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POLITICS AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN OCEANIA

Manila, today's megacity of the Philippines was founded in 1571 during the period when the Spanish ruled the seas between Mexico and South East Asia. Largely due to early Spanish influence the Philippines is predominantly Catholic. However, moving eastwards across the Pacific Ocean, one finds that Catholics are not the principal Christian denomination throughout most of Oceania. Initially the position of the Catholic Church was closely associated with European politics. Later the Church became entangled in power-plays within and between Pacific nations themselves. Recently the Catholic Church has found itself drawn to proclaim a prophetic message in situations of political turmoil. This paper will provide examples showing how the Church has played and still plays a political role, and will point to some of the implications on the mission of the Church in Oceania today.

Joining Forces with Spain

Even in its establishment there was a strongly political dimension to the Church's presence in Oceania. Priests and religious accompanying the Spanish explorers assisted in taking possession of the new found lands. For example, on Espiritu Santu Island (part of what is now Vanuatu) in 1606, Pedro Fernandez de Quiros arrived on the beach along with Father Commissary and five companions. The priest received from the admiral a large wooden cross which was carried with due solemnity to a pedestal in a makeshift church built the day before. Then amidst sprinklings of holy water Quiros took formal possession of the island.¹

The first formal evangelization of the North Western Pacific islands of Micronesia had to wait until 1668 with the arrival in Guam of a group of Jesuits, supported by some secular assistants and soldiers. The antagonism of the local Chamorro people led to the strengthening of the Spanish administration with the appointment of

the first governor in 1676 and the development of a military garrison. Thirty years later, administration was facilitated by the forceful removal of the Chamorro people from scattered villages of the Northern Marianas to Guam, where they were relocated in settlements within earshot of the mission bells. Church and State cooperated to transform Agaña from a village into the first town in Oceania, complete with plaza, government house, church, convent, and Jesuit college.

Mission Competition and Military Power

Whereas Spanish Catholicism was brought to the Western Pacific islands, British and American Protestantism predominated in the South and the East. In 1797, the Missionary Society (later London Missionary Society – LMS) attempted missions in Tahiti, the Marquesas, and Tonga. Only the Tahiti mission survived. Queen Pomare of Tahiti worked closely with the LMS missionaries. However, in 1836 Catholic Picpus Fathers (Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary) arrived in Tahiti. They were immediately expelled by Queen Pomare who resented any competition to her LMS friends. The French felt affronted by this and sent a frigate to Pape’ete (Tahiti) in 1838 demanding \$2000 compensation and a salute to the French flag. Queen Pomare appealed to Queen Victoria of Great Britain for assistance. Queen Victoria chose to remain silent. Then the following year another French gunboat arrived at Pape’ete declaring that it would bombard the town unless Queen Pomare pay 2000 Spanish dollars and allow the free entry to Catholic missionaries. Three years later France took over Tahiti as a French protectorate. The Tahitians resisted violently. Finally, Queen Pomare, realizing that Queen Victoria of England had no intention of ever responding to her many letters pleading for support, reached an agreement with France. Queen Pomare would submit to France’s protectorate so long as Britain agreed to certain concessions. Thus, Tahiti became a French possession and the way was opened for the expansion of the Catholic Church in the region. In 1848 Tahiti’s first Apostolic Vicariate was established near Pape’ete, and more French missionaries arrived.

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After several years in Hawaii, Hiram Bingham—the leader of the Protestant mission—realized that he should foster relations with the extremely powerful female chief Ka'ahumanu rather than the presumed leader Kamehameha II who in fact was relatively powerless. In 1825 after the mission changed strategy, mass conversion occurred with the assistance of Ka'ahumanu.² Then the Catholic Picpus Fathers came to the Hawaiian Islands in 1827. This led to a period of intense mission competition. Bingham tried to influence Ka'ahumanu to have the priests expelled but French naval officers demanded equality of treatment for French nationals, including missionaries. Eventually Captain Cyrille Laplace obtained a promise of freedom of religion and the release of all imprisoned Catholics in exchange for France's formal recognition of Hawaiian sovereignty.

