

MIPELA SIMBU! THE PIG-FESTIVAL AND SIMBU IDENTITY

Ennio Mantovani

The Melanesian Institute, Papua New Guinea

1. INTRODUCTION

In tribal societies a group finds and expresses its identity in and through culture. In turn, culture finds its deepest meaning in religion. As Paul Tillich writes: "Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion."¹ By studying the religion of a group one has the possibility of discovering the roots of the identity of that group.

In this paper I shall be analysing the Pig-Festival to come to an understanding of the meaning, the substance, of Simbu culture and consequently of the roots of Simbu's identity.

Simbus had their first contact with Europeans in the early thirties. Roman Catholic and Lutheran missionaries settled among them in 1933. The churches reacted differently towards the pig-festival. The Lutherans and later the SDA forbade the festival as expression of pagan faith. The Roman Catholics allowed the festival to continue once the so called pagan aspects were omitted. The communities were to decide on what to keep and what to omit.²

The festival was interpreted by the missionaries to be a sacrifice to the ancestors. It aimed at propitiating the spirits and the ancestors through the killing of pigs. Humans gave pork to the ancestors and spirits and the ancestors returned the favour by giving good life to the humans.

It is the contention of this paper that missionaries came to such an opinion of Simbu religious beliefs because the Simbu expressions of religion, especially the Pig-festival, have been interpreted from a wrong symbolic system.

The pig-festival has to be interpreted from the religious experience of the Melanesian tubers cultivators, which finds its oral expression in the *dema* mythology. From such a perspective the pig-festival becomes an impressive and authentic Melanesian religious expression, different from but not inferior to any other religious expression. To recognize this is to give identity and status to the people who have created and who celebrate this festival.

2. THE PIG-FESTIVAL

General Observations

The Pig-Festival expresses all the key values of Simbu society. These key values are 'life', and in the light of 'life', community, relationships, and exchange.³ In the case of the pig festival, 'life' is expressed through the long rows of pigs, the heaps of food, the abundance of shells etc. That wealth is the proof of the presence of 'life' for everyone to see. Relationships are at the centre of the celebration, with the

exchange aiming to strengthen old relationships, create new ones, and restore the broken. The community emerges strengthened in its identity, cemented by the experience of the co-operation, and with renewed consciousness of the meaning of its life.

The one element which is not so visible is the religious one. One may see the relationships to the ancestors expressed in the ritual, but that is not what is meant by religion. Relationship to the ancestors is a relationship to some very important members of the community; it is part of the social relations which are strengthened. But by religion we do not mean such a relationship. There is a relationship to the Ultimate, to the Source of everything. This relationship we shall call religion within the context of this article. The expression of this relationship to the Ultimate is not immediately obvious. One must understand the symbolic system to be able to see this religious dimension. The element I intend to highlight in the case study of the pig festival is the religious one: the concern with the Ultimate as experienced and expressed in what I call the biocosmic religion.

Biocosmic Religion

Let me explain what I mean by biocosmic religion.

At the base of any religion, taken as a public system of beliefs, rituals, behaviour, there is a religious experience. Within the context of Melanesia it is very important to realize that there are different types of religious experiences. There are experiences which can be grouped under the term theistic and there are other experiences which are as real and religious and which can be grouped under the term biocosmic.⁴ Let us explain the two categories. Characteristic of the theistic pattern is an Ultimate who is called God. Such a God is personal, both far and near, totally other. Everything utterly depends on God for its existence. Yahwism is a good example of theism.

The biocosmic religious experience is not characterized by an Ultimate called God, theos, but by an Ultimate experience as bios — the Greek word for life. It is characterized by the experience of 'something' which is absolutely necessary for existence, of 'something', in which everything participates. I call this 'something', 'life'. The more a reality participates in that 'life', the stronger, healthier, richer, more important that reality becomes. If 'life' ebbs away, then sickness and eventually death follow. 'Life' is more than biological life, or material existence, it is material, biological and spiritual. In a sentence: everything which is experienced as positive has its source in that 'life'; anything negative is experienced as a loss of that 'life'.

