. 370.

⁸⁰ The Wycliffe Bible (which had been banned since 1408) had been translated from the Latin *Vulgate*, and so was inaccurate.

⁸¹ Lane, “Tyndale and the English Bible”, p. 370.

the move from an oral to a literary relationship with scripture, and from a communal to an individual one.⁸²

d. Evangelical Revivals and the Modern Missionary Movement

After a religious low in the later 17th century, Christianity was rejuvenated in the 18th century, by outbreaks of evangelical revivals, which started in Germany, and spread to Scandinavia, and Switzerland, and were also found in Britain and North America.⁸³

John Wesley (1703-1791), had the experience of conversion on 24 May, 1738. The rest of his life was devoted to evangelism, and led to the Wesleyan Movement, and Methodist Revival.⁸⁴ According to Armstrong, the Methodist Revival flourished at the same time as the Industrial Revolution. Within this environment, it is argued that Wesley brought literacy to the lower orders, helping them to adjust to the problems of working in industry, and bringing them to a political consciousness.⁸⁵

The *Modern Missionary Movement* was also born out of the 18th-century evangelical revivals.⁸⁶ A number of different mission societies were formed. The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), formed in 1792, was the first of many. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was formed in 1795, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799, and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804, just to mention a few.⁸⁷

William Carey (1761-1834), a Baptist missionary, from England, has been called the “Father of Modern Evangelical Missions”. He sailed to India in 1793, and spent the rest of his life there. He engaged in intensive study of oriental languages, and translated the New Testament into Bengali.

⁸² Walls, *Missionary Movement*, pp. 40-41.

⁸³ Robert D. Linder: “Introduction: The Christian Centuries”, in *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, ed., Surry Hills NSW: Anzea Books, 1977, p. xviii.

⁸⁴ F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 1446.

⁸⁵ Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodists and Society 1700-1850*, London UK: University of London Press, 1973, p. 84.

⁸⁶ Linder, “Christian Centuries”, p. xx.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

He was also instrumental in a number of other translations.⁸⁸ It should be noted, however, that Carey worked with an already-literate culture, and, so, had a readership for his translations.

With this missionary movement, Christianity took hold in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the South Pacific, and some areas of Asia. The translation principle, applied repeatedly, as the Christian faith encountered new cultures. However, instead of creating literate classes, the emphasis changed to mass readership, because of the capacity to provide copies of scriptures in large numbers.⁸⁹

e. The Brethren Movement

The other major factor, influencing the thinking of CMML missionaries in PNG, in the 1950s-1960s, is their Brethren background. Their emphasis on empowering all Christians to have access to the Bible is deeply rooted in their Brethren heritage.

The Brethren Movement was a latecomer to the evangelical revivals of the 18th century, yet followed in the footsteps of a long line of reformers. Rowdon, in describing the origins of the Brethren, between 1825 and 1850, states, "It was in Dublin that the first tentative steps were taken towards establishing a movement that looked to the Bible, and the Bible alone, for the solution of the ecclesiastical and religious problems of the day."⁹⁰ Coad writes about the centrality of the Bible to some of the founders of the Brethren Movement: "The Bible . . . was at the heart of Grove's movement of the soul. Darby, too, spoke of how, in the days after his riding accident near Dublin, the scriptures had gained 'complete ascendancy' over him. To the Bible, Müller and Craik also had gone, at each crisis in their church, and personal lives. In going back to the Bible

⁸⁸ Ibid.; also D. W. Bebbington, "William Carey", in *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, ed., Surry Hills NSW: Anzea Books, 1977, p. 548.

⁸⁹ Walls, *Missionary Movement*, pp. 41-42.

⁹⁰ Harold H. Rowdon, "The Brethren", in *Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, ed., Surry Hills NSW: Anzea Books, 1977, p. 37.

for their inspiration and guidance, then, the Brethren were treading in the same path as a long line of illustrious reformers.”⁹¹

The Brethren Movement arose in an endeavour to “recapture the outlook and beliefs of the church in its earliest days”. It emerged in Britain, Switzerland, Germany, and other countries on the continent of Europe, at about the same time.⁹² The founders wanted their communion service to be a means of fellowship, irrespective of denomination, expressing the priesthood of all believers.⁹³

The most-distinctive characteristic of the Brethren is that the ministry and gifts of the church are distributed to all believers. This is most clearly demonstrated in the worship and communion service, which is led by different members of the congregation. The Brethren have drawn attention to the church, as the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, and equipped with spiritual gifts, distributed among the members.⁹⁴

W. E. Vine, a classical scholar of note, and a Brethren theologian, listed nine characteristics of a “local church, formed according to the scriptures”.⁹⁵ Four of these relate to our discussion. He stated that a local church is, first of all, “a company of believers, where Jesus Christ is acknowledged as Lord”.⁹⁶ Secondly, the Holy Spirit presides over, and gives direction, to the church.⁹⁷ The third is the authority of the Word of God over any creed, or set of doctrines, or centralised authority.⁹⁸ The fourth characteristic is the recognition of the priesthood of all believers, in contrast to “the appointment of an order of human priests, acting in, and on

⁹¹ F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1968, p. 248.

