

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (1997-2000)

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Introduction

When the Pharisees asked Jesus whether he supported paying tribute to Caesar, they were presenting him with an apparent dilemma. If he said yes, he would appear to be supporting the Roman occupation. If he said no, he would be classed as a rebel or a religious fanatic. Over two millennia there has been a tendency to use this text as a basis for an understanding of Church and State, with the conclusion that they are completely separate spheres. However, Jesus did not separate the spheres, rather, he prioritised them. He asked for a coin — since he did not carry one — and pointed to Caesar's image there. Then Jesus told the Pharisees: What bears the image of Caesar belongs to him, but you bear the image of God, so you belong to God!

Caesar and God may operate in different spheres, but they are never completely separate. Some states, like Israel, England and Italy, have a formalised relationship with a religion or church. Moreover, some highly organised ecclesiastical institutions maintain official church-state relations, for example, the Vatican maintains normal diplomatic relations with a large number of other states including Papua New Guinea. However, for Papua New Guinea, the relationship between church and state is not formalised, though there is an understanding that church and state should preserve a respectful independence while co-operating in areas of mutual concern such as health and education.

Despite secularist influences, traditional attitudes integrating religion and politics persist in Papua New Guinea. We have seen religion and politics linked symbolically in the Papua New Guinea

parliament building itself. The building takes the form of a traditional haus tambaran or spirit house, and now at the peak of the roof, there is a large white cross. The Speaker, Bernard Narakobi, says that the house and the cross represent the “noble traditions and Christian principles” referred to in the preamble to the Constitution.¹ Symbols beg interpretation, and sometimes there is a “conflict of interpretations” (Ricoeur 1974). This paper looks at various interpretations, some complementary and some conflicting, of the relationship between religion and politics in present-day Papua New Guinea.

I will consider four cases:

- Church leaders in politics
- Religious leaders as critics
- Religious figures as friends
- Political leaders funding religious bodies.

Using the above examples as illustrations, I will then discuss briefly seven areas in which religion and politics interact in contemporary Papua New Guinea, and suggest some ways in which that relationship might be improved.

The 1997 National Elections

The 1997 national elections were dominated by the issue of Sir Julius Chan’s introduction of Sandline mercenaries earlier that same year in an attempt to solve the Bougainville crisis. The violent reaction to the event led to a general disgust with politicians and their perceived corruption. From this disillusionment emerged operation 'Brukim Skru' (Bend the Knee), a pan-denominational prayer campaign for repentance and the election of a God-fearing government. The leader of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, Brigadier General Jerry Singirok, made his first anti-Sandline call on the national radio talk-back show hosted by Roger Hau’ofa, an Operation Brukim Skru leader. The 'operation' achieved such prominence that a National Intelligence Organisation report unfortunately labelled it a plot by politically minded Christians riding

on a wave of anti-corruption sentiments.

In this highly charged atmosphere leading up to the elections, many candidates chose to use religious language. "I am a Christian!" "I am born again!" "I fear God!" were slogans designed to appeal to the religious groups praying for change. Some even included a picture of Jesus beside their own picture on election posters (Gibbs 1998:46). Following the election, many associated with Operation Brukim Skru were happy to see that a number of leading figures in the new government were professed Christians. In a rally at the Boroko United Church (27 July 1997), the new Prime Minister, Bill Skate, pointed out that now the Governor General, the Chief Justice and himself were "born again" Christians, and that the new speaker of the house, John Pundari, was a devout Christian (SDA). The Prime minister added, "Jesus has conquered Satan here in PNG." In Mount Hagen, where Operation Brukim Skru originated, ex-university chaplain, Fr. Robert Lak, toppled former Prime Minister Paias Wingti, and Kuk Kuli was successful with the support of the Women's Aglow Movement whose members had fasted and prayed for his success.

Subsequent events have dampened the initial enthusiasm. After the elections, many supporters were shocked by the way idealistic Independents allied themselves with leaders seemingly compromised by the shady deals of the previous government. The sentiments could be summed up in a letter by John Kross:

Are we saying that God made a mistake? I think the big mistake lies with church leaders and the general public who swallowed everything certain people said during the last elections to promote their own political agenda (*Post-Courier* 3.5.1999:20).

