

## DOCUMENTATION

### **Submission on the Study of Theology and Religion at UPNG to the Melanesian Council of Churches by a Consultation at Goroka, April, 2-5, 1987.**

*Endorsed by MCC Executive, April 7.*

In response to the recent request by university authorities for a statement from MCC on the future of theological and religious studies at UPNG, a representative consultation met at Goroka to formulate recommendations on this matter for consideration by the churches and the university.

Historically, the university embodies the mediaeval ideal of the *universitas studiorum*, a centre where all scholarly work finds a home and is promoted, a place where research in all fields meets and interacts.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, the “noble traditions of our ancestors”, and the “Christian principles that are now ours” are affirmed in the constitution. It is, therefore, a matter of considerable regret to the churches of Papua New Guinea that the study of religion has been allowed to lapse at the university. Students are thus deprived of the opportunity to reflect on the ethical and religious dimensions of Melanesian society, and its integral human development.

This consultation, representing churches, seminaries, and other tertiary institutions, wishes to affirm that the study of theology and religion is unquestionably an integral part of the responsibility of a national university.

Nearly 25 years ago, the churches urged the establishment of a Faculty of Theology at UPNG. The presence of theology seems to us indispensable, if graduates are to have a comprehensive education, whatever their field of specialisation. We therefore propose the establishment of a full Department of Theology and Religious Studies at UPNG.

We recommend that this should take place in the following stages:

## **1. Establishment of a Lectureship in Religious Studies (1989)**

This position would be funded by the churches for up to five years. The lecturer's initial contract would be for three years, with the possibility of a further term. We recommend a national salary scale plus allowances. Any distinction between national and expatriate in the matter of salary would only arise out of the constraints of an expatriate's situation, e.g., the need for his or her children to remain in another system of schooling.

The MCC should establish a competent committee, including representation of the university chaplains, to ensure clear understanding between church and university authorities.

This committee would have the task of implementing certain minimum conditions to apply to candidates for the lectureship, especially that they should be open to religious and theological enquiry. The committee would ensure that the churches are involved with the history department in the drafting of the advertisement and the short-listing of candidates. The eventual appointment by the University Staffing Committee must have the approval of the MCC Liaison Committee.

The courses, which would have to be ready for submission by May, 1988, would be of such a nature as to help people of one religious background, e.g., Melanesian, to explain themselves to people of another religious background within the context of the shared search for truth. They should measure up to the strictest academic criteria. The history department would consult the MCC Liaison Committee on course content.

It is recommended that the appointee would preferably have a Ph.D. with Third World teaching experience, and specialised training in theological and religious studies. He or she should be aware of the theological questions raised by the study of religion.

## **2. The Creation of a Department of Theology and Religious Studies (1994)**

In the light of the expected growth of interest in the courses in theology and religious studies, and in view of the need to develop postgraduate programmes, a separate department will be created. The staffing of such a department will require a professor and several lecturers, some of whom would be part-time or of visiting status. In co-operation

with the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, as well as with other university departments, many courses offered by the new department would be inter-disciplinary in nature.

As part of the guarantee of supplying sufficient numbers of students to justify the existence of such a department, suitably qualified students from MATS colleges maybe enrolled for certain courses or semesters. The proposed starting date is 1994.

### **3. Master's Programme in Theology and Religious Studies (1999)**

A long-term aim of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies will be to offer a Master's Programme, which will be both ecumenical and inter-disciplinary. The staff of the Melanesian Institute may assist in tutoring researchers, and an ecumenical residence may be established by 1999.

It will be the purpose of the MCC Liaison Committee, in consultation with the university, to monitor the implementation of these proposals. The churches accept their part of the responsibility for funding each stage of this project.

#### **Participants**

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