⁹² Rowdon, “The Brethren”, p. 520.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 520-521.

⁹⁵ W. E. Vine, *The Church and the Churches*, 3rd edn, Kilmarnock UK: John Ritchie, 1964, p. 127.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

behalf of, the church”.⁹⁹ From this, comes the emphasis on the laity participating in all aspects of church life.

As the result of migration, and a strong missionary emphasis, Brethren are now found in most parts of the world. New Zealand is just one country where Brethren are relatively numerous.¹⁰⁰ The NZ Brethren have made a major contribution to overseas mission, and have sent missionaries to many parts of the globe.¹⁰¹ The opening up of PNG after the Second World War became a catalyst for renewed missionary endeavour.¹⁰² Between 1951 and 1995, about 245 NZ Brethren were “commended” to work in PNG.¹⁰³

Among the CMML missionaries, who went to PNG in the 1950s and early 1960s, were some, who had read widely, who were prepared to think through strategies, which would be appropriate in PNG, and who understood that New Testament principles needed to be applied in different ways to different cultures. They were committed to the dynamic principles, on which the Brethren Movement began, rather than to what it had become in many places. Their thinking was influenced by reports of Brethren conferences in England, where New Testament church principles were being reconsidered in relation to today’s society.¹⁰⁴ To help their missionary colleagues better understand some of the issues involved in PNG, they prepared discussion papers for their annual conferences. The

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

¹⁰⁰ At the International Brethren Conference on Mission in Rome, in June 1996, there were representatives from 52 countries. The author attended this conference, along with her husband, who was one of the plenary speakers.

¹⁰¹ Brethren missionaries, who have gone from NZ to other countries are recorded in Marsh, *In His Name*; and also Les A. Marsh, and Harry D. Erlam, *In His Name: A Record of Assembly Missionary Outreach from New Zealand*, 2nd edn, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, 1987. Both need to be referred to, because the 1987 edition does not include missionaries who had completed their overseas service prior to the publishing of the 1974 edition.

¹⁰² George Trew, *Looking Back/Forging Ahead: A Century of Participation in Overseas Mission by New Zealand Brethren Assemblies*, Palmerston North NZ: Missionary Services NZ, 1996, p. 16.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 124-125.

¹⁰⁴ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 28.

book *God at Work in New Guinea* reflects much of their thinking at the time.¹⁰⁵

B. The Melanesians

The people, among whom the CMML missionaries first started working, belonged to a non-literate culture. I would like to distinguish here between the terms “non-literate” and “illiterate”. A non-literate person is a member of an oral society, which has highly developed forms of communication, not dependent upon the written word.¹⁰⁶ Information is passed on, through storytelling, and other oral means; education is through the ear; listening and memorisation skills are highly developed; memory and oratory skills are far more important than reading skills; remembered facts, rather than written, are important facts; decisions are by oral consensus, rather than by motions recorded in minutes; and lasting agreements are made in other than written form.¹⁰⁷

An illiterate person, by contrast, is a member of a literate society, in which literacy is a basic life skill. It is within this context that one might equate illiteracy to ignorance and poverty, as Mason does in his book.¹⁰⁸ To describe all people, who are unable to read, as illiterate, is to show one’s ignorance about oral cultures.

¹⁰⁵ *God at Work in New Guinea* was published in 1969, as an outcome of a number of weekend seminars in NZ, led by Kay Liddle, Max Tuck, John M. Hitchen, and Lewis Larking (Kay W. Liddle, John M. Hitchen, and Lewis , eds, *God at Work in New Guinea*, Palmerston North: GPH Society, [1969]).

¹⁰⁶ An example of this is the New Zealand Maori. Their art forms – carvings, rafter patterns, and plaited wall panels – all communicate messages about their history and worldview. Their history is recited in genealogies, and in traditional prayers, and chanted in traditional songs. Their beliefs and values are passed on through their myths and legends, and lived out in the communal gatherings on the Marae. Their values and words of wisdom are also passed on through their many proverbs.

¹⁰⁷ For discussion on oral societies, see McKenzie, *Oral Culture*, pp. 9-10, 46; also Peter J. Lineham, *Bible and Society: A Sesquicentennial History of the Bible Society in New Zealand*, Wellington NZ: The Bible Society in NZ, 1996, pp. 14-16; Kevin G. Hovey, *Before All Else Fails . . . Read the Instructions: A Manual for Cross-Cultural Christians*, Brisbane Qld: Harvest Publications, 1986, pp. 212-213; Lynette Bay, “Communicating the gospel in an African Context to the Illiterate Semi-literate People”, unpublished paper, Auckland NZ: BCNZ, 1995, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Mason, *Reaching the Silent Billion*, p. 10.