Others however, like Pastor Joseph Walters, took more of a faith stance and maintained that God must have heard the prayers of Operation Brukim Skru, so Christians should not point fingers but rather uphold the government in their prayers (*Post-Courier* 27.4.1999:2). Prime Minister Bill Skate continued to use religious language, and maintained that his becoming Prime Minister was an answer to prayer.² Gradually, however, the public became less

sympathetic. When, at a village in the Central Province, he likened himself to Jesus, sleeping and eating with the poor and the sick, and being “persecuted” by the opposition, Skate was confronted days later by the headline, “PM, you’re not like Christ” (*Post-Courier* 8.3.99:4).

Church Leaders in Politics

John Momis is a well — respected long — standing member of parliament. As a Catholic priest he was deputy chairman of the Constitutional Planning Committee, and served several terms in parliament as a priest-politician before resigning from the active priestly ministry in the Catholic Church. Fr. John Momis had the support of his bishop, Gregory Singkai. Bishop Singkai shielded him from critics, who could not understand how Momis could “serve two masters.” Critics tended to overlook the example of missionaries, like Fr. John Nilles SVD, who was an elected member of the National Assembly and the Simbu Provincial Assembly in the early 1970’s.

By the 1997 elections times had changed. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference, supported by Rome, was taking a strong position against priests standing for election to parliament.³ In April 1996, in a letter addressed to priests, seminarians and religious, they wrote: “We bishops emphasise that we do not want any Catholic priest or seminarian or religious to become involved politically by running for office in 1997 or at any other time.” Despite the prohibition, three diocesan priests stood for election and two were successful — Fr. Robert Lak and Fr. Louis Ambane. Both have been suspended from public sacramental ministry in the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, both retain their clerical title, and are still considered religious leaders. Other elected churchmen, like Pastor Jacob Wama, and evangelist Peter Lus have not encountered the same opposition from their churches.

For the two Catholic clerics, getting elected to political office may have been easier than exercising it. Fr. Ambane’s election was nullified by the Supreme Court in October 1998 on the grounds that the Electoral Commission had failed to provide an adequate number

of ballot boxes for the elections. He then doubled his votes in a by-election, only to end up fighting a court battle to regain the governor's position from Simeon Wai, the interim governor.

Robert Lak's passage was even more tortuous. Having defeated strongman Paias Wingti in what was called a "David and Goliath" contest, Lak soon became embroiled in a prolonged legal battle over charges of unlawful carnal knowledge and of producing a pornographic video. The allegations attracted critics who voiced their opinions in the media, and the Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference had to take a stand in Fr. Lak's defence. Fr. Henk Kronenberg, General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference wrote, "The media has put the question again, 'How much longer will the Catholic Church hierarchy remain mute over the public allegations that one of its member is involved in a sex scandal.' ... If the court convicts him of this, then the bishops will certainly say something, but nobody can just go by allegations" (*The Independent* 28.8.1998:11). One charge was eventually dismissed on technical grounds, and the other charge has been filed (*Post-Courier* 17.6.1999:3). However, as Fr. Lak himself admits, the allegations in the so called sex tape affair have "put his credibility at stake" (*Post-Courier* 13.7.1998:1).⁴

Religious Leaders as Critics

Archbishop Brian Barnes of the Catholic Church has a practice of making his Christmas and Easter messages relevant to the social and political climate in the nation.⁵ In his 1999 Easter message he wrote,

we are living in a real world, and we can't separate the spiritual from the material and practical problems which we most certainly have (e.g. church health workers going unpaid, educational institutions not supported financially, increasing crime,...) refusal by our most prominent politician to undergo questioning by police goes against the principle that everyone is equal before the law' (*Post-Courier Supplement* 1.4.1999: 25).

Barnes warned that the future of Papua New Guinea as a free

democratic country was threatened. The next day the *Post-Courier* headlines read, “Bishop: Govt 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 is shameful, and that there was a need for a change of government (*Post-Courier* 1.4.1999:3). The newspapers were quick to support the Archbishop. The Editorial viewpoint in the *Post-Courier* read:

We applaud Archbishop Barnes for being forthright on the state of the nation — he has truly expressed the views of thousands of Papua New Guineans about their country. We also endorse his view that churches must speak up for the sufferings of the people and the way politicians are running this country they have a moral and spiritual obligation to do so (*Post-Courier* 1.4.1999:11).

