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Heroes, Journeys and Change: Themes in Precolonial Religious Life in Papua New Guinea

Introduction

To launch this exploration of themes in religious life of Papua New Guineans during the many centuries before the coming of new foreign ideas and institutions with colonialism, I will begin with a hero legend told me by an old man in August 1972 in the mountains of Enga Province.

This is the legend of Pandakusa and was told to me by a man in his fifties who had been crippled by leprosy. This man, now an important leader and teacher in the local community, was seen as a 'man of wisdom' in the knowledge handed down from ancestors. Probably about five generations earlier people had migrated north from the Lagaip valley into the lower altitude of the Maramuni valley closer to the Sepik. They carried this legend and other essentials of their heritage with them into this new environment.

We sat in a small group around the fire in the local Lutheran mission out-station. Our small audience included, among others, the indigenous leader of that church who was on visitation. In the hushed glow of the embers the story-teller lay down on his side, as if sleeping, and the hero legend unfolded in the mounting cadences of his chant, interrupted only at regular intervals by the encouraging calls of his close relatives. The following sketches only the barest bones of the content of this moving performance in which the tale, like running water, flowed as a creation rich in music and wisdom.

The Legend of Pandakusa

Pandakusa was born to his aged mother, of an unknown father, in the midst of the dry season. He quickly grew, built himself a house,

away from his mother's dwelling, cleared land and planted it. When this homestead was established on the valley floor, Pandakusa set out on a hunting journey into the forest on the ridges above. There he had some success, but a strange thing happened. While hunting near an old tree which had sacred *sangai* plants sprouting at its top, he was suddenly confronted by a young woman who, because of her dazzling beauty, he saw immediately as a sky being. This young woman asked him how his hunting was faring. He told her of his quite moderate success; but she said she would like to share a part of cooked possum meat with him at his house. With renewed vigour Pandakusa reaped a good harvest of possums sheltering in nearby trees and with his catch and his new companion, whose beauty had entangled him, he journeyed down into his house.

His mother also had a woman guest in her house, with whom she was sharing food brought by the guest. Over the next few days Pandakusa's energies were absorbed in preparing food to share with his beloved companion, hunting in the forest for more and moving back and forth between his own house and that of his mother. Stage by stage he was being torn between his love for his companion and his obligations to his mother and her guest. While he was open with his companion, gathered and shared food freely with her according to her wants, he became more and more guarded and formal in his relations with his mother and her companion. Pandakusa looked upon this second woman with growing fear and concern, seeing her not simply as a beautiful and generous guest whom his mother would wish him to choose as a wife, but more clearly as a devouring, insinuating forest spirit, the very opposite of the beautiful sky person whom he had recognised as his own companion when he met her deep in the high forest. He had taken her already as his wife.

The tensions grew to an explosive point when his mother and her guest sought to capture and hold Pandakusa in her house to prevent him from returning to his own. Pandakusa raged and broke free, hurtling across the gardens to his house only to find that his beloved had gone. In a fit of terrible rage, he snatched up his weapons and ran to his mother's house to rid himself of these troublesome women. There he also found the house deserted. He spied footprints in the grass and hurried along the path which they seemed to follow till he came to a river where all trace of them was lost. He grieved now for the loss of his mother, but more deeply for the loss of his beloved. In his grief he cut off the little finger from his left hand, hurled it into the stream and sat there for many days swallowed up in mourning.

When his time of mourning had come to an end, Pandakusa saw clearly a set of footprints in the mud beside the river. These led him to the foot of a huge tree at the base of a high mountain. From this tree hung a vine. He was now convinced that if he climbed the tree, using the vine, he would find a way to the place where his

beloved may now reside within her community of sky beings. He must now make a decision about whether to go on this journey to the mountain-top home of sky beings. After weighing up the situation, he made his decision to venture on this journey to the unknown. First, he returned to his deserted homestead settlement in the valley and to his house. He cooked meat and vegetables to take as gifts of friendship and he clothed himself in oil, shells, his wig and feather decorations.

