

State Society and Governance in Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

Discussion
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CULTIVATING CHRISTIAN CIVIL SOCIETY: FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANITY, POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INTRODUCTION

Governments and international development agencies worldwide have begun increasingly to restructure their programs towards issues of governance.¹ The Australian aid budget, for example, increased support for governance programs from \$160 million in 1996–97 to an estimated \$885 million in 2005–06 (AusAID 2006a: 3). In the past, governance strategies have concentrated either on reform of the state bureaucracy or on the empowerment of civil society organisations. More recently, the Australian aid program has been attempting to combine these two strategies in order to enable government and civil society to respond to each other (AusAID 2006b: 1). This new approach entails, firstly, increasing support for civil society organisations in delivering services and, secondly, reforming government to enable it to fulfil its obligations. By strengthening the institutions of civil society and the state, and the relations between them, the strategy aims to contribute to social and political stability and to efficient resource allocation (AusAID 2006b: 2). As part of the effort to

strengthen civil society, programs to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) have been initiated. Accordingly, strengthening civil society has become a key facet of the Australian Government's approach to governance in Papua New Guinea (AusAID 2006c: 2).²

A key question that the governance strategy for Papua New Guinea grapples with is why the widespread failure of the state to realise the basic needs of its citizens has not generated a much greater demand for reform and change. Given the situation in some parts of Papua New Guinea, where there is virtually no state presence, it is surprising that more strident demands are not made. This has also been observed by Morris and Stewart in their analysis for the White Paper on Australia's aid program: "Given the well documented failures of governance in Papua New Guinea, it is notable that there is not stronger and more effective demand from community and civil society organisations for greater accountability and performance, particularly from urban citizens" (2005: 20). Recognising

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the importance of this observation, the White Paper asserts that “Insufficient domestic demand for better performance or reform ... [is] ... one of the most important obstacles to institutional development in poor countries” (AusAID 2006a: 43). The White Paper and other documents aim to develop initiatives to address this lack of demand, such as the *Building Demand for Better Governance* program and the *Democratic Governance* program. However, very little analysis exists of what factors cause or contribute to this lack of demand, and insufficient thought has been given to whether this is, in fact, a feasible strategy at all.

I begin this discussion with a general introduction to Christianity in Papua New Guinea, particularly as it relates to broad issues of governance, electoral discourse and demands for reform. Then, as further background, I present my observations of the conduct of the most recent Papua New Guinea elections, taken largely from my situation in the Southern Highlands electorate of Kagua-Erave. The course of the election and the types of election messages people were presented with, together with their responses, offer considerable insight into their opinions of government and their approach to the question of governance. While this Discussion Paper canvasses a range of Christian approaches to electoral politics and the 2007 national election, my focus is especially on the fundamentalist Christian groups. These groups are increasing in influence throughout Papua New Guinea and contribute to a profound disenchantment with electoral politics and politics more generally, which militates against efforts to strengthen community demands for better governance.

CHRISTIANITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Anyone seeking to utilise local expertise and authority in efforts to engage communities in issues of governance in Papua New Guinea is likely to look to the churches, for the authority of Christianity is well-established in this country and its influence is extensive. According to *Operation World* - an organisation with a primary focus on

the power of prayer - it is estimated that 97.28% of the population of Papua New Guinea identifies itself as Christian (2008).³ Despite Christianity’s huge importance and the country’s Christian principles being specifically recognised in its Constitution, Papua New Guinea remains a secular state (Latukeyu 1988; Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 6). In recent times, however, some efforts have been made to unite church and state by declaring Christianity the official state religion (see Gibbs 2004: 4).

Regardless of its high proportion of Christians, Papua New Guinea is one of the most evangelized places in the world. Currently, thousands of missionaries are spreading the gospel, often to people who have long identified themselves as Christian.⁴ The religious orientation of these missionaries is largely evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostal. Fundamentalist is an appropriate term for most of these, since they adhere to the defining characteristics of fundamentalism, including reading the Bible literally, or what Lawrence has referred to as “scriptural absolutism,” and an extremely dualist view of the world as a dire struggle between good and evil.⁵

Although the long-established churches have a long history and compose by far the largest Christian group in PNG, in the last decade or so the most spectacular growth in converts has been in the newer “born again” churches, while the mainstream churches have suffered inroads into their traditionally large congregations. Though it is unclear how they derived their figures, *Operation World* estimates that of the total Christian population of PNG, evangelicals comprise 21.1% (1,014, 000), charismatics 12.4% (598,000) and Pentecostals 9.2% (442,000) (Operation World 2008).⁶

Because of the considerable diversity in what constitutes Christianity in PNG, Philip Gibbs says that it is misleading to refer to the Church in Papua New Guinea as if it were a homogeneous entity, suggesting instead that it can be divided into four separate blocks (2004: 3). The first block comprises the mainstream churches, which have their roots in the long-established

former missionary churches - Lutheran, Catholic, United and Anglican. The second group comprises those that identify as the Evangelical Alliance, including the Apostolic, Baptist and Nazarene Churches and the Salvation Army. A third block, not yet formally organised, comprises the more recently established Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God and Christian Revival Centres, and the fourth consists exclusively of the Seventh Day Adventists, who, as Gibbs remarks, have considerable political influence in Papua New Guinea (2004: 3-4). However, though Gibb's delineation is a useful heuristic device, it has some limitations - for example, though there are many theological differences between his Evangelical Alliance block and his Pentecostalist block, there are also significant commonalities, especially in the emphasis given to personal salvation and evangelism, and in millennial beliefs, such as a belief in the end of the world and the return of Christ.

The relationship between Christianity and politics in Papua New Guinea does not lend itself easily to summary or broad generalisation. Not only are there the widely divergent institutionalised churches, each with their own local character, but there are also some elaborate syncretic forms of religion constructed from elements of Christianity and local religions. These are highly influential and some take great interest in the political arena (see Lattas 2006). The relationship of electoral politics and Christianity is also widely diverse. At one end of the spectrum, a union between the two exists - political parties which explicitly define themselves as Christian, such as the Christian Democratic Party - while at the other end of the spectrum are churches which eschew electoral politics altogether.

Many of the mainstream churches have a rather ambivalent position, not wanting clerics to be involved directly in electoral politics, but having a commitment to social justice and good governance that sees them speaking out on political issues. Catholic clerics are forbidden to assume public office, and any priest who does so is suspended from the exercise of priestly and pastoral duties.⁷ Even so, some take the electoral

path, the most famous being the late Father Robert Lak, who unseated the former Prime Minister, Pius Wingti, in the 1997 election.

Despite this stance, the Catholic Church has itself entered political debate by being outspoken on the issue of corruption. A number of Bishops have been particularly vocal, including the Archbishop of Port Moresby, Brian Barnes, who has regularly used his weekly radio program and other forums to voice his criticism of the government and his anti-corruption message (Gibbs 2004: 4; Standish 1999-2000). In the lead up to the 2002 election, he went so far as to say that the future of Papua New Guinea as a free democratic country was under threat, that the conduct of many Papua New Guinea leaders was shameful and that a change of government was needed (Gibbs 2004: 4).

In the lead up to elections, the mainstream churches have been particularly active in mounting educational campaigns to inform voters about good governance and the electoral system. This includes the 2002 election and the supplementary elections in the Southern Highlands in 2003. Although the United Church was involved in some of the initiatives, the Catholic Church was the only one to design and carry out a specific community training programme throughout the country in the lead up to the 2002 election (Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 15 citing Stein Holmes 2003). There is some suggestion that this programme was one factor contributing to the very high turnover of members of parliament in the election (i.e. 80% compared with 65% during the previous election in 1997) (Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 15, citing Stein Holmes 2003). In 2007, members of Catholic organisations such as Caritas Papua New Guinea and the Catholic Women's Federation were actively involved in the civil society educational campaign to inform voters in the Southern Highlands electorates about the Limited Preferential Voting system (LPV).⁸ Besides such initiatives, there exist "no broad, endogenous, church-based strategies in place aimed specifically at enhancing or improving governance or policy performance in PNG" (Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 17).