The issue became the leading story on radio and television. Support soon came from other Christian churches.⁶ 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* 7.4.1999:3).

Protests came from the government. Public Service minister, Peter Peipul said that the Archbishop’s outburst was unethical and misleading (*Post-Courier* 7.4.1999:3). The Minister of Justice, Simon Kaumi, claimed that there has been collusion between the Archbishop and the opposition (*Post-Courier* 6.4.1999:2). Jacob Wama, Minister of Finance and Internal Revenue Affairs, said that the bishop’s outburst was out of biblical context which teaches Christians to pray for those in authority (*Post-Courier* 6.4.1999:2). Such criticisms prompted the head of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Ayong, to write in a letter to the *Post-Courier*:

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. ...Saying this is not an unjustified interference in politics by the Church, but an exercising of a legitimate democratic right, and, we believe, an important responsibility in the light of the demands of Christian justice (*Post-Courier* 14.4.1999:11).

Prime Minister Skate, publicly at least, took a conciliatory stance, inviting himself to meet with all the Catholic Bishops on 16th April at their annual meeting in Rabaul. Then, on 26th April he met at the Travelodge Hotel with leaders from a number of churches. Three months later, on July 7, 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. The Archbishop himself remained somewhat sceptical of attempts at reform. A few months after the formation of the new government he is quoted as saying, "when a church leader is critical of government performance, a common reaction is to seek the views of the church on a particular plan or initiative and afterwards ignore it" (*The Independent* 2.9.1999:2).

The episode has not been forgotten. Two years later the Governor of the Gulf Province, Riddler Kimave, on the floor of parliament alleged that 'a church' was involved in the removal of the Skate government, and asked the Minister of Home Affairs if he was preparing regulations to govern the activities of denominations in the country (*The Independent* 8.6.2000:5). The Governor refused to name the church. However, some who heard the allegation, infer that it is levelled at Archbishop Barnes and the Catholic Church.⁷

Religious Figure as Friend

Less than a month after the Archbishop's criticism, Prime Minister Skate found a friend in visiting televangelist Benny Hinn. The televangelist had been invited by the Prime Minister to come as

a guest of the national government, and was promised a welcome, including a state reception (*The National* 19.1.1999:1), and a contribution of K180,000 towards the crusade (*The National* 15.4.1999:3). The televised arrival showed Benny Hinn being met at the airport by the Prime Minister and other leaders, along with the Royal Constabulary band, a choir and a police escort. For two nights the John Guise stadium was packed to capacity, and aided by 13 tonnes of sound equipment, the crusade could be heard far and wide.

Benny Hinn was the guest at a prayer breakfast at parliament and is quoted as commenting afterwards that, “the spiritual submission of politicians and bureaucrats during the prayer breakfast was also an historic experience in his entire globe trotting career” (sic) (*The National* 3.5.1999:1). Benny Hinn’s message was: “God is saying to Papua New Guinea, ‘I am ready — are you ready?’” It seems that not all the parliamentarians were ready for the message, as less than a quarter of them showed up for the prayer breakfast. The Prime Minister said that Pastor Hinn’s visit was in accordance with “the Lord God’s purpose to save the nation from its problems” (*The National* 3.5.1999:3). However, the Simbu Governor, Fr. Ambane, expressed concern that “the Papua New Guinea government and certain politicians could be taking a free ride, using Pastor Hinn’s crusade to cover their own sins. Papua New Guineans should not fall for this type of con artist, be they faith healers or politicians” (*Post-Courier* 29.4.1999:2).