His journey along the vine took him up the tree till he came to a branch which led him like a bridge across to the mountain. He followed a pathway up to a high ridge, and there, so far from his own valley homeland that he could no longer see his settlement, he journeyed until he came to a beautiful dancing ground bordered by some houses. He went from house to house, listening until he heard a familiar voice calling his name from inside. At the door of the house he offered his food gifts to the occupants and entered to rejoin his beloved. After they embraced and shared food, she told him that there would be a dance and feast the next day and that he must be accepted by her brothers if he were to take part in the portioning and exchange of pigs.

Her brothers returned from a trading journey, met and accepted Pandakusa and all went next morning to the dancing ground. In the midst of the dance, a strange new group of guests were seen coming from higher up the mountain. The leader of this group was a most striking and handsome older man who walked into the centre and commanded all the singing and dancing to cease. He beckoned Pandakusa to join him in the centre of the ground and then addressed him. He told Pandakusa that he was indeed a sky being who had given the life to his mother by which she conceived and bore him, Pandakusa his son. He then rebuked him for his failure to give due hospitality and friendship to his mother's guest, by favouring too much the woman he chose as his beloved. His father then informed him that he must be tried for these weaknesses in his relationship to his mother, if he were to gain his true identity. Pandakusa then went through a series of trials. In a series of pig exchanges he was challenged by both women (his wife and his mother's guest) to choose and distribute special pigs; each woman led him to a tree from which he was bidden to gather shells and other valuables. Through each trial he mended broken and unbalanced ties between himself and the women and their relatives and he became a bringer of new wealth and new institutions of exchange, reconciliation and purification to his descendants.

The story ended with Pandakusa and his two wives following his father on a journey into the higher mountain where he himself became transformed into a sky being.

Pandakusa the Hero

The fortunes and identity of Pandakusa are ambiguous and this legend is rich in themes and meanings. It is possible here to consider a number of principal themes and meanings about this hero: Pandakusa, sky beings and identity; his journeys and discoveries; Pandakusa as a culture bringer and founder.

Sky Beings and Hero Identity in the Legend

In the final confrontation when Pandakusa's father reveals his own and his son's true identities and chides his son for not fulfilling obligations of hospitality to his mother's guest, we discover that this hero is the son of a sky being. His mother, whose guest he feared and spurned as a dangerous forest woman, is revealed to be herself a woman of earth and forest who bore the hero generated in her by this extraordinary and beautiful sky being and father who now reveals identities and bids Pandakusa to seek his own true identity through reconciliation.

Sky beings were significant to Enga precolonial religion. One anthropologist has recorded the following about them in the 1950s within the first generation of the colonial era:

> "The people believe that the land with its flora and fauna has always existed in essentially the form that they now see, although for a long time no humans lived on it. The only quasi-human beings in existence then were the male sun and the female moon, "the father and mother of us all" who resided in the sky ... Eventually this pair begot many children, now called "the causal or originating people", who also live and still live, in the sky. These in turn have had many descendants ... regarded ... as the sky people. They are light-skinned immortals, who, in other respects, resemble humans. They are organised into a lineage system, and they marry, feud, grow crops, raise pigs, build houses, pay death compensations, and so forth.
>
> At some specific point in time and for reasons now unknown the sky beings decided to colonise the earth ... Accounts of how this was done differ today from clan to clan ... (Meggitt, 1965: 49-51)."

It would appear from this interpretation of pre-colonial beliefs about sky beings that the ambiguous Pandakusa, half-sky being, half-child of an earth/forest/woman/spirit emerges at that stage in history when sky beings began to colonise the earth. His journeys and the consequences of his trials suggest that he is both a culture bringer or culture hero and a founder of a group of brother clans, even though this legend closes with his going to the realms of the sky people.