Most of the new evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches are fundamentalist and shun active involvement in politics, avoiding engagement with the state both in civil society and electoral affairs (see Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 22; Gibbs 2005: 17).⁹ This general aloofness towards politics has been described as “political acquiescence” (Schoffeleers 1991: 89)¹⁰ and indeed some of these churches do endorse the belief that people should accept the authority of the government of the day (Gibbs 2004: 4, 2005: 18; Hauck, Mandie-Filer and Bolger 2005: 22).¹¹

This does not mean that they do not have what Ireland refers to as, “critical citizenship” - a critique of the social and political economies of the country in which they live (1995: 136). Indeed these churches often articulate trenchant criticism of the corruption and the inability of the Papua New Guinea state to deliver services. Much of this criticism is cloaked in a particular kind of conspiratorial and apocalyptic language, as evident in the discussions with local pastors I describe later. However, these critiques rarely generate political activism; rather, they are reactive, expressing a feeling of moral outrage towards those responsible for corruption and poor governance. Such problems are seen as evidence that people are not living Christian lives, and the remedy is for people to become good Christians - the emphasis being on individual moral reform rather than broader social reform - and to pray for God’s intervention for a good election result (Gifford 1991: 18). Some commentators argue that such Christians are not passive spectators in political affairs since they use prayer in the hope of influencing outcomes. Sometimes this is framed in terms of “spiritual warfare,” conceived as an active challenge to Satan’s power through aggressive prayer (Jorgensen 2005: 446). However, while it is true that this activity reveals the existence of interest in outcomes, it is hardly effective action.

In the following section I describe specific aspects of the 2007 election that illustrate the problematic relationship between Christianity and politics in Papua New Guinea.

THE 2007 PAPUA NEW GUINEA GENERAL ELECTION

The 2007 election bore some similarities to previous elections and also significant differences. Discussing the relationship between politics, religion and churches in the 2002 Papua New Guinea general election, Philip Gibbs suggests there was a blurring between the sacred and the secular, with political discourse and symbolism being laced with Biblical and other Christian imagery. This involved candidates assiduously seeking to present themselves as “God-fearing” people who could be trusted. The Saviour was also a common figure and Gibbs cites several examples of candidates comparing themselves to Moses leading the exodus from Egypt to the promised land.

In the 2002 election, some candidates also made extravagant promises to Christians to secure their vote. Peter Yama, the candidate for Usino Bundi Open, declared that he would “ensure that 10% of the annual national budget is given to God”, a tithing policy to distribute 10% of PNG’s total earnings to churches through the Home Affairs Department (cited Gibbs 2004: 7 and see also 2005: 3).¹² In 2007, the People’s Freedom Pati made similar promises, advocating support for the churches and NGOs by a voluntary tithing of 10% of the tax revenue. However, none of this party’s eight candidates succeeded in winning a seat. Other political parties and candidates were more restrained in their promises on this issue, simply saying they would support the work of the churches.

Christian rhetoric was a persistent theme in the People’s Freedom Pati statement which appeared in the *Post-Courier*. They considered it very important that the quality of leadership should take priority over problems of development - leaders must be “truly repentant and resolved towards the God Almighty, oneself, family and community” (*Post-Courier*, June 2007). Leaders must also be physically fit, possibly a reference to the widespread idea that bodily health, especially outward appearance, is an indication of moral health (see Eves 1998: 28-29 and 1996). In the same newspaper, other Christians upheld Jesus as the model of leadership,

defined in terms of “shepherd-ship, servant-ship and sacrifice” (*Post-Courier*, June 2007). The Pangu Party’s policy platform included creating a Ministry of Religion: “Pangu acknowledges the role of the church in promoting Christian values, and in social, economic, and spiritual development, and proposes to create a Ministry of Religion to improve government-church cooperation” (*Post-Courier*, June 2007).

A significant difference between the election of 2007 and earlier ones was the absence of a nationwide campaign like *Operation Brukim Skru*, which featured in the lead up to the 1997 election (see Kocher Schmid 1999: 20; Gibbs 2005; Jorgensen 2005). Literally meaning to bend the knee, but conveying connotations of kneeling down to pray or seeking forgiveness, *Brukim Skru* was initiated by the Governor-General of the time, Sir Wiwa Korowi, in November 1996. *Brukim Skru* aimed “to bring Papua New Guinea before God for his divine intervention for the evils of our time” (Asia Pacific Network 1997).¹³ A large number of churches were involved in this campaign, though Gibbs suggests that the initiative was held mostly by the conservative evangelical and Pentecostal churches (2005: 14). One plan, which evidently had the support of the Electoral Commissioner but which didn’t quite get off the ground, was to provide “prayer cover” to keep corruption and evil spirits away during polling.¹⁴

Operation *Brukim Skru* also involved local events, such as crusades, including a “Mega Prayer Crusade” at the University of Papua New Guinea, organised by the Tertiary Student’s Christian Fellowship, which involved students praying for good government. As the President of the Tertiary Student’s Christian Fellowship, Bill Koim, commented at the time:

We have been praying for a good government and honest leadership, and we have not been surprised to see a lot of the established leaders fall. We are not saying that they were bad leaders, but we are thankful because these are God’s own doings (*The National*, 9 July 1997, cited Kocher Schmid 1999: 20).

He added that the underlying theme of the crusade was that politicians needed the strength of God to perform well in the new government - human strength and wisdom being only secondary (*The National*, 9 July 1997, cited Kocher Schmid 1999: 21). Since the country had lost its way, only divine intervention could help it to follow the right path.

Although the 2007 election had no such nation-wide campaign, prayer was still promoted as a useful strategy. This occurred at the local level, something I return to later, but it was also widely advocated in the national discourse prior to polling, with correspondents to the newspapers urging people to pray for the right leaders to be elected. One correspondent from Madang suggested that voters must take some responsibility for the quality of the leaders elected and divine intervention was needed in this. As he wrote:

As a Christian country we must unite and pray so that right leaders will be elected through the ballot box. I am appealing to all Christian churches and families to come down to their knees and pray constantly in the couple of weeks remaining before the election. Let the man above choose the right leaders for us. All Papua New Guineans with a heart for Papua New Guinea must unite and pray! (*Post-Courier Viewpoints, Weekend Edition*, 8-10 June 2007).

Some of these letters, including this one, were reproduced on the online Papua New Guinea politics forum and elicited considerable scorn from other letter-writers, who saw praying for political change as pointless. One responded to the appeal to pray for the election of the right leaders by referring to “the totally failed *brukim skru* campaign,” pointing out that God did not solve the problems since nothing changed, and tartly concluding that: “The tears dried, our sore knees healed, meanwhile Billy Skate and his mob continued cleaning out the public accounts especially at NCD

(National Capital District). So much for divine intervention" (*Post-Courier* Viewpoint, cited *Papua New Guinea News Board* 2007). Another response repeated this message, suggesting that the end result of "brukim skru" was "some crook got into power" (Anon. *Papua New Guinea News Board* 2007).¹⁵ Obviously some sceptics exist in the Christian nation.¹⁶

WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

The relationship between Christianity and politics was placed squarely on the public agenda during the 2007 election when it became apparent that the gazetted polling day in the Southern Highlands and Morobe Provinces fell on a Saturday, much to the ire of Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), who worship on this day. The 50,000 SDA members in these provinces made furious attempts to have the day of the polling changed. Appeals were made by SDA church leaders, such as the General secretary, Pastor Joel Makao, who believed that God would be dishonoured by polling on the Sabbath: "Leaders are chosen by God to lead his people" and the Electoral Commission "must respect God and allow his people to cast their votes during one of the weekdays" (*The National*, 28 June, 2007). Others who joined the fight included the former Southern Highlands Governor Hami Yawari, whose lawyers wrote to the Electoral Commission asking for the polling day to be changed and threatening court action if it was not changed. He added that since the majority of Southern Highlanders were Christians, the polling should not be held on Sunday either (*The National*, 27 June, 2007).