Benny Hinn was careful not to voice any public criticism of the Prime Minister or his government. The Prime Minister responded with enthusiasm, declaring, “The Prime Minister of this country is none other than Jesus Christ (and) I am his ambassador” (*The National* 3.5.1999:3). The reticence to criticise the government is common in conservative evangelical circles, based on Paul’s instruction that Christians should be subject to governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7). They stress the importance of disciplining individual politicians and emphasise the power of intercessory prayer. For example, in a follow-up to Operation Brukim Skru, Operation 'Prea Banis' (Prayer Wall) saw teams of intercessors going to pray in government

departments, including the Chamber of Parliament. Moreover, they convinced the Prime Minister to allow them to use the official government aircraft, Kumul 1, to fly along the border with Irian Jaya, praying that Papua New Guinea might be protected from outside evil influences. They also circumnavigated the entire country in a navy patrol boat, erecting a 'prayer wall' while performing prophetic acts, and praying that God would release power in the heavenly realm to impact on the earthly realm and protect the nation from evil.⁹ The example of this group of evangelical Christians illustrates a different approach from that of Archbishop Barnes: the former involving spiritual warfare with evil forces; the latter preferring to confront the political system and its leaders.

Political Leaders Funding Religious Bodies

On 27 March 1997, a motion was passed in the National Parliament to introduce legislation relating to the establishment of a National Council of Christian Churches (NCCC) in Papua New Guinea. Then, in 1999, the member for Komo-Margarima prepared a Bill for a National Council of Christian Churches Act by which the national government would appropriate funds from the National Budget annually to fund various church-run programmes and institutions in the country in a higher level than is presently the case. There were also plans to have a five-year national reconciliation and spiritual development program, and a fund for a school of integral human development and national reconciliation.¹⁰

Near the beginning of the proposed act, the draftsmen notes that "the National Parliament and other institutions of the State are created by God to protect its citizens...." If one would be cynical, one might see it is an attempt to legitimise the state, using religious language, and at the same time reducing the independence of the churches under the guise of helping them with funding. The issue of government funding for churches in Papua New Guinea has been a hot issue for years. The government pays the salaries of teachers in church agency schools (the Seventh Day Adventists officially being an exception). The churches and the government co-operate in funding health services throughout the country. This has been a touchy issue in recent years with church-run health services closing

down, claiming that they have not received the promised government subsidies. In many provinces, government money is used to fund church buildings and religious gatherings.

The bill proposes that the chairman of the NCCC be a nominated Member of Parliament, and an additional member of the council would be appointed by the appropriate government minister. Moreover the act proposes that all the assets, property, etc. of the PNGCC be transferred to the NCCC. This is a surprising proposal because it amounts to an Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) becoming in effect a government organisation.

Church reactions to the proposal have been less than enthusiastic.¹¹ In commenting on the proposed bill, Archbishop James Ayong of the Anglican Church said,

'If the church and government were one, how free would the church be to offer a challenge if she sees the government doing something that is wrong or immoral? How could she be critical if she is part of the same organisation? The church's role in speaking out in areas of faith and morals is preserved by her independence.'

No doubt the Archbishop can speak from the experience of a church established in England. The PNGCC General Secretary, Rev. Pat Kila, also voiced his concern that, 'If the government gives funding, they would be in control. Would the church's representative stand with the government or the opposition?' (*The Independent* 9.10.98:17).

The draft of the Act highlights the fuzzy boundaries of the respective jurisdictions of church and state in Papua New Guinea. Relations continue to be strained. The financial plight of church health services has improved, but they are still struggling to get reliable channels for funding, and church representatives are wary of government attempts to control them. In March 2000 the churches received a letter from the Department of Home Affairs instructing church leaders to be present in Port Moresby for a meeting with the

government. They were told that the Prime Minister expected them in Port Moresby on the Tuesday of the following week. They were informed that they were to meet at the luxurious Parkroyal Hotel and that the whole enterprise would be funded from Gaming Board Funds! Not surprisingly, the churches refused the 'invitation.' Mrs Gegeyo, the General Secretary of the PNGCC commented, "If it wishes to hold a meeting with the churches, the government should rightfully contact them and not instruct and treat them as its employees" (*The Independent* 30.3.2000:21).

Religion and Politics Together¹²

In what ways has religion been woven into political relations and political leadership in Papua New Guinea in the period following the 1997 national elections? I will briefly outline seven ways in which this is occurring.