Journeys and Discoveries in the Legend

The second set of themes in the Pandakusa legend concerns his journeys and discoveries. There are a number of journeys upon which this young hero goes, each with its own particular significance

for the meaning of the legend. The first is his journey away from the small cultivated settlement established by his mother and himself near the valley floor. This is a journey full of dangers and possibilities, because he is moving away from the security and order of a settled human environment to the unknown, dangerous, ambiguous and powerful environment of the forest which lies on the ridges above his settlement. In many Enga legends, there is a similar deep tension and contrast between secure, ordered human settlements and dangerous, unknown and powerful forest environments. Note here that, in his search for food as a hunter in the mountain forest, he comes across a tree having in it the sacred *sangai* plants—bog iris plants hidden in the forest and used as powerful ritual objects to purify young men from the pollution of living with mothers and sisters as children in human settlements. Here, because of what is promised later in the legend to Pandakusa and his sons by his wife's brothers, we can assume that in some way Pandakusa becomes himself the founder and bringer of this purification rite for youths to his descendants. But certainly he, as a young unmarried bachelor on this first hunting journey up into the forest, foreshadows the coming of these *sangai* purification rites to his people, by himself going to these hidden plants.

There, in the forest, as so often occurs in Enga legends, he is confronted with a paradox and a choice: he encounters a beautiful woman, who may be a dangerous forest spirit at the place where the *sangai* plants (which embody male power and strength) lie hidden. That meeting, as we have seen, leads on to further journeys: back with her to his house in the settlement; back and forth between his own and his mother's house and finally, after the loss of his beloved, he embarks on the journey which takes him beyond the settlement in the valley and the forest up into the mountain top realm of the sky people. There new knowledge, new power and wealth, harmonious relations with powerful beings and the discovery of his own full identity come to him through his tests and trials. And there he builds on his discovery of the *sangai* plant in the forest and acquires the true knowledge and power which are the source of wealth in exchanging pigs and shells with relatives and friends. He thus becomes both a sky being, a culture bringer (one who endows his descendants with essential institutions such as the *sangai* and exchanges of pigs and other valuables) and, possibly, the father and founder of the people who hold and tell this legend.

For the teller, this story carried many meanings, as it did for the hearers; familiar as most of them were with the rich traditions of legend making and telling by which wisdom and power were handed on from generation to generation in Enga culture. Because the teller and his audience were Christians, they were also seeking new ways to understand and explain the wisdom contained in this rich and complex tradition. They did this by commenting upon and talking over the unfolding legend.

A modern writer of Papua New Guinea, who is deeply concerned about being in touch with 'the masters of our own culture who are living in the villages', and also with seeking out his 'identity based on the people's culture', has recently captured for us the simple but complex ways in which this wisdom was handed on among his Binandere people of Northern Province. He recorded these reflections by his father:

"In the olden days the custom was for each family to make fire in front of its house, sit around it and one elder to talk to the juniors; he would tell stories and legends, histories of land claims and so on. Those who sat around the fire discussed some of the ways to behave and the elders told their children about moral issues, the view of the world and its meaning. This also went on late at night and then the fire was moved under the house. The members of the family entered the house to sleep.

In the early dawn the fire is again taken out to the front of the house. Before going to the gardens, the family again talked about the current issues and moral behaviour in the previous evening: they told each other of their dreams and shared the meaning thereof—interpreting the dreams, relating them to the day's work, warning children if there were misfortunes met in the dreams, and giving hopes and expectations if luck were shown in them.

(Today) ... children won't speak Binandere because the custom in which oral literature was created and passed on has steadily declined." (Waiko, 1977:35).

The legend of the hero Pandakusa, as well as those of the many other heroes and heroines, their journeys and transformations (a portion of which are on record) all belong to the oral traditions of communities living in Papua New Guinea. Since these traditions have embedded in them the wisdom which has guided and enlightened their owners for very many generations, it is through them that we may be led into discovering some essential elements about the religious life of Melanesian people in the centuries before the coming of colonial influences and its religion, Christianity.