There is another essential element in this biocosmic experience. That 'life' is not experienced as personal either in itself (ontologically) or existentially. It is cosmic: everything participates in it in various degrees and everything is bound together into a unity by it. Animals and plants are different from humans, but are still linked together into a cosmos, an ordered whole, by that 'life' without which nothing could exist. Everything which exists shares in the same 'life'. I call this experience biocosmic from the two main elements in the word: the bios, Greek for life, and the cosmic from the Greek word for 'ordered universe' which means universality and interrelatedness. The symbolism of the biocosmic experience is horizontal, with a stress on the blood, the womb, the tomb, the phallus.

Religious Aspect of the Pig Festival

As Eliade observes: 'It is enough to say that all responsible activities (puberty ceremonies, *animal* or *human sacrifices* [my emphasis], cannibalism, funerary ceremonies, etc.) properly speaking constitute a recalling, a "remembrance", of the primordial murder.'⁵ The celebrations become memorials, i.e. the making present

of that event that initiated the flow of the true 'life'. By making present that life-giving event the participants are immersed into that true 'life' and come to participate in that 'life'.

The Changing Aspect of Traditional Religions

Having observed pig festivals for more than twenty years and listened to the discussions prior to and during the festivals, I have come to the conclusion that there seems to be a general outline of the celebration which is commonly known and followed but the details are very much a topic for heated arguments even within the same lineage.

The younger generation which blames the mission for the present-day changes misses the whole point.⁶ The reason for those changes is, and was, that rituals have to prove themselves efficacious. An efficacious ritual provides 'life'. One that fails to do so is changed. The fact that there are changes in ritual today, in favour of Christian symbols and rituals, is not a discarding of the way of the ancestors but a very traditional way of increasing the efficacy of the rituals. It is a pity that today's elite has been taught to understand the pig-kill only in theistic terms and not in Melanesian biocosmic terms. The irony is, that by wanting to freeze the rituals according to a certain tradition, the elite works towards the killing of traditional religious celebrations: they prevent them from being a living, changing religion and force them to become museum pieces or a mere folkloristic show.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE FESTIVAL

The Myth

Often the same theme is expressed in story-form as well as in drama. When I first observed the pig festival I was quite aware of the possibility of a myth rendering the theme of the pig-festival but I did not find such a myth. My article in "Christ in Melanesia"⁷ was written prior to the discovery of the myth.

The only myth I could find in the Gumine area of the Simbu goes as follows:

"Once upon a time some people were hunting frogs and followed the Kingaima creek to its source. When near its source they saw two beings who were dancing and wearing the decoration people today use to wear when they celebrate the pig-festival. Up to that moment people did not know how to celebrate the pig-festival. The frog-hunters tried to come closer to the two decorated beings but the two took off. One, though, had a bad leg and could not run. The frog-hunters grabbed him. He told them: 'When you kill pigs you should put on these ornaments and use the items you see. Do not forget: if men eat the liver of the pig, women should abstain from eating it; if women eat the liver of the pigs men should abstain.' That's how we learned to dance, how to put on our decorations, how to use the wig (*gibilinkobe*), the *geruas*, the flutes (*nebare*) and how to kill the pigs."

The myth gives the origin of the festival but not the nature of the festival. It was only later that I discovered a myth that seemed to give the meaning of the festival.

I found the myth reported by William Bergmann among the Kamanuku further to the north. The Sina-Sina, Gumine and Salt Nomane areas do not seem to know such a myth. The myth is of the dema type and goes like this:

Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived in heaven. One day they appeared like a flash of lightning through the sky and descended to the ground,