Legitimation

The State may legitimate a religion or church and visa versa. It may happen in obvious ways, as with the Holy Roman Empire and the Popes, or in more subtle ways, for example, the inscription 'In God we trust' on coins in the USA. Moreover, there may be a dynamic of de-legitimation as we saw with Cardinal Sin's action against President Marcos in the Philippines.

In Papua New Guinea, God receives a mention in the national anthem, and Christianity is legitimated by the specific reference to Christian faith in the Preamble to the Papua New Guinea Constitution. Examples given earlier in this paper have shown how political figures have tried to legitimise themselves by using language intended to appeal to people's religious sentiments. Another example above referred to the Prime Minister and some members of the government allying themselves with a visiting televangelist. This appeared even more obvious, following immediately after the de-legitimising public criticism by Archbishop Barnes. Legitimation may be seen in a positive light in terms of co-operation and support of one sphere by another. However, especially in times of crisis, there is a natural

tendency towards claiming political leadership by divine right. In such situations, claims to be appointed by God are an unhealthy trend, with the potential for abuse.

Ideology

Sometimes religious leaders endeavour to stay apart from a particular political ideology so as to maintain a more critical stance. For example, Pope John Paul II, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern, 1987)) criticises both capitalism and marxism as “imperfect” systems and says that the church offers, not a third way but a moral theology to critique all systems. At times though that critique may have a direct ideological impact on the political realm, particularly when it claims divine authority — backed up by divine punishments!

In Papua New Guinea, John Momis, leading the Constitutional Planning Commission, was able to help integrate principles from the social teaching of the church into the national goals and directive principles of the Papua New Guinea Constitution. For example, as he explains, the sharing of power in decentralisation is the logical consequence of our sharing in the divine power in incarnation. The theological principle of grace building on nature underlies the principle of integral human development which is the first goal in the Constitution.¹³ We have seen in the examples above, the influence of Operation Brukim Skru, and the difficulties the two priest-politicians encountered, how difficult it is to maintain an ideological stance in the context of party politics.

Government funding of church programs can have an ideological impact on church policy and practice. Church leaders may well be afraid of appearing critical of the government lest their source of funds dries up. This is another reason why some of the churches have been wary of the proposed NCCC as a channel for government money, since they want to preserve their independence and the freedom to make policy decisions, some of which might not be popular with the government of the day.

Collective loyalty

In Europe after the Reformation, with *cuius regio eius religio* (literally: whose region his religion), the religion of the ruler was the religion of the region. In Papua New Guinea, at least initially, the denomination of the missionary became the denomination of the region. Different missions concentrated in different parts of the land, and this is reflected in the predominant religious affiliation of the various provinces and their leaders. For example, the Morobe Province is 77% Lutheran. The Northern Province is 68% Anglican. By contrast, the Bougainville population is 75% Catholic and the Catholic Church's solidarity with people during the crisis aroused suspicion in government circles that the church supported the rebels.¹⁴ The practice of the Skate government to include Protestant pastors in the negotiations over Bougainville did not go unnoticed by many Bougainvilleans and did little to win their confidence.

Various churches in different parts of the country may create local solidarity, but can be quite divisive over the nation as a whole. The disunity among the churches in Papua New Guinea creates a difficulty for the government, because there is no one body to deal with. The 'mainline', Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventist Churches all form different groupings. There is some overlap, but in practice they operate independently. The mainline churches are represented together in the PNGCC. However the council tends to take a low profile, partly because it has no real power to influence the policies of the churches that it represents. In practice, the churches tend to work together when their own welfare depends on the effectiveness of their collective action in bodies like the Churches Medical Council.

Organisation

Churches differ in the importance they give to impacting on the social domain. Some tend to dismiss 'earthly' realities and concentrate on individual salvation. However, other churches with a theology more concerned with the course of history as central to their task in the world will see the relevance of involvement in the

social and political realm. Through importance given to the historical process, people become aware of their potential as participants in the process of change.

We have seen how on a national level the Catholic Church, as a highly organised ecclesiastical institution, is prepared to confront the government on socio-economic and other issues. The more cohesive and organised a church is, the more able it is to confront the state. Today, with 44% of church health worker positions, and employing 51% of the teachers in the church agency schools, the Catholic Church, more than any other, may feel that it can make demands of the government.¹⁵ However, the influence of numbers also carries with it the likelihood of conflict between the religious authority and the state.