Their Needs

Melanesian “needs” can be seen from two perspectives. The needs, as we perceive them, are what Hovey calls the “selling points” of literacy – letter writing, handling official business, keeping abreast of government politics, and development.¹⁰⁹ However, from a Melanesian perspective, these “needs” can be fulfilled, quite satisfactorily, by having just one literate member per family, or even per village, in smaller communities. Therefore, few adults are sufficiently motivated to learn and maintain literacy skills.¹¹⁰

The missionary believes that the people “need” to be able to read the scriptures. Shaw, himself a Bible translator, says, “part of every Bible translation project includes a concerted effort to teach people to read and write their own language. The motivation is to have readers for the translated scriptures. From a people’s perspective, however, there is far less motivation, as most societies can manage quite happily with less than 15% of the population literate.”¹¹¹

Their motivation

It often appeared to missionaries that Melanesians were motivated to accept Christianity, and other benefits brought by Europeans, in order to obtain the material possessions, and “power”, that Europeans seemed to have.¹¹²

Whiteman¹¹³ wrote, “To many Melanesians, it was the European’s ability to read and write that seemed to be the key that unlocked the secret

¹⁰⁹ Hovey, *Read the Instructions*, p. 214

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ R. Daniel Shaw, *Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and Other Communication Tasks*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1988, p. 188.

¹¹² The problem of cargo cults was discussed at the CMML conference in 1962, and is recorded in *Treasury* (September 1962), p. 315. Max Tuck wrote about his experience, and understanding, of a cargo cult in the Sibilanga area in *Treasury* (January 1966), pp. 28-29, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹¹³ Darrell Whiteman was a Christian anthropologist, working in PNG, and based at the Melanesian Institute, in Goroka, PNG, when the author and her husband met him.

to his vast stores of material well-being.”¹¹⁴ This was not restricted to PNG. Parsonson, in writing about the literate revolution in Polynesia, says “The Polynesians had plainly believed that the art of reading and writing was the real source, not merely the technological capacity, of the European, but also of his military and political strength, his *mana*, and that they need only master these skills to secure a like pre-eminence.”¹¹⁵

Much has been written about “cargo cults” in Melanesia.¹¹⁶ Walls explains “cargo cults” to be adjustment movements, as Melanesians have attempted to adjust their worldview to incorporate all the new phenomena they have encountered since the Second World War.¹¹⁷

However, many Melanesians were motivated by a real desire to know God and His Word. Shaw, in discussing motivation for people to learn literacy, thinks that, ideally, a people’s response to the gospel should come first. Out of this response, comes a desire to have access to God’s Word, and, thus, the need for vernacular scriptures. This, in turn, creates a need to be able to read, and people want to learn. This is the stage, according to Shaw, that literacy should be introduced, and in such a way that the people can use it, and adapt it as their own.¹¹⁸

James Agiru, from Kundugu, in the Southern Highlands of PNG, in telling his testimony, demonstrated this principle at work. He wanted to be free from worshipping the spirits, and so responded to the Christian message, when missionaries came to his valley.¹¹⁹ After that, he learned to

¹¹⁴ Darrell L. Whiteman, *Melanesians and Missionaries: An Ethnohistorical Study of Social and Religious Change in the Southwest Pacific*, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1983, p. 189.

¹¹⁵ G. S. Parsonson: “The Literate Revolution in Polynesia”, in *The Journal of Pacific History* 11 (1967), p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Recent works include: Carl Loeliger and Garry Trompf, eds, *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*, Suva Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1985; Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (1), Point 2* (1983); Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (2), Point 3* (1983); Wendy Flannery, ed., *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (3), Point 4* (1984).

¹¹⁷ Walls, *Missionary Movement*, p. 136.

¹¹⁸ Shaw, *Transculturation*, p. 189.

¹¹⁹ James Agiru, taped interview, May 1997, translated from Pidgin by JAAF.

read and write, went away for Bible training, and came back to his own area. He has been a significant Christian leader in the Koroba area for many years.

Another person, who demonstrated this principle, was *Elara Alendo*, from the Koroba valley in the Southern Highlands of PNG. Elara had risen to be a *big man*, or traditional leader, in his community, through his prowess as a *fight leader*, and his subsequent economic partnerships.¹²⁰ In 1963, he experienced the healing power of God's Spirit, and learned that God was more powerful than all the spirits.¹²¹ He led his people into following Jesus, and remained a key Christian leader in the valley, until his death, 30 years later. He recognised the need to have access to God's Word, and, therefore, the need for literacy. While he, himself, never learned to read, he sponsored, and supported, the missionaries in their endeavours, and encouraged younger people to learn to read, and to contribute to church life through it. This illustrates Shaw's point that, when a people's response to the gospel comes first, out of it comes the desire to learn to read, in order to have access to God's Word.