One correspondent to the *Post Courier* saw the Electoral Commission trampling on the constitutional and natural rights of SDA members, citing Sections 45 and 50 of the Papua New Guinea Constitution, which provide for "freedom of conscience, thought and religion" and the "Right to vote and stand for public office."¹⁷ He urged every SDA "in this beautiful country ... to pray for the mercy of God to change the polling schedule" (*Post Courier*, 28 June, 2007). His prayers weren't answered. Others, including the

editorial writer of the *National*, invoked the constitutional separation of church and state to argue the case against changing polling (*The National*, 20 June, 2007). Despite a considerable number of appeals by Seventh Day Adventists to the Electoral Commission, the Commissioner Andrew Trawen refused to change the polling date, saying that SDA members still had plenty of time after church to vote (*The National*, 29 June, 2007). The Southern Highlands election manager, David Wakias, was somewhat more blunt, telling SDA members that the date would not be changed or polling extended and that they would have to "choose whether to vote or go to church" (*The National*, 29 June, 2007). The Electoral Commission's legal adviser said the Commission had no choice, since when polling would commence was set out in section 79(1) of the *Organic Law*, and that day was Saturday. One-day polling was instituted as a security measure and to prevent people voting on more than one day (though this did not stop people polling at more than one polling place on the same day).

Whether or not the estimated 35,000 SDA members in the Southern Highlands exercised their right to vote is unclear. Certainly, those in Kagua-Erave electorate (where I was based during the election) did not vote on Saturday, since no voting at all took place on that day, largely because the Electoral Commission had seriously misjudged the time needed to distribute the ballot boxes and papers. Despite the Returning Officer's determination to have Saturday polling, when it became apparent that the ballot boxes could not be delivered in time, the Electoral Commissioner gave approval for polling to commence on Sunday.¹⁸ Polling concluded on Wednesday and voting lapsed in a number of wards because the polling teams were unable to get there in time.

After the polling, a correspondent from Ialibu in the Southern Highlands wrote to the *Post-Courier* suggesting that the Electoral Commissioner's refusal to change the polling date was a test of people's faith by Satan. "Mr Trawen," he asked, "why have you put the people of God to the test? Have you thought that I will bow down to Satan by voting on a Saturday? No way. I've not voted.

You may consider this as another joke but remember the devil is at its best towards the end times" (*Post-Courier*, 6-8 July, 2007). Though the allusion to the end times may have been lost on those belonging to more mainstream churches, it would not have been lost on members of the SDA or the many Pentecostal churches.

WE NEED GOD-FEARING LEADERS

A common campaign theme in 2002, noted by Gibbs, was the image of the God-fearing leader, and again in 2007 the need for God-fearing candidates and elected members was echoed constantly in popular discourse (see Figure 1). It was aired on the faith page of the *National* newspaper when it reported on a radio talk-back show involving several church pastors who warned voters to choose God-fearing leaders and to be wary of those candidates who hardly ever attend church but who now, during the election campaign, carry Bibles and speak in Biblical terms. Such people, they warned, were not true leaders but were merely "switching to become 'holy now' in order to lure voters" (*The National*, 5 July 2007). By contrast, the most appropriate leaders were those who maintained their integrity, honesty, loyalty and righteousness (*The National*, 5 July, 2007).¹⁹

Being deemed God-fearing was not sufficient in itself to ensure election. A self-proclaimed God-fearing Christian from Central Province remarked that while he would vote for a God-fearing leader, he would also consider a person who would be committed to providing water and health services to the village (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007). However, since many God-fearing candidates also articulated this kind of development agenda, the two issues are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, many voters thought the Christian candidates were more likely to deliver services, believing them to be less likely to be corrupted by the trappings of power and parliament.

The term God-fearing has connotations of being fearful of God - a retributive God

who punishes those who do not behave in a Christian manner, but this was not usually stated. Rather, the meaning was often unspecified, though it was not simply synonymous with Christian. One person interviewed by the *Post-Courier* saw them as two quite different things (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007). A young student from the NCD, who was actually too young to vote, thought that a "leader should be responsible, transparent and one who promotes people's interests." Such a leader should be God-fearing, meaning that he would be dependent on God's wisdom and guidance, which would prevent him from being corrupt (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007). Another student, eligible to vote, commented that she would not be voting for wantoks and would cast her vote for a "God-fearing," "hardworking" and "reliable" leader (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007). Another saw God-fearing as describing a person who abides by the principles of the Bible and "therefore has the heart to serve the people" (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007). Others saw God-fearing in terms of "honesty," "transparency" and "trustworthiness." Others did not take up the God-fearing terminology, seeing the need simply for a Christian, particularly one with high Christian values and principles, since such a person would "most likely conduct himself according the Biblical principles" (*Post-Courier*, Election Special, June 2007).

THE VIEW FROM THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE (SHP)

Christianity featured less prominently in the Southern Highlands than in the wider Papua New Guinea I have been describing so far. With some exceptions, most SHP candidates avoided direct reference to their religious affiliation or beliefs.²⁰ While some mentioned the need for God-fearing leaders and some used Christian imagery, religion was less prominent than in the past. Posters, in particular, focused almost entirely on secular and factual matters. Election posters were very sketchy on the whole, often presenting only basic details, such as a photograph with the name of the candidate, and asking for people's votes. For example, the election poster of Dickson Pena Tasi, a

candidate for the regional seat, displayed no policies and no slogans, featuring only his name, his picture and a request for voters to write his name or number in box 1, 2 or 3.

Other candidates appealed to the “common man” in order to distance themselves from the increasing importance of money for political success, which meant, as someone remarked, that “you have to be a millionaire” to stand for parliament. In attempting to communicate this idea, the producers of the posters and slogans did not always realise the full implications of the expressions they used, at times revealing a pervasive primitivism that portrayed the electors as backward. At the same time, these candidates wanted to convey the idea that they were in touch with the rural communities who were crying out for services, as well as to imply they were outside the realm of money politics and could therefore be trusted. Thomas Handolwa, a candidate for the Mendi Open seat, for example, presented himself as a “Simple man for simple people.” Daniel Lap, another candidate for the Mendi Open seat had a similar slogan: “Simple man for grassroots people.” The candidate Joe Waph, standing for the Komo-Margarima Open seat, stated that he was “A simple and poor man for the simple and poor people.” A candidate for the Imbonggu Open seat used a similar slogan in Tok Pisin: “*votim mangi long ples long karim hevi long ples*” (vote for a villager to carry the burden of the village). “*Hevi*” has connotations of carrying a heavy load or burden and also of responsibility.