touching the tip of the Kama shrub on their way. The elder brother's name was Mondo and the younger's name was Gande. They came and lived at Wonkama. Mondo made an *arigl* head-gear, went to the bush, and stayed there until night. Then he came home and slept. Gande wondered what the elder brother was doing in the bush all day long. Next morning Gande followed his older brother to the bush without being seen. As soon as Mondo arrived he took off the *arigl* head-gear, drove a stick into the ground which had a fork on top of it and hung his *arigl* on it. He then bent down and started digging as pigs do. He kept digging until night. At dusk he took his *arigl* and put it on, but the *arigl* kept slipping off his head. So he said 'Did Gande come that you act this way? Stay put!' He then went home wearing his *arigl*. When he came home he asked Gande, 'Did you follow me to the bush and see me?' 'Yes, I came and saw you.' Mondo continued, 'You saw where I hung my *arigl*. You must kill me and bury me there and put a fence around the place. Kungi grass will soon grow on the spot and when this happens, go and look.' So Gande took his brother to that place, killed him, buried him there and put a fence around the place. Then he went home. He kept an eye on the place and watched the Kungi grass grow. Within the fence there appeared several pigs of different colours — brown, yellow, white, black, and some with black spots and some with stripes. He returned with his parents and brothers and put ropes around their legs and took them home. Since that time we have bred pigs and eaten them, and we have made *arigl* head-gear and other decorations.

If the man Mondo had not done this for us how could we have obtained the pigs, how could we have bred them? Gande saw them first where he killed and buried his brother and therefore we have pigs now.⁸

This myth does not talk directly about the origin of the pig-festival but about the origin of everything of value. Those values are symbolized by the pig which becomes the symbol for "life". Mondo is both brother (human) and pig. His/its killing by Gande brings about all the values that were lacking before. The myth refers to the origin not of human existence but of "life".

It is in the light of this dema-myth that I intend to interpret the pig-festival. The pig-festival is the making present of the event that originated 'life'. By celebrating the pig-festival the whole clan/cosmos participates in the fullness of "life".

The Preparation

Once it has been decided to hold a pig festival, one can hear the flutes⁹ being blown in pairs at night by initiated males. Meanwhile new gardens are being prepared to have sufficient food for the celebrations: there will be many visitors to be fed. Eventually the long houses around the dancing ground are erected which will serve as shelter during the festival. Immediately before the slaughtering of the pigs, a post¹⁰ is erected at the side of the ground where the pigs will be killed. In modern times this post can have a cross nailed on it or it can be simply an iron cross. It is usually a short post of about two feet, driven into the ground, so that most of the post protrudes. Around this post, the people who are holding the festival build a little fence and next to it place their digging-sticks, spades, axes, sweet potato runners, sugar cane and ropes which are used to tie the domesticated pigs. In at least one instance I witnessed, money boxes were laid around the enclosure too.

The Dance

A few months before the actual pig-kill the people who celebrate the festival put on their finery and start dancing. The first few weeks are reserved for the dance

of the children. The parents put all their finery on their children, mostly girls,¹¹ and the children dance on their home ground. Some of the children wear a special wig called *arigl* in the Kuman language of the Simbu and *gibilinkobe* in the Golin dialect of Gumine.¹² After two or three weeks the men take over the dance and a few of the marriageable girls dance with them. They dance first on their home ground and then visit other dancing grounds to perform there. Some of the men wear the *arigl* wig.

The Killing

The pigs are staked on the dancing ground. Early in the morning the pigs are killed by clubbing them on the head. While clubbing them, the people who do this move their lips. They told me that they invite the spirit (*iban*) of the slaughtered pig to go to the place where the piglets used to feed. When the slaughtered pigs are lined up in rows, the men extol the achievements of the holder of the festival. Sometimes the pigs are given away at this time but sometimes they are cooked first. The owners sing away the hair of the pigs and then proceed to cut them up. Meanwhile other men dig the pits where the pork and tubers are going to be steam-cooked. In the past, before the coming of Christianity, people used to hold or carry the so-called *gerua* boards during the killing.¹³

The Distribution

The following day the guests come in their finery and perform a dance. The dancing group is composed of two lines of dancers facing each other, with a group of dancers in the middle who move up and down between them. While the side rows are stationary, the inside groups advance towards the end of the two rows but then turn their backs and go back. Then, still with their backs turned, they come back once more. In front of the guests' dancing group there is a line of hosts brandishing spears and axes and, in dance form, obstructing the progress of the guests' group. At a certain moment, the hosts move to the side and the guests' group pours into the centre of the dancing ground. Now the distribution of pork takes place. I have seen distribution of money on poles as well to pay for marriages and births. After receiving the gifts the guests leave the ground.

4. TENTATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN SYMBOLS

The Flutes

I wrote in "Christ in Melanesia".