Whatever the initial motivation may have been to learn to read, or to accept Christianity, the outcome was that many did learn to read the scriptures, and came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Meaningful Communication in Oral Cultures

It has already been noted that oral societies have highly-developed forms of communication, other than the written word. Shaw claims that "oral communication forms . . . are no less effective, as a means to present the gospel. In fact, the scriptures, themselves, were, for much of their history, communicated orally, using poetry, song, and dance, to involve the people, who received the message."¹²² He goes on to say, "We need to

¹²⁰ For further discussion on *big-man* traditional leadership, see M. John Paul Chao, "Leadership", in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, Point 5* (1984), pp. 134-135.

¹²¹ Elara's story is recorded by Ossie Fountain in "The Religious Experience of the Koroba Huli", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 2-2 (1986), pp. 190-191.

¹²² Shaw, *Transculturation*, p. 188.

explore relevant communication styles, and note how the gospel can be presented, so that it appears appropriate.”¹²³

Let us explore some, which are appropriate to Melanesia.

a. Storytelling

Some CMML missionaries made use of storytelling, in the early stages, as a means to communicate the Christian gospel. Liddle recalls giving pre-evangelistic teaching, by means of “a matrix of Bible stories, on which faith would be born”.¹²⁴ In drawing up the aims for the first full-time Bible school, the learning outcomes included, “to be able to teach Bible stories consecutively for baptismal instruction”.¹²⁵ The curriculum was planned “to cover 60 significant [Old Testament] stories . . . to give a clear chronological outline of Bible history”, and “to present each story as an example of “the Bible storytelling method” of preaching”.¹²⁶

Hovey¹²⁷ experimented in training non-literate church leaders, using oral skills. He writes about the place of stories, myths, and legends in PNG culture. He explains that the clan stories are equivalent to “the title deeds” to property, such as land rights, clan name, and access to ancestors. They also contain the village regulations for marriage, and other relationships, and help the people to make sense of the world around them. And so, these stories record, in oral form, the philosophy of the culture. Hovey goes on to talk about the role of the person, who knows the stories: “A man, who knows the stories, is considered to be very important, while the man, who doesn’t know the background stories of a particular matter, would never consider taking a leading role in the exercise of that matter.”¹²⁸

The implication of this, according to Hovey, is that the older men, who would normally take a leading role in their community, “would feel

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Liddle, “Tribalism to Nationhood”, pp. 90-92.

¹²⁵ CMML Conference minutes, July 1966, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Kevin Hovey has been working with the Assemblies of God Mission on the Sepik River since 1968.

¹²⁸ Hovey, *Read the Instructions*, pp. 215-216.

terribly ashamed in taking a leadership role in [church] services unless they knew the Bible stories that would give them the necessary background".¹²⁹ Therefore, it was important, within his training programme, to make Bible stories a major part of the curriculum. Within the teaching of Bible stories, he built in other techniques, which enabled the essential details to be retained, and biblical significance to be understood, and the communication culturally relevant.¹³⁰

b. Use of Pictures¹³¹

A method used by Dennis Thorp at Yebil was "picture stories". He developed a set of pictures which illustrated a story and which could be easily copied. During the week the students in the literacy-Bible school were taught and practised the story, then they went out and passed it on in the same way to the village people.¹³² Bev Sundgren, who observed this process, spoke of Dennis having a "very fascinating way of telling stories and illustrates them well on the blackboard. They are simple yet get across great truths."¹³³

Bruce Cook spent five months in 1975 in PNG conducting field research in picture communication. He set out to answer the question, "What kinds of pictures communicate most effectively with people who have little or no picture experience?"¹³⁴ We can summarise his finding by saying: the style of picture is important for people who cannot read,

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 216-217.

¹³¹ The author, and her husband, used simple blackboard drawings in a Marriage and Family Life seminar in the early 1980s. The response of the participants was, "These pictures are speaking to us. We want you to put them in a book, so that we can use them." The outcome was a book, *Skulim ol long Marit*, with text on one page and picture on the facing page, for village pastors to use with non-literates (Jenny Fountain, and Ossie Fountain, *Skulim ol long Marit*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1985).

¹³² Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 21.

¹³³ Beverly Sundgren, *Treasury* (October 1962), p. 380, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹³⁴ Bruce L. Cook, *Understanding Pictures in Papua New Guinea*, Elgin IL: David C. Cook Foundation, 1981, pp. 3-4.

pictures need to be culturally relevant; and pictures of people, colour, and realistic art are most easily understood in non-literate cultures.¹³⁵

c. Repetition and Memorisation

At Green River, the Liddles did much of the early teaching by catechism, to ensure that the essentials of the faith were learned and memorised. “Converts, many of whom could not read, were taught in catechism classes, memorising questions and answers about the nature and works of God, the great good Spirit, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.”¹³⁶

Hovey wrote of his experience of training non-literate leaders by getting them to memorise the Shorter Catechism in Pidgin. This provided them with a basic theology, and enabled them to repel false teaching.¹³⁷