Likewise in Tonga, in 1827, the Tongan king refused Marist missionaries the right to land because Tonga was already being evangelized by Wesleyan missionaries. The second attempt in 1842 was more successful, but later the Catholic Church was burned down and Catholics suffered a period of persecution. Then in 1858 a French naval unit demanded reparation for the damage suffered by the mission. The Tongans refused compensation, but instead, by royal order, granted freedom of religion.

The Wesleyans survived in Fiji because they were sponsored from Tonga and had the support of the recently converted Tongan Christian chief, Tupou. The situation in Fiji was unsettled with intertribal wars and these were only resolved when Tupou intervened with 2000 Tongan warriors in support of a chief named Cakobau at the battle of Kaba in 1855. Cakobau showed his gratitude by accepting Protestant missionaries and at the same time supported British colonialism in Fiji. He was the leading chief when the island group became part of the British Empire in 1874. The French Marists arrived in Fiji in 1844 where they were met with dislike and indifference. They made slow progress until a French naval ship secured freedom of religion there also.

Whilst they often relied on military power to gain a foothold in the islands, Catholic missionaries did not always give their full support to the government authorities. Polynesia's first Apostolic vicar of Tahiti, "Tepano" Jaussen championed Islanders' rights against French absolutism for over 40 years.³ In New Zealand, Bishop Pompallier, with the Marist missionaries, found it hard to support British plans for the future of the country and its people. In Papua New Guinea, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) and the Society

of the Divine Word (SVD) sought to establish the Catholic Church in spite of colonial government restrictions.⁴

Politics of Independence

The Church in the Pacific survived many challenges including the effects of two World Wars. Following the Second World War, many of the island peoples wanted independence, and those that didn't want it were encouraged to seek some form of independence nevertheless. Many leaders were churchmen. Vanuatu's first prime minister, Fr. Walter Lini, was an Anglican priest. His first two deputy prime ministers were Rev. Fred Timakata and Rev. Sethy Regenvanu. The first leader of the opposition in Vanuatu was Fr. Gerard Laymang. In the Solomon Islands, Rev. Leslie Boseto, former president of the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, became a cabinet minister. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a former Catholic priest, led New Caledonia's independence movement. In Papua New Guinea, priests and former seminarians have had prominent political roles, notably John Momis, who in the 1970s played a major part in writing the Papua New Guinea Constitution and is presently serving as Governor of Bougainville.⁵

Moves for independence presented a new situation for the Catholic Church. France was engaged in nuclear testing in the Pacific and was insisting that its colonies remain as overseas French territories. Thus, whereas a century before links with Western powers, particularly France, had proved to be advantageous in forcing recognition of freedom of religion, now the Church found that links to Western powers provoked suspicion on the part of indigenous people. The Church entered into a phase of the politics of independence and revitalization.

Communist or Saint?

In the late 20th century in the Polynesian kingdom of Tonga, where ritual authority is highly developed, the Wesleyan Church had very close ties with the King and nobles. However, Bishop Patelisio Finau, the Catholic bishop of Tonga, felt the need to challenge the establishment in the form of the monarchy and the accompanying nobility and traditionalist elite.⁶ He saw that a very small number of elite were using their positions not to lead, but to take a disproportionately large share of the national wealth and resources. The condi-

tion of the common mass of Tongans was unchanging and even worsening. It was his concern for the poor and the voiceless that inspired Bishop Finau to lead a march of the landless and homeless to present a petition to the King in 1983. It was the same concern that moved him to lead a march to present a petition on behalf of the Pro-Democracy Movement in 1991 (Foliaki 1994:7-15). He was a political churchman, not in the sense of having parliamentary ambitions, but in terms of championing the poor and marginalized and challenging the established elite. As a result he was accused of being a Marxist, a communist, and a representative of a foreign power—the Vatican (Barr 1994:35-48). Bishop Finau was fond of quoting Bishop Helda Camara of Brazil, “When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint, but when I am asking why the poor have nothing to eat, they call me a communist.” His death in 1993 was a great loss to the Church of Tonga and the whole of Oceania.