Several candidates framed their election slogans in the rhetoric of development. Philipus Maso Hapon, standing for Mendi Open, simply stated: “Vote for Development.” While the only woman standing in the Southern Highlands, Margret Kawa (Papua New Guinea First Party, Imbonngu Open), in a slogan with a distinctly anti-colonial and nationalist tinge, wanted: “To Achieve Economic and Social Independence.” Others framed their slogans in terms of leadership. The poster of John Tanda, a candidate for the Mendi Open, proclaimed that he was “For honest and correct leadership,” while Wale Molsie, standing for Imbonggu Open, was for “simple and honest leadership.” Perhaps in a thesaurus-engendered list, Rex Akop

Welin, standing for the Mendi Open seat, emphasised several facets of leadership, asking people to vote for: “morally stable leadership,” “quality leadership,” “visionary leadership,” “Mendi Open leadership and not tribalism” and “socioeconomic development leadership.” Only one of the twenty or so posters displayed outside the largest Mendi store invoked the image of a “God-fearing leader.” This poster, promoting Paru Hagnai, who stood for the Tari-Pori Open seat and was endorsed by the Papua New Guinea Labour Party, announced that he stood for “God-fearing leadership,” “Justice for the people,” “transparency/accountability for the people” and “economic prosperity for the people.”

I saw no images of Jesus on election posters and billboards in the Southern Highlands, as was reported elsewhere for the 1997 election (Gibbs 2005: 7), although a few featured more subtle Christian allusions. One striking example of this was provided by Anderson Agiru, the successful candidate for the Southern Highlands Regional seat or governorship, who used several slogans with a Christian resonance. Declaring that it was time to “*kirapim*” (resurrect) the province, he announced that it was the “Dawn of a New Future,” an image which evokes the evangelic rhetoric of being born again. On another poster, he presented himself as a humble Christian, saying “My best is not enough, Lord Almighty!”. Since Agiru was aiming to be governor for the second time, his publicity carried many intimations of resurrection and veiled allusions to the second coming. One of his billboards, placed prominently in Mendi, showed him in shirt and tie and with raised fist, looking very much like a Bible-thumping preacher (see Figure 1).

This recourse to Christian imagery surpassed even those church leaders who stood as candidates, whose slogans were comparatively straightforward and not nearly as cleverly crafted as Agiru’s. One pastor invoked a saying from Proverbs, declaring on his poster that: “Righteousness exalts a nation” (omitting the second clause which says “but sin is a reproach to any people”) (Proverbs 14: 34). Pastor Francis Apurel, standing for the SHP Provincial seat with Agiru, simply announced that he was for



Figure 1: Anderson Agiru Billboard, Mendi

“Progress and development — God’s way.” In the extensive policy platform on his poster, Thomas Handolwa, though not a pastor or preacher, stated that he wanted to reinforce church activities, and also promote community development, agriculture and tourism. Makire Tom (Independent—Regional Seat) produced the only poster to mention AIDS, even though this is a major calamity confronting PNG. He construed this as a question of Christian morality, advocating the promotion of good ways to avoid AIDS (“HIV/AIDS – *Promotim ol Gutpela Pasin bilong Abrusim Sik AIDS*”), with its obvious reference to abstinence and faithfulness.

It was noticeable that those candidates who did articulate some Christian discourse rarely identified themselves with any particular denomination, except for the candidates who were pastors or priests, who usually gave their clerical title. This suggests that with the increasing fragmentation of the mainstream churches and the proliferation of smaller churches, it is expedient to direct appeals to the generic Christian. The introduction of limited preferential voting (LPV), which has brought the need to garner preferences more widely, has added to this impetus.

GOD MUST BE FIRST DURING THIS ELECTION (GOD I MAS STAP NABAWAN LONG DISPELA ELEKSEN)

Prior to polling, large peace rallies were organised in selected parts of Papua New Guinea.²¹ The Southern Highlands was especially singled out because during the 2002 elections widespread violence and the disruption of polling caused the election to be declared a failure in six electorates. To call for a peaceful election, marches and rallies were held in Mendi, Nipa, Tari and Ialibu in the Southern Highlands.

Organised by a coalition of church groups, including both mainstream and non-mainstream churches, and with the endorsement and active involvement of leaders of the security forces, the rally in Mendi saw several thousands march and rally. Many of the participants were pupils from church-run schools, clothed in their various coloured uniforms and holding placards appealing to voters to consider their future and to avoid the violence and corruption that had marred previous elections.²² Others carried placards with a distinctly Christian message: “Let God

lead you to choose the right leader” (see Figure 2) and “We want God-fearing leaders in the SHP” (Figure 3).

When Christians in Papua New Guinea have endeavoured to address broader issues of governance and the accountability of their elected representatives, they have often tried to frame this as a non-political message. As one of the organisers of the peace rally suggested, the firm intention was to convey a non-political, neutral message (Bishop Reichart pers. com.). This message was emphasised during the march by pastors wielding loud-hailers.

During the march, one speaker commented that the churches had been silent in the past but now all the churches are asking that there be peace in the Southern Highlands during the election:

The churches cry, the churches cry for peace. The churches cry for peace and joy (hamamas). Before the churches kept their mouths closed, but now all of them are united in calling out to the people of the Southern Highlands the following message – we must have peace, we must vote for the right person.

It was emphasised to the voters that they had the right to choose who they voted for but that they should take guidance from God: “God must lead. Our belief must stand up strong for God. You can’t look for money, you can’t look for a man. No. God must approve who you are going to vote for.”

A further speaker expressed this in the following way:

We must have peace during the election. There is freedom, there is a free choice in how you vote. There isn’t anybody who can tell you how to vote. No corruption, no lies, no theft — these things aren’t allowed during the election. God is allowing you to mark a candidate following your feelings and they will become a leader tomorrow. God can bless you.

Obviously, wary of endorsing any candidate or party, the participants at the peace march and rally sought to frame the public discourse in terms of morality, addressing broad issues of corruption and violence and the need for voters to look beyond those candidates who tried to seduce them with money and goods. This tendency to frame issues of governance



Figure 2: “Let God lead you to choose the right leader”, placard at Mendi Rally



Figure 3: "We want God-Fearing Leaders in SHP", placard at Mendi Ralley

solely within the framework of Christian morality tends to reduce political choice to the simple question of whether a candidate is a God-fearing Christian or not.

THE ELECTION IN KAGUA-ERAWE

Despite being a feature of some parties' policy statements at the national level, few candidates in Kagua-Erave overtly identified themselves as being Christian, except in the most general terms. In none of the election speeches I heard did candidates specify their church affiliation or articulate any specific Christian themes. Probably in the interests of garnering votes from as wide a spectrum as possible, their election posters were similarly noncommittal. Neither did religion loom large in debate in the council ward where I was based during the election. Overwhelmingly, campaigning there focussed on how little development there had been in the electorate and what development the candidate would bring. This is unsurprising given that the Southern Highlands is one of the least developed and most impoverished provinces

in Papua New Guinea, despite having several large resource projects that generate revenue for the national and provincial governments (Haley and May 2008; Lewis 2008). Little of this revenue appears to be returned to the people of the province. The failure of development in the electorate was largely blamed on the local member, people often commenting that they did not see any signs of his work (*"mipela no lukim wanpela mak bilong memba i stap long hia"*). Neither had people seen any sign of him in the electorate, except during the nomination and campaign period when he was seen firing a high-powered automatic weapon during a conflict with the supporters of a rival at the district headquarters of Kagua.²³ Indeed, it was a popular view that once a candidate is elected he will not be seen in the electorate for another five years, preferring to live in Port Moresby and administer the electorate by "remote control", as is sometimes said.