A Context of Change

Some points need to be made about the oral sources which will lead us into themes about precolonial religious life. It has already been said that these traditions come from the centuries before the beginning of colonial rule, almost one hundred years ago. There is a growing body of archaeological evidence to show that these centuries were times in which communities went through significant fluctuations and change, particularly those marked by the shift in economy from hunting and gathering to cultivation and the more recent shift to sweet potato as a staple (see Bulmer, 1975; Golson

1977 a,b,c; Lacey 1977 a, 1978). The growing body of evidence about interlocking and diverse trading networks (see for example Specht and White 1978; Allen 1977) also suggests that we are working with oral traditions which come from communities not necessarily isolated from each other by a difficult environment, but rather often interdependent with each other for essential resources and linked by channels of communication, along which innovations, new goods and ideas could flow. This historic context of change, adaptation and shifts in resource base and economy always needs to be kept in mind, in any exploration of the oral traditions surviving from those early times.

There are two other essentials about these oral traditions which need also to be borne in mind. First, those who work with oral traditions are familiar with the point that they survive always within specific social settings among specific owning groups who preserve and hand them on for specific purposes (Feierman, 1973:9). In practice, this means that there is a continually active dialogue between the events which generate traditions, the people who participate in events and transmit or receive the traditions and the whole range of ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes by which the people live and adapt through time and history. Another aspect of this is that the traditions themselves form a central and active part in the people's 'culture'. This means that there is always a danger of misunderstanding and misinterpretation when the living and active traditions, or fragments of them, are drawn out of their living contexts and recorded as texts, particularly in translation (Waiko, in press). But since the recorded traditions open the way into early religious life, they must be used, but with caution.

There is a second caution about their use. These rich oral sources have all been recorded in writing, in print or on tape after the arrival in this country of those who had these instruments of literacy and technology at their disposal. Those speaking them for the record are generally living in historical contexts different from those in which these traditions were previously developed and transmitted. This was the case when the legend of Pandakusa was spoken and recorded in August 1972 in the presence of not only a foreigner with a tape recorder in a missionary's house, but also a speaker and an audience, who were all Christians and seeking new means for understanding the messages conveyed by this tradition.

Journeys and Heroes

Two broad themes come from these oral traditions: themes about journeys and movements of people and themes about heroes and founders. Each in turn tells of significant aspects of religious life and change in precolonial times.

Journeys and Movements of People

One of the most common themes to be found in the oral traditions tells of *migrations*. (Though the legend of Pandakusa was carried by a migrant people as part of their heritage when they travelled northwards from one valley system to another, it does not itself tell of a migration journey by the hero.) Sometimes those who migrated were themselves the founders of the group of people who now own and tell these traditions. They tell of a variety of causes for migration. These include quarrels between brothers, disputes over pigs, fish, land or distributions of food at feasts, jealousy over wives, sorcery accusations, the effects of disease, some natural calamity or warfare—to name some of the most frequent causes. Some recently recorded examples of these are found in the following: Amean et al (1974); Asor (1974); Kamit (1975); Kolia (1977: 90-116); Lacey (in press); Neckitelly (1975); Ogaie (1977); Opeba (1975); Oram (in press); Swadling (in press). Some of these traditions of migration tell of lengthy chains of movement, long journeys, lasting through a number of generations and passing through places the names of which are recalled in these legends.

These traditions have been, and remain today, significant elements in their owners' heritage. It is through them that the people have transmitted basic legal, political, social and economic charters by which rights and obligations between groups within communities are defined, and rights to specific resources and territories are defended. In some instances, they, along with traditions and myths of origin, are considered so secret and powerful that only certain members of the community, generally mature males, were permitted to communicate this knowledge. The testimony of a wise old Enga man about the significance of this kind of knowledge is worth noting here:

> The Mulapini people began at Yoko ...
> But Mulapini men have gone and settled in other places too ...
> Our people are like the root and trunk of a tree which has many branches ...
> The possum Komaipa begot Kombeke, Kombeke began the Mulapini people in Yoko. These two, Komaipa and Kombeke, are right at the base of the centre post in our men's house. Like the centre post these two founders of Mulapini hold together our whole group. (Lacey, 1974:40-41).