No real myth is remembered about the flutes. The old men no longer know the meaning of the flutes. They only know that they (the flutes) are 'strong' in the sense that they can make the boys strong and therefore are shown to them at initiation to change them from boys into men. They also make pigs grow. Because of this belief among the Yui people of the Salt region I saw the flutes being blown outside the pig festival during a girls' initiation before the pigs were slaughtered.¹⁴

In the Gumine myth the flutes are shown to the people by the two mythical beings.

The men told me that they played the flutes for the pigs so that they would grow and fill the eyes of the beholder and the bellies of the guests.¹⁵

There is also another fact to be considered. The flutes, said to be as male and female, are played only in pairs and, male and female together, symbolize fertility, life, and new life.

Linguistically, according to John Nilles, there is a link between the flutes and female menstruation and genitals, which also indicates that the flutes are symbolic of fertility.¹⁶

According to K.E. Reed, the flutes symbolize *nama*: 'To the Gahuku-Gama the sacred flutes are a manifestation of the external supernatural force which watches over their well-being and destiny.'¹⁷ Read further explains that the force which is symbolized by *nama* is the power of society itself.

Both Read and Nilles take this power to be personal. Read says it 'watches over their well-being ...' and Nilles calls it 'a real animated personal being'.¹⁸ Nilles says 'personal', though his informants never went beyond a 'something that exists'.¹⁹ I agree with Nilles that it is something very 'hard to define'.²⁰ The question is: is that 'something that exists' a survival from theistic past when the ancestors of the Simbus were collectors — Read and Nilles can be read in that sense — or is it the experience of the cultivators, of that Ultimate as 'life' on which the whole cosmos depends? 'Life' seems to be the function about which present Simbus are concerned.

The flutes' function, as 'sanction of men's influence over women', seems to have been accidental. Recent events have shown it to be an effect rather than the cause of the practice. My experience is mostly in the time when the flutes were public, although in 1963 I visited an area where the flutes were still secret. In all the other cases and places the flutes were not secret anymore. The fact that they were still blown after they had been made public indicates that the purpose of the exercise was not primarily to deceive and dominate the women but, as my informants told me, to make the pigs grow, and to make things grow.

According to R. Johnson the power of the flutes comes from their secret use, from the secrecy which surrounds them. The secrecy gives meaning to them as tools to keep male superiority as a means of social oppression.²¹ In my opinion there is more to it than only secrecy. Johnson reports that the flutes were used first by the mythical ancestors to initiate their sons,²² implying that the flutes are powerful in themselves and that is the reason why the ancestors handed them down to their descendants. Secondly the flutes used to belong to the women and the men stole the flutes from them.²³ Women are symbols of 'life' and fertility. Is the myth saying that, even if the flutes are handled by men today, they are nevertheless powerful and loaded with 'life' like a woman? An explanation why the myth of the theft is not part of the instruction at the boys' initiation could be that recounting the myth would only prove to the boys that women are fundamentally more powerful than men — an idea that the initiation intends to undermine in favour of male superiority.

The Post

The phallic nature of the post does not have to be proved to anyone who has seen it. Even for those clans who do not perform the symbolic coitus as described by Louis Luzbetak and Nilles²⁴, the phallic symbolism seems fairly obvious. That the post must be planted into the tomb of the ancestor seems to be symbolic too. The link, tomb/womb, is rather common in mythological narration. The grave of Mondo is the womb giving birth to 'life'. The planting of the phallic symbol into the tomb/womb, analogous to the sexual union, could be a symbol for 'life'. What Luzbetak and Nilles describe is an alternative, more explicit form, though Luzbetak mentions the 'burial' of the post as well.²⁵

'Life', symbolized by the phallic object, is proclaimed to be based, not on any ancestor, but on the original ancestor. From all reports, and from my observations, the post is never planted on a grave in the cemetery (historical ancestors), but on a special grave elsewhere: the grave of a non-historical, mythical, ancestor. Could

the symbolic message be saying that 'life' is coming from the tomb/womb of the mythical ancestor? Is that mythical ancestor the dema of which we heard in the Kamanuku myth?