McGavran writes of caring for non-literate people movements. He advocates the frequent use of memorised passages in worship. He claims that this, then, becomes part of the “spiritual equipment” of a Christian. “He can quote it at any time, night or day. He leans on it in times of stress, and teaches it to new converts. . . . Village Christians . . . rejoice in its familiarity, comfort, and certainty.”¹³⁸

Even when literacy has been taught, in an oral culture, the ability to read words may not indicate that a person is effectively literate. *McKenzie*, in writing about the Maori, claims that the teaching of elementary reading is “primarily oral/aural, not visual, because it involves the pronouncing and repetition of letters, syllables, and words (a practice reinforced, where there are few books, fewer texts, and group teaching). We can appreciate how oral repetition from memory might masquerade as reading; and the Maori – used to an oral tradition – had a most retentive memory.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-85.

¹³⁶ Thorp, and Thorp, *Christian Brethren Churches*, p. 28.

¹³⁷ Hovey, *Read the Instructions*, pp. 219-220

¹³⁸ McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 326-327.

¹³⁹ McKenzie, *Oral Culture*, p. 17.

d. Listening

One characteristic of oral cultures is that listening skills are highly developed. Sir Apirana Ngata, an outstanding Maori leader in the early 20th century, said that his own people still preferred to hear things read to them, because that is what they were used to. He said that, in his boyhood days, for every one who owned a copy of the scriptures or prayer book, there were 50 or more content to listen to, and memorise, the words, which were read to them.¹⁴⁰

Gospel Recordings (GR) was an organisation, whose ministry depended on the listening skills of non-literate people. GR aimed to record the gospel in as many different languages as possible, using native speakers. The recordings were then made available on record or cassette for people to listen to. In 1969, GR teams worked in the Nuku area, where there were about 20 different languages, enabling people to hear the gospel in their own language.¹⁴¹

In a personal testimony, James Agiru, from Kundugu, related how, in 1959, he went and listened to a “black thing that went round and round, and had a voice, and talked”. As he watched and listened he heard the voice saying, “You shall not worship the spirits”, and “There is only one God”. He returned often to hear more. By the time the CMML missionaries went to Koroba in 1962, he was ready to follow God’s way.¹⁴²

e. Group Devotions

Another characteristic of oral cultures, including Christian communities in New Testament times, is that many activities are communal, rather than individual. This is true of devotions. Liddle described the development of this practice in some areas of PNG: “People meet daily . . . for devotions. They sing, pray, memorise scripture, and listen to the . . . Bible story, told from memory. If someone is literate the scriptures will be read. This practice of group devotions falls naturally into

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴¹ Marsh, *In His Name*, p. 341.

¹⁴² James Agiru, taped interview, May 1997, translated from Pidgin by JEAF.

the indigenous mould of group activity, and will, no doubt, continue and develop in the rural communities.¹⁴³

McGavran advocates daily worship after the evening meal as being highly beneficial for non-literates living in villages. He believes that “regular evening worship for the whole new Christian community . . . is not only feasible, but comes to be a cherished experience, and is influential in developing true Christian character”.¹⁴⁴

f. Training Programmes for Traditional Leaders

Hovey has some interesting insights into training respected community leaders for leadership the church. He explains that a leadership-training programme for men, who are already recognised as leaders in their village, or community, is training leaders to meet the immediate needs. Because such men are mostly non-literate, training courses should be based on non-literate communication skills. Such training programmes recognise and respect the traditional culture.¹⁴⁵ There is a danger in having training programmes based on literacy only. They train younger men who may, one day, become leaders. They do not yet have the respect of the community as a whole, and so, churches are attended largely by women and children.¹⁴⁶

Related to this, is the need to recognise traditional values. Hovey explains that, within Melanesian culture, traditional legends and myths are at the very core of the belief and value system. Likewise, familiar communication forms and language are at the heart of their culture. Thus, when a new belief-and-value system is introduced, based on a new form of communication, namely literacy, there is so much that is new that it threatens the very existence of that society. This may contribute to the rejection of Christianity by the older generation, and village leaders, or to the alienation of those same leaders from the church.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Liddle, “Kind of Churches Needed in New Guinea”, p. 44.

¹⁴⁴ McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, pp. 326-327.

¹⁴⁵ Hovey, *Read the Instructions*, pp. 209-210.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

I have not explored all the different ways in which people in oral cultures learn. The place of drama and music, for example, has not been investigated. The role of “events” in an event-orientated society has not been discussed. Hovey experimented in the East Sepik with what he called “the stick which talks”, or the genealogy stick, to which the older people could immediately relate.¹⁴⁸ Bruce Olsen, in Colombia, witnessed the Motilone presenting the gospel through a “song duel”, through which God spoke, and the hearers turned to Christ.¹⁴⁹ The methods investigated are those which CMML missionaries used. While there was a big drive on literacy, there is evidence that some used oral methods of communication and teaching.