Besides the frequent migration traditions which have carried down the generations significant evidence about movements of people, there are also many traditions telling of other significant journeys and embodying into institutions ideas about journeys. Here we will dwell briefly on two.

The first tells of the fantastic *journeys of great culture heroes* and creators. Most communities have culture hero (whether male or female) traditions, and most culture hero legends and myths tell of

great journeys. The scale of these journeys and the quality of the events which are recalled about them, differ from those in the migration traditions. (Some records and discussion of some of these journeying heroes and heroines can be found in the following: Allace (1976) for Mala; Hoeltker (1974, 1975) and Tamoane (1977) for Djari (Dsari, Daria); Kamma (1972) for Manarmakeri, Malinowski (1973) for Tudava; and Wagner (1972) for the Iko-Sido-Hido-Souw complex).

These are significant and widely held traditions and they speak in detail about great and heroic journeys, sometimes from one environment or way of life to another, and of significant happenings along the pathways of these journeys. Pandakusa's journeys into the forest and into the high place of the sky people where he became a culture hero is an example of these kinds of journeys.

The final kind of journey which is told of in traditions, though in this case the traditions are re-enacted in cerèmonies, are *journeys of initiation*. Much has been written on rites of passage. Some writers refer to evidence from this country. One element, common to the initiation rites which have been recorded is the journey of the young men away from the everyday life of their village, to a place of seclusion in a hidden club-house, a special house in the wild forest or some other situation which removes them from village life for some time. As noted earlier, Pandakusa's first hunting journey from settlement to forest in which he discovers the hidden *sangai* plants, foretells the future journeys of young Enga clansmen into the seclusion of the forest to undergo purification by the *sangai* rites.

Often the ideology and belief is that they, like the heroes who founded their people or who gave them this institution, have gone into the land of death or been swallowed up by powerful spirits. After their confinement, removal and initiation, they are then led back by elders from this other place to their homes and village. Through that journey away, they have been lost as boys, and they return transformed, purified and strengthened as men, to take up new responsibilities as young citizens and warriors in their villages. Some examples of these initiation journeys are recorded in Bateson (1936); Hogbin (1970); Lehner (1935)—but see also Kigasung (1978); Read (1952); and Williams (1940).

Precolonial Religious World View

These three themes about movements and journeys, are all central to these traditions. If we are to construct an indigenous history of this country which is based upon evidence found in indigenous sources, we must take these themes into account (see Lacey, 1977b). Here we need another focus. What can they tell us about precolonial religious perceptions and ideas?

Here are some propositions to consider:

(a) This emphasis upon movement from one place or environment to another (whether by migrants, by heroes or by youths) may suggest that fluidity, innovation and fluctuation were central features of life, culture and thought. If these traditions, telling of these kinds of movement, do reflect the realities of life in precolonial history and do carry evidence of events which took place in that past, then movement, fluctuations of fortune, borrowing and innovation were essential elements in precolonial life and history. The archaeological evidence demonstrating a lengthy and complex history of hunting and gathering involving significant shifts in stone technology and showing a long history of agricultural borrowing and innovation and extensive trading systems all support this view of a precolonial era of fluctuation, change and innovation. Religious life and thought were obviously essential parts of this changing history.