There have been attempts to set up political parties based on Christian principles, such as the United Christian Democratic Party in 1968, and the Christian Democratic Party in the lead-up to the 1997 elections, but such parties have attracted little success in the polls. In May 1999, John Pundari resigned the Speaker's position and announced the formation of the Advance Papua New Guinea Party (APP). John Pundari, a Seventh Day Adventist, likes to integrate prayer with party gatherings and takes a strong stance on moral issues, such as pushing for the abolition of polygamy. No doubt many Christians are supportive of such developments. However, given the chronic instability of political parties in present-day Papua New Guinea, it is unlikely that any church-party alliances would have a lasting influence.

Legislation

In Papua, in 1937, Sir Hubert Murray was faced with a legal dilemma with the return from Madagascar of the first Papuan priest, Fr. Louis Vangeke. According to the laws at the time, as a Papuan, Louis Vangeke was not permitted to drink wine and was not supposed to wear any form of clothing above the waist. The case raised the question, not only of discriminatory laws but also of higher education (Kadiba 1989:287-8).

Three decades later, another priest, John Momis, was taking a leading role in the formation of the PNG Constitution. We read in the preamble to the Constitution the pledge to “guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.” Also the Constitution (section 45) guarantees freedom of conscience, thought and religion. Other than this, there is no formal definition of the relations between church and state, though some churches and church organisations, particularly the dioceses of the Catholic Church have been established by Act of Parliament, thus giving them legal status.

The greatest area of co-operation between the churches and the government is in educational and health services. The government and church agencies are legally part of a single educational system, as defined in the Education Act of 1970. The legal provision in health matters is less formal. At a different level there is legal provision for church representatives to be on governing bodies such as the National Youth Council, or the Advisory Committee on the Power of Mercy. In the proposed legislation on the Integrity of Political Parties, the PNGCC would provide one member of the board overseeing the funding of political parties.

Function

From the earliest times of Western contact, the missions and the colonial administration have shared a common function in the provision of resources and services to the people. Initially, the missions provided the bulk of the educational and medical services. Commenting on education prior to World War II, John Kadiba says, “What little education the Colonial Administration achieved was through the mission agencies, which were solely responsible for educational work until 1941” (Kadiba 1989:279). The contribution of the two agencies in the areas of education and health is set out in tables in the appendix to this paper. The tables show how the administration/government has gradually taken on the responsibility of providing educational facilities. However, it was not until 1985 that government school enrolments were higher than those in the mission schools (Fergie 1993:15). At present the two work in partnership, and mission agency

schools provide services in primary, secondary and tertiary education, including two church-run universities. The government puts a greater percentage of resources into developing its services at the secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Initially the government contributed subsidies and grants as aid to mission health services. By 1960 the government was providing 60% of official mission health expenditure. At present the churches provide 45% of PNG health services (49% in rural areas), 60% of general nurse training and 100% of community health worker training. The government is committed to funding 80% of the K20 million budget of the church health services. While this appears generous, the government funding has been a source of tension between the government and some of the churches in recent years because of late, reduced, or non-existent funding through the provincial governments. Financially embarrassed, some church health services have had to close for long periods.

Culture

Anthropologists report that in Melanesia, typically one finds an integrated worldview with no real separation between the natural and supernatural. The sacred or non-empirical is found, not in some other world, but within the context of people's experience. At the same time there is a tendency to see God's action in the miraculous and the extraordinary. An example of this tendency may be found in the interpretation of events surrounding the formation of the present government on 14 July 1999. After confusing everyone with a double change of support, John Pundari sided at the last minute with Sir Mekere Morauta, becoming his deputy. The *Post-Courier* recorded how people interpreted the inexplicable in miraculous terms:

Many described Wednesday's events leading to the election of Prime Minister as Divine intervention and Mr Pundari being a strong Christian was led by God to do what he did. 'It was not him (Mr Pundari's making). It was God who intervened and made the decision for him,' said a lady staffer at the national parliament. Enga Governor, Peter Ipatas, said God works in mysterious ways and no one can underestimate his power nor override his plans

and purpose for every individual. 'I was convinced that we had a government in place and there was no doubt about it. But what transpired yesterday is a mystery and I believe God had intervened in the last minute,' he said. ... Cathy Max from Western Highlands said, 'Mr Pundari was a man of God and his decision was made by God' (*Post-Courier* 16.7.1999:3).