Revitalization Movements

Faced with dramatic social change, people throughout Oceania have often responded with various forms of religious movements ranging from indigenous revitalization movements to Christian revival campaigns. Micronesia provides an example of a religious movement that challenges both the government and the established churches. The Modekngai movement started in Palau around 1905. Modekngai promotes the existence of a single God—one of the local Palauan deities equated with Jesus; its symbol is the cross and its meetings are similar to Christian services. Their most important ceremonies are healing services. By 1937 the movement was in complete control of all local political power in Palau. After the Second World War over 700 Palauans told American census takers that they were members. Still in the 1960s it was estimated that Modekngai embraced about a third of the population (Carucci and Poyer 2002:227).

The Palau case is not an isolated one. From New Zealand to Hawaii to Papua New Guinea and the Solomons, religio-political movements have arisen, particularly in times of socio-cultural and political stress. Recently, in August 2003, Bishop Terry Brown of the Anglican Church in the Solomons wrote: “The Weather Coast of Guadalcanal is largely Roman Catholic, but there is also the Moro Movement on the southeast side of the Weather Coast. They date from the sixties, and are former Roman Catholics who left the Catho-

lic Church to go back to 'Guadalcanal custom,' including the gods of Guadalcanal, traditional dress, etc. Most of the members of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA, later renamed Isatabu Freedom Movement, IFM) were Roman Catholics or members or offspring of the Moro Movement. There was certainly cultic activity by the IFM. Many of their fighters wore traditional Guadalcanal loin cloths and a traditional string around the neck (like the Moro Movement). They used various forms of magic to make themselves immune from gun fire. They were very poorly armed, with traditional spears and homemade guns from leftover WW2 materials—over against the MEF's guns from police armory in Honiara."⁷

Religio-Political Developments in Fiji

The churches including the Catholic Church have still to find effective ways of dealing with such religious-political movements, which continue in ever new forms in parts of Oceania even until today. Consider, for example, recent developments in Fiji. The interaction between Christianity (in particular Methodism) and Fijian politics has been a major factor in shaping modern Fijian nationalism. Colonel Rabuka's two coups against the government in 1982 fed into "anti-heathen" sentiments particularly among the Methodist majority in Fiji. The fundamentalist Methodist faction which was closely allied to the military regime wanted Fiji to be declared a Christian state. A Sunday Decree was imposed in 1987 and roadblocks were set up to prevent anyone from violating the sabbath. Sister Teresa, a local Marist Missionary Sister, protested against Colonel Rabuka and his parade of military might through the streets of Suva. The Colonel told her to be quiet and to stay in her convent and pray. Later a public protest was staged involving Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians. Two Catholic Priests and a number of lay people from the three churches were arrested and imprisoned.

By the year 2000, with the attempted coup and hostage taking in Fiji by businessman George Speight, the situation had changed somewhat. Fijian ethno-nationalism was still strong and this caused divisions within the Fiji Council of Churches. During the crisis there were Christians in the parliamentary complex everyday singing hymns, offering prayers, and preaching sermons. The principal actors in this religious activity were Seventh Day Adventists and some leaders of the new fundamentalist religious groups in Fiji (Tuwere 2001:47). Just before the 2001 elections a group called the Assembly of

Christian Churches (ACCF), which included the Methodist Church, the Assemblies of God, and a number of fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic churches held a public mission. They spoke of reconciliation but appeared to have strong support from Laisenia Qarase and his nationalist Sogoso Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party. To many it was clear that the churches belonging to the Assembly of Christian Churches used their members for very definite political ends. This became obvious after Prime Minister Qarase nominated Rev. Tomasi Kanailagi as one of his appointees to the Senate. The Catholic Church generally has been critical of ethno-nationalism and has tried not to become involved publicly.⁸ However, the nomination of the Rev. Kanailagi caused such controversy that in a rare public statement, Catholic Archbishop Petero Mataca condemned the Methodist Church's involvement in politics and Kanailagi's acceptance of a Senate seat. On the front page of the Sun (September 22, 2001) Archbishop Mataca is reported as saying:

Mixing religion and politics has been the norm with the Methodist Church in Fiji since 1835....It has just become obvious that what they have been doing in the dark is now clear for all to see. I hope that now their hidden agenda will be exposed.