3. The Role of Literacy in Establishing Churches

Finally, let us evaluate the role of literacy in establishing indigenous churches in PNG. Was this an effective strategy? If CMML missionaries worked within non-literate societies, should they have concentrated more on oral methods of teaching? What is the outcome today?

A. Evaluating Missionary Strategies

Let us look first at the strategies missionaries used in the 1960s, and see whether they were effective. First, while teaching adult literacy may have met some immediate social needs, it did not keep pace with other factors in the community, and so the needs still exist. On a national scale, the level of literacy in PNG in 1997 stood at about 45% of the adult population.¹⁵⁰ In many of the rural areas, it is much lower. There has been formal education over the years, but it has not been universal. Thus, many young people, even in the 1990s, are reaching adulthood illiterate, contributing to the low level of literacy.

Secondly, using literacy as a bridge for evangelism, was successful. According to Thorp, “it worked”. Through his literacy-Bible school, young men came to Christian faith. They, in turn, went back to their own areas,

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, *Transculturation*, p. 188.

¹⁵⁰ GPH Society, *New Zealand Assembly Prayer Handbook 1998*, Palmerston North NZ: GPH Society, 1998.

and taught their own people, many of whom came to faith.¹⁵¹ McKirdy also reported a number of people, who came to faith through teacher-evangelists.¹⁵²

Thirdly the number of rural Christians who, as a result of literacy alone, became sufficiently literate to read the Bible for themselves, and have a daily “quiet-time” is debatable. It actually takes a high level of comprehension to interact with the written word. According to Kraft, learning “to carry on a conversation with a book” is a difficult skill to learn, and many do not develop it.¹⁵³ While this may have been a motivating force, and a goal of literacy, the real value for nurturing may have been in the process, rather than in the end result. Literacy learning was done in classes as a group activity. The students met together with their teachers daily, with devotions as part of the programme.

Of much greater influence, in enabling people to read the Bible, are the training programmes, which they attended, after learning to read. The majority of people we know of who are literate, and are able to derive benefit for themselves through reading the Bible, are those who have attended one of the Bible schools for a time. This has led to consolidation of literacy skills, as well as a familiarity with the scriptures.¹⁵⁴

Fourthly, in order to build churches, which could edify themselves from scriptures, recognition was given in the 1960s that, contrary to the practice of the Brethren at that time, trained pastor-teachers were needed to build up the church, and “feed the flock of God”.¹⁵⁵ At Koroba, nine young, literate couples were selected, in consultation with the church elders, and sent to the Huli-language Bible school at Tari. They returned home, and began working with the Koroba churches in 1969, with the

¹⁵¹ Thorp, “Faithful Witness”, p. 29.

¹⁵² Owen McKirdy, *Treasury* (January 1964), p. 23, [Details of title of article are unknown].

¹⁵³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll N: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 263.

¹⁵⁴ At Yimbrasi Bible School, which started up in 1973, emphasis was placed on consolidating literacy skills. The students received Bible teaching, in the form of reading, printing, and comprehension, using the Bible as their text book. Bob Davis, “Bible School at Yimbrasi, PNG”, in *Treasury* (January/February 1980), p. 45.

¹⁵⁵ Liddle, “Kind of Churches Needed in New Guinea”, p. 45.

support of the elders, and have been the backbone of the church over the years. The fact that the traditional leaders were involved in the selection, and appointment, of these couples meant that the decision was theirs, and that their leadership was being respected. The young men and their wives were still very much part of the traditional culture, and worked within its parameters, and in cooperation with the elders. When revival swept through the valley in 1975-1976, it was this group of men, who, with the knowledge of their own culture and people, on the one hand, and access to the Bible on the other, were able to guide the churches, and give corrective teaching where needed. The early literacy teaching, followed by consolidation of literacy skills through Bible training, yet with recognition and respect of the traditional leaders, ensured that the churches were able to “edify themselves from the scriptures”.

B. The Role of Literacy in the Koroba Churches

What role does literacy now have in the Christian Brethren Churches (CBC)?¹⁵⁶ To answer this question, let us look at the experience of the Huli churches in the Koroba Valley.¹⁵⁷

Establishing Indigenous Churches

The pioneer missionary in this area was Kay Liddle. Some of the strategies, which he initiated, set the patterns for church practice. The Huli tribe was a non-literate society. Kay used oral methods of communication and teaching to share the gospel with them. By doing this, he included leaders of the community, some of whom became leaders in the church.

When the churches were first established in the valley, a weekly preachers' class was put in place to enable non-literate men to participate in the teaching programme. Men came in from the various churches to hear

¹⁵⁶ The Christian Brethren Churches (CBC) are the group of churches established by CMMML missionaries. In 1969, there were 75 churches. Almost 30 years later, there were 346 churches, according to the statistics held by the CBC Coordinating Committee, in March, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ The author, and her husband, worked with the Huli churches from 1971 to 1984, then visited back in 1990 and 1997. Many of the observations made in this section are from an “observer-participant” status.

and discuss the message, and learn the memory verse, then went back and shared that same message on Sunday.