The substitution of the cross for the post,²⁶ or the imposition of the cross on the original post, would be a Christian statement that the cross is the true symbol of 'life', which symbol was prefigured by the post in the past.

The argument about the tomb of the mythical ancestor is not as stringent as it might sound. As a matter of fact, though the dead are buried in individual cemeteries, at least among the Golin of the Gumine area, the soul of the deceased (*iban*) in times of crises e.g. sickness in the family, is lead to the burial ground of the mythical ancestors where eventually the pig festival is going to take place. (This ritual raises interesting questions: why are the historical ancestors placated by being led to the mythical ancestors grave? Does it express a need of the historical ancestors for something they do not have but which can be found with the mythical ancestor?) In spite of this fact in time of family crisis pigs still seem to be slaughtered in the individual cemeteries while the big slaughtering which climaxes the pig-festival is held at the mythical ancestral grave. It remains true that the post is never planted in an individual cemetery or on an historical grave, no matter how famous the historical ancestor may be. It seems to say that 'life', as symbolized by the phallic object, at least does not come directly from the historical ancestors.

The Killing

Whether one fully agrees with Eliade or not, that all sacrificial killings in this type of religion are memorials of the original killing, the theistic symbolic system does not explain the facts I saw or heard described. Even if we admit, that some inconsistency is a characteristic of human behaviour, one must still assume a basic consistency in any cultural system.

Why do those who kill the pits send the 'spirit' of the pigs away to the place where pigs used to feed? In the mortuary feasts the spirits of the pigs are not sent away but presented to the dead. In this killing just described however, the spirits of the pigs are not given to the ancestors. What then is given to the ancestors?

The explanation given by the performer of that ritual, and also accepted by the missionaries, is that the sprinkling of the blood which pours from the noses of the pigs, gives growth to the sweet potatoes, to the pigs which will subsequently be tied with ropes sprinkled with it, and to the gardens which will be prepared and cultivated with tools also sprinkled with blood. So it seems then that it is the blood which gives growth not the ancestors.

The Blood

From my observation at the various pig-festivals and pig-kills for rites of passage it seems that the blood of the pigs is not "sacred" and powerful in itself but only when and if it is used as symbol of the violent death of the pig.

There is no pouring out of blood in the sense of a blood offering. The blood seems to be only an occasional by-product. Not all the pigs bleed that much. If blood would be the main thing then people would make sure that blood pours out of the pig. It is not done. The blood which falls on the ground is left there and I saw people stepping on it and dogs licking it. The idea never comes to people of carrying and sprinkling it in the gardens.²⁷ It seems that it is not the blood in itself which is sacred and powerful but its symbolism, its symbolic relation to the actual killing. The blood is not sacred in itself. It is mainly used to make sausages!

A totally different picture is given when we consider the menstrual blood. Menstrual blood is powerful in itself and people are in fear of it. A man can get sick and

die because of contact with it whether accidental or not. Not so with the blood of the pigs. People step on it, make sausages out of it, they put seasoning in it; they cook and eat it. Such food is far from being special in any way. It is special because seldom not because of other properties. The blood of the pigs is valid only when used as a symbol. The traditional ritual of sprinkling of blood on the sweet potato runners, the sugar cane, the digging-sticks and other gardening tools, signifies that, for Simbus, 'life' and growth come from the killing of the pig of which the blood is the symbol. If this be so, then the theory that the ancestors are 'givers of "life"' is a misinterpretation. The interpreters are using criteria from their own religious system to evaluate another. That many Melanesians will agree with the missionaries' interpretation is more indicative, I believe, of the strength of the churches' teaching on this matter, than on any weakness in the argument.

Because the post is a phallic symbol, it seems to imply that human sexuality receives vitality from the same source as the gardens and the ancestors: the ritual killing of the pig of which the grave of the mythical ancestor is a symbol. In the ritual, human sexuality is brought into contact with the source of 'life'. In the mythical perspective, the source of 'life' is the killing of the pig which makes present, or reactualizes, the original killing of Mondo or of the dema on whose tomb the post is planted.