As in the wider province, Kagua-Erave candidates' election posters gave little information about policies, relying largely on

empty slogans. For example, one candidate alluded to his past political career to claim he was: "For Genuine, Strong and Proven Leadership," and another, standing as a Papua New Guinea Country Party candidate, proclaimed that: "We have the Answers." One of the most elaborate posters was produced by the Pangu Party candidate, Lalepa Patapu, who had once been Chairman of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Fund and more recently the Church Development Officer for the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea. He utilised the metaphor of a hand-mark to emphasise that he had already made his mark elsewhere in Papua New Guinea and now wanted to do so for Kagua-Erave ("*Nau mi laik putim han mak long Kagua-Erave*"). His poster featured three photographs of separate buildings, the last with his hand superimposed as a reference to his work in the superannuation industry and their investments around the country. He did list some policies, one on each finger of the large image of a hand, including church, women and youth, law and order, and health. Donald Yaki Rambua, standing as an Independent, had a brief policy list on his poster, one of which was to support the work of the churches in Papua New Guinea.

In terms of the organisation and procedures during the election, media claims of "successful polling in the Southern Highlands Province" were far from true for Kagua-Erave. The overwhelming consensus of those present, including voters, candidates, security personnel and even electoral officials, was that the election was a huge failure because the election was so poorly organised. People were dismayed at the inadequate electoral rolls, which omitted a great many residents' names. Also, some voters had been unable to vote because ballot papers or electoral rolls did not arrive.²⁴ One ward, for example, received rolls and ballot papers for only four constituents, and these were actually from another electorate. One fairly common comment was: "*Em failed eleksen, em bugerap tru.*" One Assistant Returning Officer's comment was that the electoral commission had "failed miserably," a claim echoed by many. Another polling official commented, "the running of the election in Kagua-Erave was very poor. The Commission as a whole has failed." Some people considered themselves in mourning,

with one man from Kumbianda, who was unable to vote, commenting that: "*mipela stap long haus kra*", meaning that he and others in his village were in mourning over their disenfranchisement. Some even commented that the election failure was worse than the 2002 election. This is a damning indictment, given that this election was fairly peaceful compared with 2002, when people stormed the Kagua Police Station, disarmed police, forced down the police helicopter and stole and destroyed ballot boxes and papers.

As one candidate remarked, the LPV system has changed people's behaviour: "before the people ruined the process, but now it is the government." Another man expressed his disappointment in the following way: "The people are very quiet but the system is killing us." Others, especially those whose names were omitted from the common roll, asked rhetorically which country they belong to now, since the government has rejected them: "*Gavaman i rejectim mipela, mipela stap long wanem kantri nau?*" (The government has rejected us, which country do we live in now?).

Unfortunately, the abject failure of the electoral commission to carry out its mandated role nourishes the profound disenchantment with the Papua New Guinea nation-state widely felt in rural communities and cities alike. Many people responded to these failings by suggesting that Australia, through institutions like AusAID, should not only run elections, but take over the governing of Papua New Guinea, since the state institutions are totally incapable of doing so. Some people even wanted the Electoral Commissioner to be replaced by an Australian, since they had totally lost confidence in the ability of the current Commissioner to run an election.

Even before the first vote had been cast, many people predicted that a major failing of the election would be the common roll. This proved true, and the fact that many people were denied the right to vote is the source of a great deal of anger. It was only the presence of a large contingent of security personnel, including an armed mobile squad and PNGDF soldiers, that contained an explosive situation and enabled polling to take place. There was considerable anger at what can be accurately described as the mass

disenfranchisement that occurred through the inadequate updating of the common roll and through a number of polling places not receiving enough ballot papers.

The campaign period and polling in Kagua-Erave was remarkably peaceful, with only minor incidents of violent or threatening behaviour. The LPV system has been very successful in diminishing the level of violence and has allowed candidates to move around freely to canvass for preferences in areas that are not their key areas of support. The LPV system is considered by some to be an “icebreaker” which allows things to happen that would not have been possible with the previous “first past the post” system, where success depended on getting as many votes as possible.

The speeches made by candidates at campaign rallies were generally very short on substance. No social issues were raised and the little policy that was presented dealt only with economic issues. Indeed, many candidates reiterated the same promises - about building and upgrading roads, schools and hospitals, for example.

The cultural forms of campaigning that had featured in past elections - the large and colourful campaign rallies with traditional dancers and gifting to secure votes - were repeated in 2007 and were just as vibrant as previously. In 2007, though, rallies were intended to draw on much wider audiences and often involved several candidates and their supporters in an effort to secure preferences. As in the past, communities sought to capitalise financially on this by building grandstands and charging gate fees, sometimes raising school fees for their children. Also, as in previous elections, candidates donated money for the use of the grandstands in a thinly veiled attempt to secure votes. Although there were some unconfirmed reports of candidates paying 30 to 40 thousand Kina for the privilege of using a grandstand, confirmed figures were much more modest. Thus, at a rally held at Rakura the maximum donated was K2000, while the minimum was K100 (Daniel Tulapi – K2000; James Lagea – K400; Ken Kenda K200; Lalepa Patapu — K100). At a rally at Pawayamo in Aiya LLG (Local Level

Government, hereafter Aiya), the maximum given was K1500 and the minimum K100 (Daniel Tulapi – K1500).

LOCAL POLITICS: THE VIEW FROM THE VILLAGE OF IBIA

During the campaign period, I was based in the village of Ibia, in Ibia council ward, Aiya LLG (Local Level Government) area of Kagua-Erave electorate. Here, the face of Christianity is changing and churches of different denominations are proliferating. This is happening throughout Papua New Guinea, where in the past each village usually had a single church of the denomination that had first established Christianity in the region. Besides the long-established Catholic Church, Ibia council ward’s population of about one thousand people supports several newer churches, including the Assemblies of God, the Bible Missionary Church, the Church of God, the United Pentecostal Church, the New Apostolic Church, the Church of Christ and the Lutheran Church. Also, some residents belong to other churches, such as SDA, Revival Churches of PNG, and the United Church, situated in a nearby village.

This council ward is typical of many in the Southern Highlands, not only for its religious diversity but also for the distinct absence of the “hand of the government,” as people say (see also Haley 2008). The aid post at Ibia was derelict and had not been staffed for several years, though more recently it had received boxes of supplies from AusAID, which apparently had been distributed by a self-proclaimed “doctor” with no medical training.²⁵ The local primary school also had an erratic existence, having been closed, it was said, for a number of years, largely due to the failure of the so-called “free education” policy, which has seen supplies to schools consist of dusters and chalk and not much else. Though it is currently open and has more than 400 students, it is severely understaffed, having only four teachers instead of the eight it should have. These are supplemented by three teachers’ assistants - adolescents who have attained a year ten education, but who have no training. The teachers run two classes simultaneously,

moving between the two to spend half a class in one and half a class in the other. The bush material buildings have galvanised iron roofs, funded by a local council grant, but overall the facilities are very basic, with rough hewn desks and chairs, and a library with no books.

Because of the inadequate government services, there is extensive pessimism about the politics and government of Papua New Guinea throughout the electorate and the whole province. The view is also widely held that many of the candidates cannot be trusted, being motivated only out of self-interest. "Politics in Papua New Guinea is no good, lots of liars are involved" (*Politiks long Papua New Guinea em i no gut, plenti giaman i stap insait*). It is also widely held that independence has been a failure, with many people longing nostalgically for a return of the Australian colonial government.

Though many hoped that their local candidate would be elected and that some services would be delivered, pessimism about the prospects of improvement in the

local conditions was widespread. While the failures of the state causes much of this feeling that adversity is inevitable, the kinds of Christianity espoused also encourage it, especially in the newer churches, as explained below.