Traditionally in Melanesia spiritual power helps one avert misfortunes and discover ways to prosperity and well-being. Many people continue to think this way. That is why calls to separate religion and politics so often meet with incomprehension and resistance on the part of the general populace in Papua New Guinea, for in Melanesian terms, religion has a political function.¹⁶ The principal concern today is whether spiritual power will control politics for good or evil. This concern is reflected in a large notice board currently standing at the corner of the road leading to the house of assembly. It reads: "When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice. But when the wicked rule, the people suffer. Prov 29:2."

Concluding Comments

This paper has illustrated various ways that religion and politics, church and state, interrelate in present-day Papua New Guinea. The question arises as to how that relationship might be a more healthy and productive one. There are various levels in the involvement of the churches in politics. These range from partnership in providing services, to public debate in pastoral letters, personal association with political figures, public protest, active support of or opposition to candidates or members, and active candidacy for office. Religious leaders in particular must ask themselves how best to proceed.

There is nothing inherently unhealthy about religious leaders such as priests and pastors asking themselves what politics may be demanding of them. Political involvement is a duty. However, the more important questions are, "What is priestly or pastoral involvement with the political? Does it not have 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?" Faith

relativises the political realm in the light of the Kingdom of God.

There may be times when strong public statements are in order. However, these must be matched by dialogue, or as Bill Page of the Four Square Church puts it, "getting beside them." Thus, efforts must be made to overcome the fragmentation and disunity in the churches so as to be able to dialogue in meetings with the government such as the 'NGO/churches-state summit' meeting proposed by the Department of Home Affairs. There is a need for an ongoing dialogue between the PNG government leaders and the church leaders, not with one dominating the other but as partners in human development.

For many Christian leaders today, the issue is not whether to pay dues to Caesar, but rather, how to reconcile religious values with political structures permeated by corruption and self interest. It would appear that some political leaders prefer to go by the principle, 'God helps those who help themselves.' Christianity, however, teaches that the true *homo politicus* is involved in people's deepest concerns. There should be no conflict in holding public office while being a committed believer. When people, who bear God's image, repay God with their service for the common good, then religion and politics can work with rather than against each other.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Personal Communication, 17 June, 2000. See also *The National* 10.7.2000:7.
- 2 "Mr Skate said it took prayer to put him into the leadership as Prime Minister, and to form the government and 'it will take more than a handful of greedy, power-hungry leaders to remove his government.'" Address at Morobe patrol station, commenting on Brukim Skru (*Independent* 4.6.1999: 30).
- 3 Papua New Guinea is not an isolated case. For example, in the USA, Fr. Robert Drinan SJ served five terms in the US House of Representatives until compelled to withdraw from his campaign for re-election in 1980.
- 4 For further details, see Vulum 1998.
- 5 Other forthright comments from Archbishop Barnes on issues relating to politics, may be found in his Easter Message 2000, his Christmas messages in 1998 and 1999, his address on "Violence in the Community," at the University of Papua New Guinea Open Forum (19th April 2000) , his Independence Message - 1999, his address at the National NGO/Church Summit on 14 July 1998, his address to Transparency International's National Community Workshop, in June 1998, and

his address, "Church and State in Development," at the Constitutional Development Commission Seminar: PNG Politics into the New Millennium.