(b) To go a step further: these traditions and institutions, which embody messages about movement and journeys, seem to say something about the gaining of significant knowledge and wisdom. This is particularly so for the journeys of the heroes and the initiates as we saw in Pandakusa's case. True wisdom and true understanding come from the heroes who bring them from outside or to the youths who dare to leave their homes and families to journey out into danger, terror and "death", hidden away in the seclusion of the wild forest. Both wisdom and transformation come from such journeys, brought by heroes or won by initiates. That message seems of great significance, but we must be cautious that we do not Christianise it too freely. In fact, when discussing the legend of Pandakusa with Enga university students, some have claimed that the teller has already been too heavily influenced by Christianity, because he resolved the tensions inherent in this tradition too neatly at the end, instead of leaving the ending more ambiguous and more in keeping with the tradition.

One famous tradition which illustrates this point about the growth of knowledge and innovation is the legend of Edai Siabo the founder of the *hiri* trading system. This tradition tells how, when fishing with clan brothers one day, Edai Siabo was captured and drawn down into a cave at the bottom of the sea by a *dirava* spirit. While his people searched for him and thought that he had been lost at sea, he was taught the knowledge essential for the construction of the *lakatoi* and the conduct of the trading voyages. He was later discovered and brought back from the sea to his village. When he woke, as if from sleep or death, and rejoined his people, he began teaching them this knowledge which he had gained, while away in the depths of the sea. Here a journey, like death, a removal from his people, and a return with new knowledge, are the ways in which this hero brings a new and significant institution into the lives of the Motu. (Oram, 1977:85; Seligman, 1910:97-100; Swadling, in press).

Heroes and Founders

The traditions of the journey of heroes occupy a central place in the foundation myths like that of Pandakusa and the world views of many Papua New Guinea communities. They are crowded with heroes and heroines, but it is possible to group these protagonists into three broad categories before considering their actions in a little more detail.

These categories are as follows:

(a) Culture heroes or culture bringers—those heroes or heroines who endow their people with basic institutions, skills and knowledge which are essential to their identity and heritage as a people. Pandakusa brought from the sky people institutions like the *sangai* and exchange mechanisms using pigs and pearl shells. He and his mother may have also brought the skills, crops and technology for crop cultivation. Edai Siabo brought to the Motu of Boera those essentials of the economic and political life, the *hiri* trading system linking them with the sago producing people of the Gulf of Papua and the *lakatoi* ocean going canoes by which they went on their trading voyages. Other culture heroes brought other essential innovations to their people e.g. marriage, warfare, the technology of trade and cultivation, crops, canoe building, dancing and religious ceremonies.

(b) Creator heroes, like Tudava of the Trobriands discussed below. These beings had the power not only to innovate and bring into being essential elements in the heritage of particular communities, they could also create or transform parts of the natural environment. So some heroes were both culture heroes and creator heroes. These heroes also journeyed through the world endowing particular parts of the natural environment.

(c) Founders were heroes whose names were sometimes preserved in the group names of their descendants. While Pandakusa did not give his name to his descendants, other Enga founding fathers, such as Mulapini, Yanaitini and Tekepaini did (see Lacey in press). Some of these founders by their actions gave their descendants certain temperaments, personalities or skills (Meggit, 1965:51). In common with Pandakusa many of these founding heroes were, in many different Melanesian cultures, culture heroes as well.

We will now briefly explore some ideas about these groups of heroes.

Environment and Culture

Tudava, the creator hero of the Trobriands, is one of the great culture heroes.

In Kitava, Tudava endowed the place well; he went to the village, he

planted big yams, taytu, taro, arum. The countryside was made bright. He made Kitava indeed a very good (agricultural) country. Not in the slightest bitter (the crops), yams planted round the village very big, also in the bush and on the coral ridge all very good. The home of the very large yams ...

He sailed to Digamenu. The people of Kwaywata came, the masters of the island. They drove him off (shouting). "This is our island. Do not settle (here) O, Tudava.' They drove him off. He told them: 'In this place Digumenu I thought I should plant yams, I should plant taytu, I should plant bananas. (But) because you have driven me away already, I shall give you only coconuts ... (Malinowski, 1973: I 70-72).