JOHN YANO

The village of Ibia was the home of one of the candidates for Kagua-Erave electorate, John Japhet Yano (see Figure 4), and so I was able to observe his campaign first-hand, and to interview him about his background and opinions. He was related to the powerful local leader, (Captain) Randa, who actively and financially supported his campaign.²⁶ John was a 30-year-old married man with one child, formerly a primary school teacher at Imena Primary School (2004-2006) in the Sugu Valley, the district of his wife and the former sitting member, David Basua. It was his first time as a candidate and would probably be his last, as the campaign was very costly for someone who did not have a large resource base.



Figure 4: John Yano, PNG Party Candidate for Kagua-Erave Electorate

John was a devout Christian, a member and leader of the Church of Christ, or Lokal Sios as it is called. Like the other born again churches, this church opposed the participation of leaders in the electoral process. He was therefore suspended from his role as church leader and forbidden to preach or even initiate the singing in church, reduced, as he termed it, to being a "*kristian nating*," who had to sit with the rest of the congregation. After the election, if not elected, he would be "disciplined" for a further 2-3 months, after which he would have to kill a pig or organise a feast to which the leaders of the other 26 Lokal Sios in the Southern Highlands would be invited. There, they would pray over him and "release him," allowing him to resume his leadership role in the church again.

Somewhat contradictorily, it was largely at the behest of the church that he had stood as a candidate. This exemplifies the general ambivalence towards politics displayed by many of the born again churches. On the one hand, they object to their members taking an active role in the electoral process, but on the other hand, they are acutely aware of failings of the current politicians and the need for better political leaders. Motivated by a church member's dream, in which God expressed his wish for a member who could bring services to the people of the electorate, the church leaders decided that it would be good for John to stand as a candidate. In their discussions, they turned to the Bible and saw the story of Moses leading the people to the promised land as a sign that God would single out a leader in difficult times. They told John that if God wanted to raise him in this way and give him this kind of power, it was something that God could do. They also compared John to David in his struggle with Goliath.

Despite these Biblical allusions, Christianity did not feature much at all in John's campaign. As noted above, this was also the case for most other candidates. John did advocate a tithing policy of 10% which would go to small born again churches such as his own, mainly to help purchase musical instruments, lamps and kerosene for use at rallies, camps and crusades. This was less ambitious than another Papua New Guinea Party candidate (for the Imbonngu Open

seat) who promised to supply electricity to all the churches in the electorate, a very ambitious task given the lack of infrastructure in the area and the proliferation of small churches, many of whose assets consist of little more than a bush-material house and a congregation no bigger than an extended family.

John would undoubtedly have been considered one of the "God-fearing" candidates that public discourse sees as desirable leaders, even though his Christian identity and beliefs were rarely mentioned in his campaign. In interviews about broader issues, he and his church appeared very fundamentalist in outlook, with the usual strong emphasis on being born again, repudiating one's past life and the belief that good Christians would be whisked away in the Rapture prior to the Last Days. Also, as is usual, these Christians placed great emphasis on personal morality and were required to forsake many practices, ranging from drinking to playing sport. The maintenance of strict sexual morality was also considered important, particularly marital fidelity. A man was required to marry a Christian, preferably from within the same church, and polygamy and divorce were not permitted.

Like some of the candidates standing in other electorates, John presented himself as a village man ("*man bilong ples*") or as he termed it "*mangki bilong bus tasol*," - that is, as a person who did not have money or vested interests at stake and who could truly represent the wishes and aspirations of the villagers. Further, as a teacher who had worked in a remote rural community school, he believed he was aware of the needs of the rural villagers he sought to represent. Despite his identification as a grass-roots man, he could hold his own with other more educated and worldly candidates in public speaking.

John owned one of the few cars in Aiya LLG (five for a population of approximately 21,000), given to him by his brother who works at Ok Tedi, and bought second-hand for K35,000. Like the other vehicles, it was an unregistered and unroadworthy bomb. Usually severely overloaded with his supporters, it barely staggered up the local

hills (and occasionally didn't). The campaign was reputed to have cost approximately K50,000. As a member of Mekere Morauta's Papua New Guinea Party, John received a little funding from the party, enough to print one thousand campaign posters. Mainly his funding was garnered from his relatives, local support base and another Papua New Guinea Party member, Francis Awesa, a wealthy business-man and owner of Global Construction, a major road-building company in Papua New Guinea.

Like many candidates, John used the rhetoric of anti-corruption, good governance and anti-gifting, but was nevertheless forced to play the politics of gifting to secure the support of wavering voters. This involved making contributions to the sponsors of grandstands when he attended campaign rallies, and also handing out small amounts of cash to individuals and dispersing pigs. His priorities if elected were similar to other candidates - to bring development and services (*sevis*) to the electorate. This is an obligatory promise in Papua New Guinea electoral politics having irrefutable appeal, since nobody would contest the need for better roads, schools and hospitals. In Kagua-Erave electorate he saw the need for road services as the greatest, followed by schools, aid posts and then the development of plantations to utilise the large labour pool in the electorate. Well informed of the number of voters in each council ward and of how much support they had, John's close supporters were convinced of victory, with all the confidence of cargo cultists that the goods would be delivered.²⁷ Three weeks before polling, John confidently predicted that he had the support of 16 out of 24 council wards in the local level government area, a confidence buoyed by the dreams of many supporters. Reputedly there had been 101 dreams predicting his victory. However, the predicted support did not eventuate and he was not successful in winning the seat, though he was fourth in the contest with nearly 10% of the first preference vote.

LOCAL CHURCHES AND POLITICS

Prior to the polling, I also interviewed a number of the pastors of the newer churches in Ibia to ascertain their broad religious outlook and their attitude to politics, electoral politics in particular. I met with pastors of the Church of God, the Assemblies of God, the Bible Missionary Church, and also a previous member of the Christian Revival Centres of Papua New Guinea.

All of these churches put great stress on the radical conversion experience of "*tanim bel*" or being born again, with its emphasis on personal morality and bodily purity. To attain this purity, these churches prohibit many behaviours besides the usual Biblically-named sins. While there are some minor variations, particularly in relation to some aspects of local custom, such as mortuary rites and bride-wealth payments, these churches are broadly similar in their prohibitions, which include smoking, drinking alcohol, chewing betelnut, card-playing and sport. The latter is often associated with pride, but is also banned because the clothing worn during games exposes the body to the view of the opposite sex. Polygamy and divorce are not allowed, since family life is considered a mainstay of the church community. It is forbidden for a husband to beat his wife and in some churches married couples are counselled if conflicts occur. All of these churches can properly be called fundamentalist, seeing the world essentially as a crucial struggle between Satan and Christ. Some are Pentecostal and recognise that baptism by the Holy Spirit can bring miraculous gifts, such as healing and prophecy.

The Christian Revival Centres also eschew involvement in electoral politics, forbidding its members to stand in elections and suspending anyone who does so. Members cannot actively support a candidate by participating in campaign activities and the church refuses to accept donations from politicians or candidates or to associate with other churches that do so. Indeed, it was said that they would not attend the peace

march and rally in Mendi for this reason. This eschewal of politics was explained in terms of politics and God's word being contradictory: "You cannot preach God's word, you cannot be a Christian and do politics at the same time." This informant also described this as being like light and darkness, which are opposites and cannot mix.

The Assemblies of God took a similar radically dualist position. A member of this church was contesting the Mendi Open seat and, accordingly, was suspended from church membership. The pastor, Roki Awepe, said that although a candidate for Kagua-Erave (John Yano) was his "brother," he was not permitted to accompany or assist him in the campaign, which, for him, would mean breaking the laws of the Bible. As a Christian, he must think only of God and God's word. Involvement in electoral politics would conflict with Christianity, since the kinds of thought involved were mutually opposed. Faith, he said, requires one hundred percent commitment, not partial or competing commitments. Moreover, he believed that involvement in politics was corrupting, as earthly thoughts would inevitably arise, destroying his Christian life and leading him astray from Jesus.