- 6 The Seventh Day Adventist Church was the only one to publicly distance itself from the controversy. Pastor Bradley Kemp, Secretary of the PNG Union Mission wrote, "The Seventh Day Adventist Church says that while it is seriously concerned about the events that are taking place in the country, and the effects these were having on the lives of people, it is not prepared to enter into a debate on the continuation of the current government." (*Post-Courier* 7.4.1999:2).
- 7 The news report continues that the Home Affairs minister, Mr Kumbakor replied that he would be introducing two laws to parliament which will look at controlling NGOs and Churches so that they do not involve themselves in matters of politics (*Independent* June 8, 2000, p. 5). A spokesman from Home Affairs denies that such legislation is being prepared.
- 8 According to the report in *The National* 3.5.1999:1, the evangelist introduced Mr Skate as his "friend for life."
- 9 Prophetic acts involve doing seemingly outrageous things in obedience to God. For example, the Israelite soldiers marching around the city of Jericho in silence for six days and then with the Ark of the Lord on the seventh (Joshua 6:1-21). One of the many acts in PNG involved holding high a flag printed with the words "Jesus is Lord" during the entire flight along the PNG/Irian Jaya border. (Personal Communication, Bob Brown, Port Moresby, 12 June 2000).
- 10 The proposed bill appears in the Notice Paper for Parliament (1997-98-99-2000) no. 77, item 184.
- 11 For a view, see the report, "Churches sceptical about Bill" (*Post-Courier* 28.6.2000:6).
- 12 Some points in this section come from Ramet and Treadgold, 1995
- 13 John Momis, personal communication, Port Moresby, 23.5.2000.
- 14 When confronted with this issue, one prominent Bougainvillean retorted, "We didn't have to rely on the missionaries to tell us that we owned the land."
- 15 In 1998 the distribution of the 2301 church health worker positions is as follows: Catholic 44%, Lutheran, 10.7%, United 10%, ECPNG 8.6%, Nazarene 4.4%, Baptist 4%, Anglican 3%, SDA 3%, Gutnius Lutheran 2%, 16 other agencies 11% (Calculated from statistics from the PNG Dept. of Health Church Health Services, 1998). The distribution of teachers in church agency community schools is as follows: Catholic 51.8%, Lutheran 17%, Evangelical Alliance 11.2%, United 10.7%, Anglican 5.3%, SDA 4%. (Calculated from Educational Statistics PNG, 1998)
- 16 Recently there have been reports of radical SDA elements in Enga, the Eastern Highlands and Momase actively opposing the National Census because they see Satanic forces behind it (*National* 22.5.2000:3).

APPENDIX

Development of Educational Facilities		
	Admin/Government	Mission/Church
Report to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of the Territory of New Guinea and the Territory of Papua 1929-1930	The Territory of New Guinea had 2 "native" elementary schools (Rabaul, Kavieng). £7,698 was spent from the Native Education Trust Fund (grants to missions?). The Territory of Papua report does not mention education except £4,000 given to the missions from the Native Education Fund.	The Territory of New Guinea reports that there are 1,431 mission schools with 38,801 pupils.
Territory of New Guinea and Territory of Papua Reports, 1960-1961	30 primary "A" schools 236 primary "T" schools 22 post-primary 4 secondary 7 technical 5 teacher training college	16 primary "A" schools 904 primary "T" schools 2669 "exempt" schools 10 post-primary 3 secondary 4 technical 21 teacher training colleges
Education Statistics of Papua New Guinea, 1998	699 elementary schools 1511 community schools 104 provincial high schools 3 teachers colleges	824 elementary schools 1654 community schools 51 provincial high schools 6 teachers colleges

Development of Health Facilities		
	Government/Administration	Mission/Church
Report to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of the Territory of New Guinea and the Territory of Papua 1929-1930	The Administration spent £17,782 on medical care in Papua, and £68,761 on public health in New Guinea. Subsidies to missions by the administration for mission hospitals and medical treatment by missions amounted to £2659 in Papua and £343 in New Guinea.	Missions, such as Anglican, London Missionary Society, Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Seventh Day Adventist, all maintained health facilities.
Territory of New Guinea and Territory of Papua Reports, 1960-1961	107 hospitals 1303 aid posts 573 maternal and child clinics £305,254 grant in aid to missions (approx. 60% of official mission health expenditure).	106 hospitals 386 aid posts 126 maternal and child clinics
Statistics from Department of Health Church Health Services, 1998	55% total PNG health services The Government is committed to providing 80% of the K20 million budget of the church health services.	45% total PNG health services 49% rural health services 60% general nurse training 100% community health worker training