The cycle of myths, legends and songs of Tudava and his exploits were told throughout the islands of Milne Bay Province, when Malinowski was working there between 1914 and 1918. Malinowski noted this about what he was taught:

In one version of the legend, ... obtained in Woodlark Island, I was told that Tudava was the first man to come out of the ground in Kiriwina. After him the other men came out. As each man emerged, Tudava gave him his totem. When he first came out, there was no land except Kiriwina. He threw a large stone into the sea and there arose the island of Kitava. Then he went there and threw other stones and [other islands] ... came into being ... the gist of the stories about the origins of gardening is an explanation of the excellence of some places and the poverty of others. They contain a legendary charter of gardening in general and of differences in local fertility and custom ... (1973: I, 68, 75).

These are important clues for interpreting culture hero traditions. If we accept the Tudava legends as examples of this kind of tradition, they carry two significant messages of importance for understanding precolonial religious life and belief. First, the environment and landscape is endowed with the power and personality of the creator hero, and thus is alive and personal. Second, the fertility or non-fertility of the environment is rooted in relationships between specific inhabitants of particular areas and the powerful creator-spirit.

Like the Tudava myth, other creation legends in this country have explained the birth of particular places and environments as expressions of the prodigious power of these heroes. These places have a character, a personality and a life that flows from the actions of the heroes. If these traditions embody the beliefs of their tellers, then we may conclude that their environment is not a natural, physical object, but that it is charged with the power, the personality and the character of their creator heroes.

One of the most important changes which occurred in the precolonial history of this country was the growth and spread of cultivation. The Tudava tradition, like so many others in this region, recalls and explains the ways in which there were differences in crops and productivity or fertility. Its message is that differences in productivity came from a moral source, from the quality of

relationships between specific communities and the hero. When relationships were good and Tudava was welcomed, there he laid down a good environment and endowed the people with fertile crops. On the contrary, where he was made unwelcome, he uttered his curse, telling the people that they would inherit poor soil and only basic crops. One of the consequences of this belief was not only that the character of a place originated in those first relationships, but that fertility needed to be continued by the maintenance of good relationships.

The culture bringers and innovators are like the creator heroes in that they are the ones who endow the people with basic elements of their lives. The creator heroes are the ones who begin the world or lay down the environment, endowing it with their personality and power. They are also beings with powers to transform themselves and change radically their own shape or character, for example, from snake to human person, or from old person to youth (Allace, 1976; Kamma, 1972; Lacey, 1974; 40, 41). They also can engage in activities quite outside the realms of custom and morals and are sometimes endowed with powerful sexuality or fertility (Wagner, 1972). Some of these qualities are shared by the culture bringers and innovators, but more often they are remembered for other activities and feats.

Their arrival in local history marks a beginning of culture, order and productivity. They generally come from outside and bring with them the knowledge of making fire, or human sexuality and birth, or cultivation and good government—or special skills which mark one people off from their neighbours. These include the knowledge of making pots, of carving canoes, of art forms, or dances, or feasting. Edai Siabo, though a son of Boera, was a culture bringer because he was taken into the underworld and returned, carrying revolutionary new knowledge which brought wealth and fame to his people. As a bringer of new crops and of the knowledge of gardening and its special magic, Tudava was a culture bringer as well as a creator hero. Mala and his son, the prodigious heroes of the peoples in the Vitiaz Straits, were sometimes creators of specific islands and places. But they are principally remembered as heroes who endowed different communities within this region with special knowledge and interdependent skills and forms of production which opened the way to their trading system (Allace, 1976). And, as we have seen, Pandakusa was a bringer of essential elements in his people's heritage.

Continuity and Change

These are some of the general messages which these traditions about the culture heroes have taught. Here, I wish to explore briefly

some implications from them. We can see these traditions as being in some ways like creation myths, but in content they are more specific about the basic elements of culture. They may be ways that have been handed down through the generations for explaining the origins of cultural heritage. That needs further study. Like the creator traditions, these traditions have a sacred and powerful character, because the very origin and identity of a people is rooted in them. Since significant cultural elements and institutions were endowed upon the people by particular, named, and powerful innovators, the continuity of their cultural heritage is made possible through maintaining proper relationships with these powerful heroes. Pandakusa himself became a culture hero and founder by mending fractured and distorted relationships between himself and other powerful beings.