This pastor considered that much as the year 2000 was a "Year of God," so too was 2007. Therefore, it was desirable that 2007 should be a peaceful time. Since the electorate of Kagua-Erave was not a good place and full of greedy people - when members were elected in the past they just took the money and did not bring any services to the electorate - Pastor Awepe instituted a program of prayer to be followed by his congregation seeking to ensure that the election was not characterised by "trouble." He hoped God would remove any bad leaders and see that only good leaders were elected. Personally, he was going to seek guidance from God about who to vote for, and if his spirit spoke to him he would follow this guidance.

Pastor Awepe thought that in this "Year of God" they should be looking for signs of the end times. Like Pastor John Kuma of the Church of God, above, Pastor Awepe thought

that a takeover of Papua New Guinea was imminent and would occur after the election. While it may appear that he is alluding to the kinds of interventions into fragile and failing states that have occurred in recent years, such as the RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands) intervention in Solomon Islands or the ECP (Enhanced Cooperation Program, now known as the Strongim Gavman Program) intervention in PNG, his reference is actually decidedly Christian. Satan was behind this "take-over" and he believed that after the election Satan's distinctive number 666 would be visible in PNG. As he remarked:

The one world mission, one world government, all these kinds of things, they have prepared them and they are ready but they are waiting for this government, all the new members to go to parliament and form a new government and administration. Ok, after this they will declare it and they will start to use this number and start to use the new law of the one world mission and one world government.

He went on to say that "they" have already recorded where everybody lives, and that as part of the new order members of the Catholic Church were singled out to receive projects from the Pope. As all Catholics are registered and their names recorded on a computer, they were eligible to receive the projects they wished for — small-scale development projects such as saw-mills and farms. Though he did not say so, such stories usually mention that supporters of Satan have the number 666 tattooed on their foreheads and hands, and that those who do not wish to join with him are beheaded.

The Bible Missionary Church has much the same policies towards elections as the churches described above, members being forbidden to stand for election or be involved in politics and being suspended if they do so. Pastor Simon Ewa also believed that candidates in elections do not always tell the truth, a patently unchristian behaviour. He saw his role as giving guidance to his

congregation, giving them good thoughts, so that they would remain good Christians and live a life that would get them to heaven. He encouraged the congregation to pray for guidance from God on whom to vote for and for help in choosing the right leader. Members of this church also subscribed to beliefs about the end times and the idea that this would be marked by the ascendancy of the one world mission, one world government and the number 666. Pastor Ewa believed that this apocalyptic scenario was set out in the Bible, though it also appears that his beliefs were influenced by foreign missionaries from his church, as well as rumours and stories. Like the Assemblies of God pastor, he believed that this would all be revealed after the election:

We are waiting for the government to go inside [parliament] and ok the 666 number. It is all ready and is just waiting for the next elected government to go to parliament and sign the necessary papers. The number has arrived and is waiting. Once the politicians have signed the papers, the number will be revealed.

Although he believed that this new world order would be controlled by one man, he did not connect it to the Catholic Church, as some do, suggesting that the Bible is not clear on who this man is.²⁸ People would be under the control of this man and they would bear the number on their forehead or body. If this man said that they must go to church they would go to church. If he said that they must do nothing, they would do nothing. If he told them to do some kind of work they would carry out the order.

Such beliefs are characteristic of many of the fundamentalist evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches, many of which are premillennialist, believing that Christ will return to rule over the earth for a thousand years.²⁹ This will be preceded by the end times, a period of widespread social and economic disintegration, climatic changes and natural disasters (Boyer 1992; Weber 1987; Eves 2000).³⁰ Many adherents see the present as just such a time of disintegration

and disaster, pointing to the increasing levels of corruption, raskolism and the AIDS epidemic as clear signs of the end times. One aspect of this rather pessimistic view is the prophecy that Satan or the Anti-Christ will take over the world for a period, before being defeated by Christ. The allusions by some of the pastors above to the “one world mission” and “one world government” are examples of this.

Most premillennialists believe Christ's return is imminent and they await this anxiously, conducting their lives in perpetual readiness, keeping themselves sin-free and evangelising zealously; for if they remain good Christians they will be spared the tyranny of the Anti-Christ's rule, being whisked away in the Rapture. In obedience to Christ's request to spread the Word to all nations, called the Great Commission, they believe it imperative to convert as many people as possible before the end times. Some believers seek to spread the gospel in the belief that Jesus will return when all nations have been evangelised (Brouwer, Gifford and Rose 1996: 18).

CONCLUSION: ENCOURAGING REFORM

This paper has pointed out some of the many weaknesses and failures that occurred in the electoral processes in Papua New Guinea in 2007. It would, of course, be worthwhile to attempt to remedy these as part of an effort to encourage greater demand for reform in the government of Papua New Guinea and improvement in its services - for example, to educate voters in their rights, to make bribery unacceptable, to improve voting procedures, and to encourage candidates to provide meaningful and detailed policy proposals. The possible disadvantageous effects of the peace rallies in managing and containing dissent could also be considered. However, the main focus of this paper has been on the part played by Christianity, particularly the newer fundamentalist religions in the 2007 election. This leads to further discussion of the role of religion in attempts to improve governance in Papua New Guinea.

For AusAID, working closely with civil society in Papua New Guinea has involved working with the churches, particularly through the Church Partnership Program (currently programmed to 2009). This has mainly meant working with the mainstream churches, including some that have been willing to speak out on issues of corruption and government accountability. Some of the impetus for the current Australian aid program's approach to the churches has its origins in the 2005 discussion paper commissioned by AusAID - *Ringing the Church Bell: The Role of Churches in Governance and Public Performance in Papua New Guinea*. Though a very useful piece of scholarship, the paper focuses almost exclusively on the mainstream churches, with very little analysis of the implications for governance of the burgeoning fundamentalist churches. This is a significant omission given the rate at which people are transferring to these churches. Indeed, many of the mainstream churches are embracing the practices and worldview of the more fundamentalist churches.

This weakness gives rise to some excessively optimistic assessments of the role of the churches in Papua New Guinea, such as the following from a recent draft strategy paper on democratic governance in Papua New Guinea:

Churches form the mainstay of Papua New Guinea civil society. They provide basic services, community radio, and bring together clans and other groups and institutions, establishing sustainable and constructive partnerships based on extensive social networks (AusAID 2006b: 6).

In fact, the current conditions, with the congregations of the mainstream churches diminishing in a tide of evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal movements, are as likely to produce fragmentation and disharmony as they are to produce the social solidarity described above. Disharmony is particularly likely when a community has several competing churches with differences of theology and doctrine, which creates tension and antagonism. Accordingly,

communities that once operated as relatively homogeneous entities are increasingly divided along denominational lines.³¹ This can also occur when two mainstream churches compete (as happened at my fieldwork site on the Lelet Plateau in New Ireland, where the people of one village who used to meet together each Monday are now divided along church lines, with the Catholics and the United Church members holding separate community meetings).