Religious Politics in Papua New Guinea

The involvement of fundamentalist groups is no more apparent than in recent times in Papua New Guinea. During the 1997 election campaign period the news broke about a secret multi-million kina deal involving a mercenary force to train soldiers to fight in Bougainville. This quick-fix contract with the "Sandline International" company backfired badly on the government, with a near military coup and rioting in the streets of Port Moresby. Eventually the Prime Minister, his Deputy, and the Minister of Defense had to stand down to allow for an official enquiry into the affair.

Born again Christians achieved a good deal of publicity during the Sandline crisis. The Governor General, Sir Wiwa Korowi, published a full-page press release in the daily paper calling on people to "get down to your knees and pray and ask God to give you and me a total peace of mind that we need to endure." The military commander who sparked off the crisis, Brigadier General Singirok, said that his decision to denounce the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Defense Minister, was based on ethical principles and his

Christian convictions. He is reported as saying that he was an instrument used by God.

Besides Sandline, there were other politically sensitive issues involving Christians in the Defense Force. For example, there was a move by some born again Christians in the military to establish a mission of "spiritual operations" in war-torn Bougainville. The mission to send the army of "prayer warriors" to Bougainville was abandoned only after the chairman of the Heads of Churches Committee wrote to Brigadier General Singirok expressing his amazement that private soldiers had been identified for detachment to Bougainville for spiritual duties. This was contrary to the policy that spiritual duties were always the sole responsibility of official chaplains.

Though the move might appear to be an honest evangelization effort, the proponents were surely not blind to the political implications and the side effect of undermining the Catholic efforts at reconciliation in Bougainville. The Bougainville population is 75% Catholic, and the Catholic Church's solidarity with the people in their plight had aroused suspicion on the part of some in the National Government and in the Papua New Guinea Defense Force.

The most significant involvement of the churches in the political process came with a prayer movement called "Operation Brukim Skru" (Bend the knee). All the churches were involved, though the initiative in most cases lay with the conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Shortly after, a secret national intelligence report speculated that there could be a deliberate plot by politically minded Christians, riding on the wave of anti-corruption sentiments and using the Sandline issue, as a means to further their political ambitions.

Only a year after the formation of the new government Catholic Archbishop, Brian Barnes in his 1999 Easter message warned that the future of Papua New Guinea as a free democratic country was threatened. The next day the *Post-Courier* newspaper headlines read, "Bishop: Gov't must go." Interviews with the Archbishop appeared with stronger opinions than in the Easter message. He was quoted as saying that the personal conduct of many PNG leaders was shameful, and that there was a need for a change of government (*Post-Courier* April 1, 1999, p.3).

The issue became the leading story on radio and television. Protests came from government ministers, but support soon came from other Christian churches. Sophia Gegeyo, the General Secretary of

the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) is quoted as saying, "...Politicians cannot keep the Church quiet while the people they represent suffer as a result of bad government decisions and leadership.... The bishop has spoken the minds of the ordinary people in the country" (Post-Courier April 7, 1999, p. 3). Anglican Archbishop Ayong, in a letter to the Post-Courier newspaper wrote, "Any politician who tries to suggest that church leaders should keep out of politics does not know his Bible... From the time Israel moved into Canaan, the spiritual leaders of God's people have been challenging, rebuking, correcting, and, at times, condemning the political leaders when they wandered from God's path. That duty remains today" (Post-Courier April 14, 1999, p.11).