If, within the context of the symbolic system of the digging-stick cultivators, we take the ritual killing to be 'the making present of the original killing' which initiated the flow of true 'life', then everything else seems to follow logically. The killing is the actual event which gives 'life', and the whole cosmos participates in the abundance of 'life'. That participation of the cosmos in 'life' is symbolized and dramatized by the smearing of the blood, or the painting with red colour, of whatever participates in that growth or flow of 'life'. The whole cosmos is symbolized by the sweet potato runners, the working tools, the graves of the historical ancestors, and the post.

The Dance

It took me a long time to work out the symbolism of the dance because I did not try to understand it within the context of the biocosmic religious system, where community symbolizes 'life', where sex and marriage serve the community. The link with the birds of paradise, expressed beautifully in the documentary film, 'The Voices in the Forest',²⁸ further helps us understand the meaning of the dance. As the male bird through its sound and display attracts the female, so the group of dancers entice female spectators to join them and become their wives.

Another symbolism which seems to be represented by at least some groups and their dances is the ambivalence of relationships. It symbolizes the enmity which is eventually overcome and the friendly relationships which triumph and are expressed and cemented through the pork exchange.

The Arigl

People use a wig called *arigl*. Not everybody wears such a wig. It is worn by some dancers whether children or adults. I saw it being worn by women the day of the actual killing of the pigs. I sometimes saw the *arigl* lying on the bodies of the dead pigs when they were lined up before distribution. The myth says that Mondo was wearing an *arigl*. I was unable to find out many details about the *arigl* wig, although I was told that it is a sign that a man has many pigs and hence a sign of abundance of wealth, of 'life'. The myth links the *arigl* wig with Mondo himself. In the Gumine myth the wig is given by the two mythical beings. The wig is one of the symbols which have been retained by Christian Simbus when performing the pig-kill.

The Gerua Boards

In the past there was another important symbol which today has been discarded because, in the eyes of the Simbus, it was incompatible with Christianity: the *gerua* boards. However, it seems that in the eyes of the people this omission has not compromised the success of the pig-kill. Does it mean that the *gerua* boards are not essential? Or have the Simbus found a functional substitute? Who told the Simbus that the *gerua* boards were anti-Christian? The missionary of the time did not know what the *geruas* were, and he did not take part in the people's discussions.²⁹ What perception did the Simbus have of Christianity at that time? What did they see in the *geruas* that made them think they were incompatible with Christianity?

The *geruas* have been discarded, the flutes have been made public, and the *arigl* continues. Why the difference? Do the *geruas*, beside their overt function, have another function which is thought to be incompatible with Christianity? These are pertinent questions for any analysis of the *gerua* board. Joachim Sterly writes: 'They (the *gerua* boards) are sacred objects of cult, which make it possible to preserve the spiritual breath of the pigs which, as they come from the body of Mondo, are as siblings of the human beings.'³⁰ This 'spiritual breath' is like a fluid emanating from the pigs.³¹ I agree that one has a problem in expressing the reality the Simbus perceive in the *gerua* complex, but I doubt whether a term like 'fluid' is ever going to bring us near to a formulation of the reality behind *gerua*. We seem to be dealing with symbols of realities which are perceived but escape description. I suggest that *gerua* symbolizes, or is linked closely with 'life' of which the killings of the pigs is an efficacious sign. That 'life', as Sterly rightly says, is cosmic.³² It is more than fertility: it is growth, well-being, health, wealth, and good relationships. It is not only limited to the human sphere; the whole cosmos represented by children, pigs, gardens, environment, shares in it.

If the *geruas* had another symbolic function in the past, at least when I was collecting my information they had been interpreted to fit the biocosmic religious system. This interpretation is indicated by the painting of the rhombus on the *gerua* boards. In Kuman, the rhombus is called *Mondo numbuno*.³³ Both the fertility sign of the rhombus and the name given to it indicate the boards are now understood in terms of the Mondo myth and belong to the complex of the symbols of 'life'.

Summarizing

All the symbols seem to point to growth and 'life'. They can be grouped into two categories: one centering around sex, the other around violent death.

Tentative results of this analysis

The pig festival is first of all not an offering to the historical ancestors, to the dead. It is not an offering to the mythical ancestors either. It is the repetition of the original killing which brought 'life' to the Simbus. It is not a repetition in the sense of a new distinct act in linear history. What is done now is what has been done in the past. The two cannot be separated. The whole power of the original act is present now.