Elara, who had come to know God through the ministry of Kay, and had led his people into Christianity, was not only a key community leader, but he also became a wise Christian leader. After the church in his area was established, Elara was selected by his own people to be one of the elders in his church. He remained non-literate, but regularly attended the weekly “preachers’ class” through the years, and frequently exhorted the Christians in Sunday services. He mentored younger, literate men, and encouraged them preach. When our own son asked to be baptised in 1983, it was Elara who counselled him (through an interpreter).

The Role of Literacy in the Church

By the 1970s, teaching of vernacular literacy was well established. Literacy had become a ministry of the churches in the community. Classes were held several times a week, and were open to the wider community. It became a group activity for people who traditionally worked together.

Literacy teaching became a testing ground for other ministries. It was mainly young men who became literacy teachers. The elders would observe their Christian life and commitment, and, on that basis, recommend them for Bible training.

Within church services, there was accommodation of the new skills offered by literacy. In the communion service, for example, the older, non-literate men dispensed the emblems with great solemnity. Yet they invariably asked a literate person to read the Bible verses relating to the emblems. In the teaching service, they would look around and invite a literate person to read the scriptures, and to give the Bible message. But when there was no suitable literate person there, a non-literate elder would give the message he had heard at the Friday preachers’ class, or tell a Bible story, and draw some applications from it. Church services remained largely oral in nature.

The role of group devotions was discussed earlier in this paper. This was very much a characteristic of church life at Koroba: an extended family

grouping, a clan, a local community, meeting together in the evening (and sometimes in the morning), to sing, pray, give testimonies, and share Bible verses. If there was a literate person present, they would have opportunity to read God's Word. Another practice, frequently observed while waiting for a service to begin, was the women sitting in small groups, reading scriptures, or hymnbooks, together.

The Huli churches functioned basically within traditional and oral patterns, yet incorporated literacy into church life, in a way which suited them, and which did not threaten the fabric of their society. The older, non-literate leaders were respected. They, in turn, were open to accepting innovation, and they mentored younger, literate men. They used literacy to serve the needs of the church, rather than allowing it to dominate, or become separate, from the church.

Finally, let us meet Samuel Angalu. He is currently the Executive Office of the Plantation Fellowships Ministries in the Western Highlands. He trained as a Pidgin literacy teacher at Koroba in 1980. Now he is a literacy advisor to three provinces in the Highlands. This includes 12 districts, 114 literacy teachers, and 50 schools. Samuel's role is to provide advice, guidance, ideas, and technical assistance. Samuel believes that literacy is essential to the growth of the church. He claims that when literacy declines, church life declines. When literacy grows, church life grows.¹⁵⁸ He is committed to literacy as an ongoing church ministry.

Conclusion

The teaching of literacy was an integral part of the strategy of the CMML missionaries working in PNG in the 1960s. There were some educationists, who specialised in adult literacy, and who developed primers, trained literacy teachers, and coordinated literacy programmes. They set up a literacy programme, which was accepted nationwide in PNG, and continues today in the 1990s. They did this, in their professional capacity, to meet the ongoing social and educational needs of non-literate adults within rural communities of a developing nation, just as

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Angalu, taped interview, April 1997.

schoolteachers engaged in education, and doctors and nurses engaged in medical work.

However, many of those who taught literacy in the early years, did so in their capacity as pioneer missionaries, and church planters. They used it as a strategy for contacting and evangelising people, and for discipling and nurturing new Christians. Literacy permeated the various levels of Bible teaching, from pre-evangelism to the training of pastor-teachers.

Much of this paper has gone into investigating the question, “Why literacy?” An examination of the motivation, and the evangelical heritage of the CMML missionaries, has shown us that literacy has not been an end point in itself, but a means to an end. The goal has not been, purely, to achieve a level of fluency in literacy skills to equip the learners to participate within a literate society.

One factor, which has become obvious, is that translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, and teaching of literacy, go hand-in-hand. Those who translate scriptures, do so for a particular audience. If there are no readers in that audience, then their efforts are in vain. The same motivation for translating scriptures applies to teaching literacy. Thus, SIL, in teaching linguistics to missionaries, also gives training in teaching literacy. Glenda Giles, who translated the Duna New Testament, emphasised that *both* translation *and* literacy were integral to any Bible-teaching programme within PNG. However, like literacy teaching, Bible translation is not an end in itself. It is also a means to an end.

The goal of both is making the Bible accessible to the people. Many missionaries aimed at empowering Christians to read the Bible for themselves. Churches, able to edify themselves from the scriptures, was a desirable end point. Leading figures through Christian history, such as Wycliffe, Erasmus, Luther, and Tyndale, have all worked towards making the Bible available, and accessible, to the common people. McGavran, Mason, and Culley, all emphasise the centrality of the Bible in modern mission, and the importance for people to have it in their own hands, and to be able to read it. Leading Evangelical scholars in our times, such as John Stott and J. I. Packer, rank the centrality of the Bible foremost over other

evangelical characteristics. The founders of the Brethren Movement, likewise, put top priority on the centrality of the Bible. Therefore, the more fundamental question is, “Why the Bible?”