There is one other implication, which is important for understanding the sources of change. These traditions tell of new beginnings, new skills, knowledge and power, of a new sense of order and productivity, as being imported from outside by these innovators and of being accepted or rejected according to the ways in which the culture bringers were received by their hosts. That message contains two important ideas about change. First, that significant changes and new beginnings in culture could come from outside and, if accepted properly, could lead to growth in the character of the receiving community. Secondly, that if these traditions about innovation lie at the heart of the people's cultural heritage, this may indicate communities which have a basic openness towards change, innovation and experimentation. Adaptability and openness to experimentation with new ideas and knowledge has been demonstrated in many parts of Papua New Guinea during the colonial period. Their roots lay in the world views already developed through precolonial times.

The founder heroes belong to more recent precolonial generations than either of the two other groups of heroes, if perhaps these three bodies of tradition mark different stages through time for their owners. These traditions tell of the deeds of the founders of descent groups, clans, clusters of brother clans and villages. They are often combined with migration traditions. Like them they are basic charters which define specific groups and the rights to specific resources for cultivation, and for hunting and gathering. Often the places associated with original group founders are believed to be sacred and become centres of worship. One characteristic of these traditions, and of the commemorations in which they are embodied, is that they confirm solidarity and stability in a world of change. If openness to change is one of their characteristics, there is also this core of solidarity in which a community's identity is deeply rooted.

The implications discerned in our analysis can be summarized as follows:

- Traditions about migrations and journeys suggest that a basic belief may have been that knowledge and wisdom only came through separation, seclusion or entry into another environment and a life different from everyday life.
- Traditions about important and powerful heroes and creators suggest that the environment is created and shaped by powerful personal beings to which man must relate, if he is to survive and prosper. Those about the culture bringers and founders suggest both an openness to innovation and experimentation, and a strong belief in the need to conserve the basic core of heritage, knowledge and wisdom given by founders and by which the people's identity and culture were defined.

Conclusion: Exploring Religious Life

I would suggest that one of the major realities of colonial history has been the significant growth and spread of a range of Christian religious traditions through the work of mission organisations. If we are to accept this as a significant force in colonial history and to assess its influence, then one starting point may be to argue that religious life and belief was already of significance in the precolonial era. This would mean that we need to do more work in studying the nature and significance of precolonial religion.

Further, if the starting point of this exploration is correct, we need to examine the nature and character of religious life in as wide and as concrete a context as possible. To abstract religious beliefs, rituals and institutions from their living and concrete contexts, would be to adopt a foreign approach rather than a Melanesian one.

If the major thrust of this exploration is accurate, then we must be able to understand religious life in both precolonial and colonial phases as being dynamic, fluid and adaptable, and to seek out what elements gave religious life this character. To build up ideal and abstract models of indigenous religion would not achieve understanding in terms of the kind of religious life present when Christianity came.

Finally, were the indigenous religions swept away or destroyed by the impact of the new age? Or, are we faced with only external appearances, seen through foreign eyes? Or, did they continue their adaptation and experimentation and so absorb the new ways and religion? These questions need to be put, if we take the reality of indigenous religious life and history seriously.

Pandakusa did not live in a stable and unchanging world. He was torn and tested by choices and decisions about his destiny, his

true identity and his relationships with powerful beings. He searched for new knowledge and discovered new powers in his journey into a dangerous environment. If his story is an echo and a reflection of historical realities, (and there is evidence to support this view), then we have in this legend not only a picture of the religious life of a particular mountain community, but of the many diverse communities which developed during the long precolonial chapter of Papua New Guinea's history.