Three months later, on July 7, 1999, the Prime Minister had lost so much support that he was forced to resign. Though the significance of the Archbishop's criticism may be debated, it is clear that his action acted as a catalyst for others to work for a change of government (Gibbs 1998:27-51, 2001:155-74).⁹

Contemporary Challenges

In the light of present political realities in Oceania, what is the mission of the Church today and for the future? Despite secular influences, politics and religion will presumably remain closely related throughout much of the region. Whether it be fundamentalist doctrine urging people towards a new form of Christendom, or socially aware faithful speaking out against economic exploitation and ecological destruction, the churches surely will resist being confined to the "sacristy." Restrictions would go against the tendency of Pacific people to elaborate religious understandings in all domains of life. Much could be said, but I will limit myself to outlining the mission of the Church in four points:

1. supporting democratic forms of participation
2. serving as prophetic witness
3. maintaining a place for the transcendent
4. promoting the kingdom of God

Supporting Democratic Forms of Participation

Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar in an address to a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development said,

People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power, and liberation above control. In this paradigm, development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people.¹⁰

Democratic principles promoting the rule of the demos or the poor is surely in line with the Gospel. Most often the poor are unable to express or impose their will and need to be empowered. That is where the Church can and must play an important role. But to fulfill this role the Church cannot be overly dependent on government power or money, nor can it place a high priority on maintaining the status quo. Concerns about government funding and not "rocking the boat" may well be obstacles for the Church in many countries of Oceania.

Ron Crocombe gives an example from the Cook Islands. When the ruling party won an election in 1989 with only 52% of the vote, it sought a broader basis of support by co-opting the churches. When any religious organization wanted to build a church, Sunday school, or other project, the government provided workers, equipment, material, and cash. Crocombe says that in Avarua village alone the Catholic cathedral was built in 1994, the Cook Islands Christian Church rebuilt in 1995, and a new SDA church built in 1996 using government resources. The understood price was collusion.¹¹

Is the above example merely an expression of the "Melanesian Way" or the "Pacific Way" with its holistic worldview that tends not to separate church and state? Admittedly, there can be as many forms of governance as there are nations. Democracy is not limited to a mere handful of forms such as those found in America, Britain, France, or Australia. Each country will have its own characteristics. Possibly Oceanic democracy will show greater emphasis given to communal rather than individual values. However, the task of the Church is to help people distinguish between beneficence and an unacceptable political patronage that amounts to corruption. Until today many of our churches are still struggling to be free from colonial or neo-colonial thinking. Authoritarian governments and authoritarian churches reinforce one another, leaving little freedom for genuine leadership in the arena of participatory democracy. The principal goal is that people will be sufficiently empowered to be able to participate significantly in the honest governance of their country.

Prophetic Witness

I have already given the example of the prophetic witness of the late Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga and of Archbishop Brian Barnes in Papua New Guinea. The Church in Oceania badly needs other leaders, clergy or lay, and communities who will be prepared to read the signs of the times and offer a prophetic witness to the Gospel faith in our time. One cannot dissociate faith and politics. In this sense, the Church does have a prophetic role and to do this it must be "political" in that challenged by the socio-economic and political situation, it both presents and demonstrates gospel values.

Fijian theologian Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere writes of the importance of vanua or land in the Fijian context. Then he asks: What about the landless in a place like Fiji? When leases expire Fijian land owners will be legally entitled to take back their land. Where will the Indian farmers go? So he raises the question of who is our "neighbor" in Fiji? Who are the "poor" (anawim) in the aftermath of two coups in Fiji? Tuwere proposes that love of God and neighbor is a necessary condition for land ownership. The prophetic challenge announces that one should not expect to hold on to the land if one's relationship with God or neighbor is violated. Land is a free sovereign gift of Yahweh who gives and takes away. Jesus Christ who challenged the Jewish authorities is challenging the chiefly leadership in many parts of Oceania today. Tuwere says that, "When a form of nationalism is justified on the basis of a religious fundamentalism, we have a perfect recipe for the destruction of human community. We then deny ourselves the right and the freedom to life" (1995:12).