The centrality of the Bible stems from the evangelical belief that the Bible is *the Word of God*. Through the Bible, God reveals Himself, and His will, to His people. His plan of salvation, through His Son, Jesus Christ, is contained in the Bible. Our theology, our Christian ethics and values, along with many of our church practices, are derived from the Bible. The Holy Spirit illumines spiritual truths, as we meditate upon its words. The Bible is also life changing. Walls talks about the translation principle, which releases the word about Christ to the people, so that He might life within the lives of His followers, within that environment. As scriptures are translated into a new language, and the people of that language have access to the translated scriptures, so Christ is incarnate in their culture. Thus, when people are able to read the Bible for themselves, they have the resources to make the Christian faith their own, and to grow to spiritual maturity.

The Bible also gives guidance for establishing churches. Reference has been made throughout this paper to establishing *indigenous* churches. When we speak of *indigenous* churches, we are not talking about imported Western church patterns, but about those, which reflect the culture, thought patterns, and modes of expression, of Melanesian peoples. CMML missionaries grappled with this question. Some believed that the New Testament gave a specific pattern to follow, and that their home churches followed that pattern. Therefore, there was biblical justification for importing that pattern from “home”. Others recognised that the New Testament contains principles, which apply differently in different cultures. They believed that it was important for Melanesian Christians to have access to the Bible, because, as they grew spiritually, it was for them to decide how to apply these principles in such a way that their churches would be both true to scripture, and culturally relevant.

To CMML missionaries in PNG, the obvious way for the people to have access to scriptures, once they were available, was for them to learn to read. They, themselves, came from a literate culture, where everyone has a

basic education. Within this literate, Christian culture, it is assumed that everyone is able to read the Bible. Not only that, but Western culture puts a high value on personal autonomy, and so, it is expected that each would have their own personal daily quiet time. So, the missionaries went to PNG with the expectation that their converts would also have their own personal quiet time. However, a high level of comprehension is required for people to read, and interact with, the text in a book. Completing a set of readers or primers does not automatically make people competent to read and comprehend scriptures. Further training, such as a Bible school course, is necessary to consolidate literacy skills, and improve comprehension.

In contrast, the Melanesian people were part of a non-literate, communal society. Some missionaries were sufficiently alert to recognise that there were oral ways of communicating, and teaching, within PNG. Story-telling techniques, memorisation of catechism and Bible verses, and group devotions, were some of the means used to evangelise, and nurture, new Christians. Early efforts were made to set up processes, by which non-literate leaders could be regularly taught, so that they, themselves, could participate in teaching, and leading their own people.

Key to this chain of teaching is the teacher. In the early stages of the work, this was the missionary. In the soon-to-become-independent country of PNG, it was not satisfactory to have the missionary continuously at the helm. It was essential for the ongoing life of the church that national people were trained to read, understand, and teach the Word of God.

History shows us that one way to do this is by taking selected people and giving them in-depth training, and thus create a "literate elite", who, in turn, minister to the needs of the "illiterate masses". But the whole thrust of the Reformation, and subsequent revival movements, was to make the scriptures accessible to the masses. The Brethren Movement strongly resists the creation of a clerical class, and autocratic styles of church government. It holds very strongly to the "priesthood of all believers". It is essential that sound Bible teaching is given by competent teachers. But it is also the right of every believer to relate to God directly, through access to the scriptures. Thus, even working within the parameters of an oral culture, the teaching of literacy was unavoidable.

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The Melanesian Journal of Theology (MJT) is published on behalf of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools by the Christian Leaders Training College of Papua New Guinea. MJT aims to stimulate the writing of theology in Melanesia. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics related to Melanesia. A full progressive index of the articles in the journal can be downloaded here. Current literacy data are generally collected through population censuses or household surveys in which the respondent or head of the household declares whether they can read and write with understanding a short, simple statement about one's everyday life in any written language. Some surveys require respondents to take a quick test in which they are asked to read a simple passage or write a sentence, yet clearly literacy is a far more complex issue that requires more information. For the UIS, the existing dataset serves as a placeholder for a new generation of indicators being developed. This lesson is based on the News Literacy class at the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University. For more on how to become a news literate citizen, go to <http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/getting-started/>. Images of the protests appeared on television, in newspapers and on the internet. Literate news consumers could be certain the demonstrations took place. But not all evidence is captured on digital equipment. Sometimes evidence comes in the most unreliable form – memory. It is well known that if a police officer interviews 10 witnesses about a crime, he will receive 10 different versions of events. Yet all were witnesses. A journalist seeking the truth should interview as many witnesses as possible in search of the true story.