The ancestors and spirits, symbolized by the graves, *geruas*, flutes, wig, participate with humans and the rest of the cultural cosmos symbolized by the pig, the potato runners, the instruments of work, the money boxes, in this event. By participating they share in the 'life' that flows from the primordial killing of which the pig festival is an efficacious symbol.

From a theological point of view the pig festival can be understood as a statement of faith that the whole cosmos utterly depends on something which is not of the cosmos, but without which the cosmos cannot exist. That something I call 'life', a

life that is not only biological but spiritual as well, a 'life' which is health, wealth, well-being, good relationships, good name, prestige, meaning etc.

Further, that 'life' is mediated through the death of the dema, a death which was the genesis of this historical time. That 'life' is a gift that the cosmos could not obtain by itself. The ritual is fundamentally not a human initiative but obedience to a non-human command. The ritual must follow the tradition: what the dema commanded. It is an act of active obedience.

The blood and the colour red symbolize this original life-giving-death. To smear with blood or red is a symbol of the necessity of 'life' and the desire for the flow of 'life'. It is further a symbol of the certain hope to be able to participate in that flow of 'life'. That 'life' does not come from the symbol but from the symbolized i.e. the original killing.

Sex, sexual organs, the male-female pair, symbolize the 'life' which comes from the death of the dema. While blood symbolizes more the origin, the efficacious killing, sex symbolizes more the result, 'life' itself. In this sense blood and sex are religious symbols and can become religious rituals when they are acted out.

This is a possible interpretation of the pig festival according to the biocosmic religious symbolic system. It opens up great possibilities for dialogue. The theistic religious symbolic system explains the killing in terms of sacrifices to ancestors and so in terms of idolatry. In the theistic system, sex outside marriage is a simple aberration based on human sinfulness. Ritual is human manipulation of the divine. I have my doubts whether the latter is a more accurate explanation.

5. CONCLUSION

The first step towards recognising the identity of the Simbus is for outsiders to recognize the different symbolic system through which Simbus life must be interpreted. It would be more sensible to call the type of primal religion I just described by its proper name i.e. biocosmic instead of animistic, which latter term defines more our ignorance than the nature of that religion. This would be the first step towards recognising the identity of all those who profess that religion. Once we start using the right name and the right symbolic system then we become aware that we deal with equal partners in a dialogue. Christianity is now part of the Simbu culture and religion. It can be a foreign element rejected by a healthy body like a survival from colonial time or it can be a deepening in dialogue of the Mondo myth and its re-enactment. When fifty years ago the Simbus substituted the cross for the post on the tomb of the mythical ancestor they entered into a dialogue with Christianity using the language of visible symbols in an effort to safeguard their own specific identity. May this paper show the way for a new appreciation of the Simbu religion and so of the Simbu identity so that what has been done in a more intuitive way fifty years ago can be continued in a reasoned way today.

END NOTES

Simbu is the present official spelling used when referring to the Province which used to be called Chimbu.