In recent years the issue of a nuclear-free Pacific has captured the attention of people in Oceania in a way that few other issues have done. It is admirable to see nations like New Zealand and Palau being prepared to sacrifice economic gain and military power in an effort to ensure a life-giving environment for future generations. A number of the churches in Oceania have played an important role in supporting the moral dimension of such issues.

Sacrifices will also be required of individuals in their prophetic witness to faith. At the end of 2003 in the Solomon Islands people were mourning the martyrdom of seven Anglican Melanesian Brothers who in April 2003 had gone to the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal on a peace mission to rebel leader Harold Keke. The first brother was tortured over several days and killed. Another three were killed upon arrival and buried in a single grave. Their bodies, recovered by

the RAMSI forces (combined Australian-led intervention force), have been reburied near their community house at Tabalia. In the funeral procession, in front of each coffin there was a banner reading "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God" along with the name of the brother who had given his life in the cause of peace. Family members showed deep faith in dealing with their grief. The father of one of the dead brothers told the head of the congregation that he had buried his grief in the grave with his son and now he could live again. Two days after the funeral the Melanesian Brothers admitted 48 new Brothers to their community.¹²

Maintaining a Place for the Transcendent

In his letter to the Church of Oceania, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II writes:

It is certain that commitment to social justice and peace is an integral part of the Church's mission in the world. Yet her mission does not depend upon political power. The Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end (#26).

My intention is not to promote dualistic thinking that separates the temporal and spiritual orders. There is only one history—which includes the history of salvation. I am convinced, however, that the Church has a special mission today to maintain a place for the transcendent in political discourse. Democratic systems, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the like enable us to live with freedom and responsibility. But taken in isolation these ideals will remain merely that—ideals—unless based on a deeper source of respect for humanity. The source of that respect cannot come only from humanism, but from acknowledging the transcendent dimension of our shared humanity which has its source in the divine.

Today the nations of Oceania are bombarded with secular influences and forms of economic rationalism so there is a tendency to think of economic growth as the prime indicator that all is well. However, many nations are finding that such so-called "progress" is weak on distributive justice and genuine forms of integral human development. To try to develop a country merely through economic growth is like trying to fly with one wing. It is doomed to failure. Thus, the Church has an important role to impress on leaders that

power that does not respect the nonmaterial dimension of life whether above us or among us, is fatally flawed. This is where I see the weakness of many programs for the peace-making and reconciliation, for political awareness or AIDs awareness. Unless they tap into that dimension of humanity that is the source of respect for ourselves and others, then there will be no respect for secular authority either. The Church has a mission in the community – often called civil society – to transcend the limits of secular thinking so as to address humanity in a genuinely universal way.

How to do it? The political awareness campaigns funded by the churches in Europe seem to have little effect. People are tired of sermons about the obedient and righteous life. If only the Church could tap into the power of religious symbolism such as in the following poem by Samoan Albert Wendt (Wendt 2000:11-2):

The *faa-samoa* is perfect, they said
from behind cocktail bars like pulpits
double scotch on the rocks, I said

we have no orphans, no one starves
we share everything, they said
refill my glass, I said

and we all have *alofa*
for one another, they said
drown me in your *alofa* then, I said

it's true they said, our *samoa*
is a paradise, we venerate our royalty,
our pastors and leaders and beloved dead

god gave us the *faa-samoa* and
only he can take it away, they said
amen, I said

their imported first class whisky
was alive with corpses: my uncle
and his army of hungry kids,
malnourished children in dirty wards,
an old woman begging on the bank,
my generation migrating overseas
for jobs, while politicians
and merchants grab obesely
in the RSA, and pastors bang

out sermons about the obedient
and righteous life—*aiafu**
all growing fat in
a blind man's paradise.

*Sweat-eaters

Promoting the Kingdom of God

New Testament scholars today agree that the central message of Jesus' mission was the announcement of the kingdom or reign of God (Mk 1:15). How is this kingdom of God related to the political realities in contemporary Oceania? In an address on Pacific Women's Theology, Sister Keiti Ann Kanongata'a from Tonga said, "To theologize our life in the Pacific, in a visionary way, means a call to fashion an alternative way of living in the world. This is a way of covenantal responsibility, a way of living known as the Reign of God" (Kanongata'a 1992:11).