1. Tillich (1972:42).
2. Schafer (1981:216-218).
3. Mantovani (1984a:195-212).
4. Mantovani (1984b:31:33), (1977:156).
5. Eliade (1978:38).
6. *Niugini Nius*, Tuesday, January 3, 1984.
7. Mantovani (1977:154-165).
8. Bergmann (1970, ill:32-34).
9. The flutes are made of bamboo. They are about 60cm long and 5cm thick, One end is closed and 10cm from that end there is a hole through which the player blows adjusting the opening at the other end of the flute with the palm of his hand. The flutes are always played in pairs by males. Cf. Johnson (1982), Lutkehasu (1982), Nilles (1950, 1969, 1982), Read (1952), Sterly (1977) and Wedgwood (1937).
10. Post: it can be a pole of between 4 and 5 metres protruding about 50 cm from the roof of the *Bolin* house. It can be a short post of 60cm, 10cm in diameter, which is driven into the ground and protrudes about 40cm Cf. Luzbetak (1954), Nilles (1982).
11. As I was told the boys will have many opportunities to dance when they grow up, while their sisters will not have any opportunity once they are married. Lately though, I saw married women dancing with the young girls prior to the pig-kill.
12. The *arigl* or *aregl* is a stiff wig covering the back and sides of the head and neck and reaching to the shoulders. Cf. Sterly (1977:135), Nilles (1969, 1982).
13. The *gerua* board is a piece of flat, cut wood, with geometrical designs. It can be small, about 20cm by 8cm, or large, over 150cm by 50cm. Cf. Luzbetak (1954:106ff), Knight (1979:181-182), Mantovani (1977:158), Nilles (1950:59-60, 1969:69, 1982:253-254), Sterly (1977:18ff).
14. Mantovani (1977:159)
15. Cf. Sterly (1977:46)
16. Nilles (1960:61, 1969:135;136, 1982:255). Lutkehaus says the same about the flutes on Manam Island (1982).
17. Read (1952:24).
18. Read (1952), Nilles (1950:60).
19. Nilles (1950:60).
20. Nilles (1950:60).
21. Johnson (1982:417, 422).
22. Johnson (1982:421).
23. Johnson (1982:418). Cf. Lutkehaus (1982).
24. Luzbetak (1954:109), Nilles (1982:251), A *gerua* board of diamond shape with a perforation in the middle was slipped over the *Bolin* pole.
25. Luzbetak (1954).
26. Knight (1979:188-189), Mantovani (1977:157), Schafer (1981:219).
27. The idea is known in the North Coast's Mythology. Z'graggen (1983:276)
28. 'Voices in the Forest', from the series: *Edge of Survival*, ABC. Written and narrated by David Attenborough.
29. Schafer (19081:216-218).
30. Sterly (1977:73).
31. Sterly (1977:21,25).
32. Sterly (1977:21).
33. Nilles (1969:164) translates it simply: 'diamond-shaped sign'.

REFERENCES

- Bergmann, W
1969-70 *Die Kamanuka*, 4 Vols. (Manuscript). Mutdapilly M/S 121 Harrisville, Qld., Australia.
- Eliade, Mircea
1978 *A history of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 1, Chicago & London: Chicago University Press.

Johnson, Ragnar

1982 'A Re-Examination of the New Guinea Sacred Flute Complex: The Spirit Cries Played During Ommura Male Initiations'. *Mankind* 13(5):416-423.

Knight, James

1975 'Interpreting the Pig-kill', in Norman Habel (ed.), *Powers, Plumes and Piglets*, Adelaide: AASR, Sturt College of Advanced Education.

Lukehaus, Nancy

1954 'Ambivalence, Ambiguity and the Reproduction of Gender Hierarchy in Manam Society: 1933-1979', *Social Analysis*, 12.

Luzbetak, Louis

1954 'The Socio-Religious Significance of a New Guinea Pig Festival', *Anthropological Quarterly* 27:59-80; 102-128.

Mantovani, Ennio

1977 'A Fundamental Melanesian Religion', in *Point 1977: Christ in Melanesia*.

1984a 'Traditional Values and Ethics' in Darrell Whiteman (ed.) *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, Goroka: The Melanesian Institute

1984b 'What is Religion' in Ennio Mantovani (ed.) *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions* Goroka: The Melanesian Institute.

Nilles, John

1950 'The Kuman of the Chimbu Region, Central Highlands, New Guinea', *Oceania* 21(1):25-65.

1982 'Zu einigen Glaubensvorstellungen und Kulthandlungen der Simbu im Zentralen Hochland von Neuguinea', *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*, Bd.XXXIV, Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Read, Kenneth

1952 'Nama Cult of the Central Highlands, New Guinea', *Oceania* 23(1):1-25.

Schäfer, Alfons

1981 'Christianized Ritual Pig-Killing', *Catalyst* 11(4):213-223

Sterly, Joachim

1977 'Über ein gerua-Kult im Zentralen Hochland von Neuguinea', *Baessler Archiv, Neue Folge*, Bd.XXV, 1-82.

Tillich, Paul

Theology of culture. London Oxford; 1959/1972

1959/1972 NY: Oxford University Press.

Zgraggen, John

1983 "Topics of New Guinea Legends" in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol 42, 2: 263-288.