Sr. Keiti Ann emphasizes two important points: an alternative way of living and covenantal responsibility. The new ethic of the kingdom of God, as shown in the Sermon on the Mount, is the very reverse of worldly concepts of authority and influence: "Blessed are the poor in spirit...." At the last Supper Jesus gave the example of the washing of the feet. Insofar as chiefs and church leaders in the Pacific demonstrate this new ethic then they are reflecting the values of God's kingdom. Otherwise, there is the danger of ecclesiastical imperialism. Moreover, God's kingdom is not something to be pursued individually, but is manifest in communion. Thus, if leaders act responsibly with the community in mind, and if communities demonstrate the life of the beatitudes, then they reflect Christ's mission to establish the reign of God.

Relations between politics and religion in Papua New Guinea were brought dramatically to public attention early in the year 2000, when the Speaker of Parliament, Bernard Narokobi, had a large cross fixed on top of the parliament building. It was illuminated so as to be visible at night. Bernard Narokobi explained that the cross represented the light of Calvary and our hope in the future as Christians. Not everyone agreed with the Speaker. Some comments in the newspaper reflected the view that the National Parliament is not a holy place and one "can never put darkness and daylight together" (Post-Courier June 27, 2000, p. 10). Eventually the cross was removed. However, Narokobi defended his position saying that the cross was a

reminder that Papua New Guinea is a “Christian country.” He then made the point that parliament makes decisions that are sacred for the common good of the people. Narokobi’s action is an attempt by a devout Catholic to bring a symbol of Christian power into the very center of political power. Is it too unrealistic and idealistic to think that parliamentary decisions are sacred because they are for the common good of the people?

Inculturated Politics

From what has been said above it may be seen how Christian faith in Oceania is becoming inculturated through being politicized. Culture is not simply traditional folkways from the past. Culture is what we live. The Church must be involved in helping people of the Pacific to move from a “culture of silence” whereby people blindly obey chiefly authority whether they like it or not, to a “culture of solidarity,” building on Pacific communal values, whereby people can participate in bringing about changes that affect their lives. I maintain that shared religious values can unify and inspire people to work for such changes.

Political involvement is a Christian duty. However, one must discern what appropriate involvement consists of in any place and time. In the contemporary Pacific it has much to do with reminding the political world of its real task—that is the attainment of peace and justice and the development of a more human world for all the populace. In reality this is a radical mission because faith relativizes the political realm in the light of the kingdom of God.

There is an inevitable tension between the use of religion to gain political power and its use to control power for the common good. The former is regrettable. The latter course reflects the values of the reign of God. Tensions between religion and politics are a part of contemporary life throughout Oceania. Thus, an important dimension of the Church’s mission is the struggle, in theory and practice, to find an appropriate and effective balance.

NOTES

1. Max Quanchi and Ron Adams (eds.), *Culture Contact in the Pacific*, 33.
2. Quanchi and Adams, *Culture Contact*, 103.
3. Steven R. Fischer, *A History of the Pacific Islands*, 106.
4. Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune (eds.), *The Pacific Islands*, 178.

5. Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, 217.
6. Bishop Finau gained an MA from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila in 1970.
7. Bishop Terry Brown (Anglican Bishop of Malaita). Personal Communication August 23, 2003.
8. The Catholic Church is an active member of ECREA (The Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy) which seeks to support and empower communities in Fiji.
9. See Gibbs, "Religion and Politics in Papua New Guinea 1997-2000."
10. Kyi 1995:18. Being held under house arrest in Myanmar since 1989, she wrote the address for a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development held in Manila on November 21, 1994. At the author's request, it was presented on her behalf by former president Corazon Aquino of the Philippines.
11. Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, p. 225.
12. Anglican Communion News Service 3667, 7 November 2003.

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