For many people in Papua New Guinea, the state - that is, the national government and its various administrative apparatuses - occupies the position of a parent, largely responsible for the wellbeing of the people. In fact, the relevance of the state and people's commitment to it depend on economic and social returns. For some people, especially those in rural Papua New Guinea, the state is not merely weak, it is entirely absent, services having deteriorated to such an extent that they have no routine interactions with the government. Indeed, the only interaction with the government for many is once every five years, when polling officials arrive to conduct national elections. Public consciousness of corruption and the government's incapacity to deliver services has led to a great deal of criticism, not only from those who assert their Christianity vocally, such as fundamentalists, but more widely. Indeed, there is widespread and profound disenchantment with the state throughout Papua New Guinea. How fundamentalist Christians view the failings of the state, however, differs from members of mainstream churches and those whose Christian identity is not especially strong. For fundamentalist Christians, the collapse of services together with endemic corruption serves to confirm their premillennialist worldview, being a sure sign of the imminent end of the world.³²

Premillennialism supplies an explanatory model for the current disorders and their ultimate resolution, but this model does not accord with the developmental models of donor agents. Though the premillennial predictions provide a hopeful vision of an eventual future (since this involves Jesus returning and instituting his millennial rule), these predictions are far from optimistic

about the immediate future, for things are expected to get worse before they get better. As Boyer notes: “the world is growing more wicked; and no human effort can reverse the process” (1999: 154). Such an interpretation of history is fate-based - the future is ordained. Since nothing can be done to improve the current situation, it discourages activism, promoting a “passive acceptance of disasters, misfortune and a lack of social responsibility” (Gifford 1991: 9). The outlet for people’s agency, then, is to strive for personal salvation; evangelism and prayer take the place of political activism.³³

How, then, in the effort to strengthen civil society’s role in voicing demands for better governance, is it possible to work with these churches or with people who hold such a profoundly different understanding of the world? Not only are increasing numbers of Christians subscribing to such views, but the mainstream churches are losing members to churches that hold these beliefs. This suggests that aid programs seeking to strengthen governance through civil society have limitations.

AUTHOR NOTES

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ENDNOTES

1. Besides addressing broader security issues, these governance programs are believed to produce better aid delivery.
2. An estimated \$14.5 million was dedicated to strengthening civil society in Papua New Guinea during 2005-06 (AusAID 2006c: 8).
3. Operation World is a Christian

organisation which gathers information from all countries on religion, missions, church growth and prayer needs, as well as basic demographic information, for the purposes of “informing and mobilizing the global church for prayer and mission” (2008).

4. According to Operation World, there are 2,221 missionaries from 88 agencies in 35 countries, by far the most being from the USA (1228), Australia (260) and New Zealand (147) (2008). According to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in the US State Department, the New Tribes Mission is the largest single missionary group in PNG, with approximately 450 missionaries (US State Department 2006).
5. Both are considered defining characteristics of fundamentalism (Lawrence 1989: 5; see also Ammerman 1991 and Caplan 1987). On the usefulness of the term, see Nagata (2001).
6. Such figures do not always reflect the true significance of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, since some such believers belong to mainstream denominations. For example, the United Church congregation I studied in New Ireland, while classified as mainstream, is Pentecostalist in belief, ritual and practice (see Eves 1998, 2000, 2003). Similarly, the Catholic Church has many instances of institutionalised charismatic Christianity within its ranks.
7. In the lead up to the 1997 election, the Catholic Bishops conference formulated a clear policy along these lines: “We bishops emphasise that we do not want any Catholic priest or seminarian or religious [worker] to become involved politically by running for office in 1997 or at any other time. The consequence for ignoring this prohibition are severe, especially for a priest, being suspended entirely from the exercise of his faculties and public ministry in the church” (Father Hank Kronenburg 1997). On the Catholic Diocese of Mount Hagen policy in the lead up to the 2002 election, see Appendix A in Gibbs (2005).
8. Limited Preferential Voting replaced the first past the post system of voting, which had been used for many years. It is limited in the sense that each voter has only

- three preferences. For a more comprehensive account see Standish (2006).
9. The attitude of conservative Protestants around the world to involvement in politics varies widely. A considerable literature explores the issue. See endnote ³³.
 10. How “political acquiescence” is defined presents something of a problem according to Schoffeleers, since what seems like acquiescence to one party may be described as a subtle form of resistance, or as the best a church can manage in a situation (1991: 90). He concludes that a church is “acquiescent” when its policy is to avoid political activism of a critical nature (1991: 90). This does not preclude being critical of the political order, but this is implicit rather than explicit.
 11. Romans 13: 1-7 is usually invoked in this context (Gibbs 2005: 18 and 2004: 4).
 12. This is not the first time this has been raised. In 1987 the member for Alotau, Iairo Lasaro, quoting from the Old Testament prophet Malachi (3:7-12), stated in parliament, “I believe if this nation makes the first move to allow 10 per cent of its budget to God, ...according to the word, God himself will open the windows of heaven and pour out more blessings in this nation. Law and order, tribal fights, natural disasters and all other problems, I can assure this Government that God will guarantee the total security of this nation’ (Hansard 20 November 1987: 22-24 cited in Gibbs 2005).
 13. He was refuting claims by the National Intelligence Organisation that members of *Brukim Skru* were involved in the Sandline crisis, which brought down the government of the day.
 14. The original plan was to have 20,000 Christian volunteers in this role, but when polling came only a few hundred offered their services (Gibbs 2005: 15; see also Jorgensen 2005: 449).
 15. These correspondents were obviously not convinced by the Faith healer and televangelist Benny Hinn who, following a Crusade to PNG, claimed on his program *Praise the Lord*, that “God has put you [Skate] in that position because you are a righteous man” (cited Fisher and Goedelman 2000).
 16. One respondent saw the issue as a form of colonialism which was making Papua New Guineans passive, remarking that: “Christianity converted a once proud, fighting people into begging dogs and pigs who think all solutions must come from outside” (Anon, Papua New Guinea News Board 2007).
 17. Recourse to the constitution was also suggested by other correspondent to the national newspapers (*The National*, June 19, 2007; *The National*, 22 June, 2007; *The National*, 25 June, 2007). Pastor Thomas Davai, President of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Lae, even cited the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18, stating that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this includes worship and observance of day of worship” (*The National*, 25 June, 2007).
 18. The ballot boxes arrived on 6.10 pm on Friday 29 June. As there was no lighting at the distribution point (Kagua Police Station), the sorting of the ballot papers into their respective boxes could not be undertaken until the morning. On the Saturday morning, some AROs were still organising where their polling teams were supposed to go. This meant that many polling teams were not in place to await the arrival of Presiding Officers (POs) and ballot boxes, but had to be transported together with them. This problem was particularly acute when the boxes and teams were transported by helicopter, since some polling officials had to be left behind.
 19. These pastors commended the Prime Minister for dedicating the nation to God during a Prayer Day ceremony during the year (*The National*, 5 July 2007).
 20. Pastor David Ongol Paki, an Independent for the SHP Regional Seat, for example, gave his policies as: “1. Spiritual Development 2. Free Education 3. Health Services 4. Infrastructure Development 5. Agriculture and Livestock Development 6. Justice, Fairness and Equality” (Campaign Poster).
 21. At the National Alliance campaign rally in Mendi, the Prime Minister, Michael Somare, urged Southern Highlanders to ensure a free and fair election to show the world that that Papua New Guinea

- was not a failed state: "We must prove to them that Papua New Guinea is not a failed State. The news media in Australia always give a negative impression of Papua New Guinea as a failed State but we are not." (*The National*, 4 June, 2007).
22. Some examples: *Papa mama tingim bihain taim bilong mi*. Honest leader to rebuild SHP; Don't sell your vote: we want honest and fair leaders; Choose a quality leader for the betterment of SHP and PNG; Your vote is my future; *Noken longlong na bihainim moni*; *Papa mama yu laik mi kamap raskol, dragi or gras rut*. *Orait votim lida nogut*; *Lukluk gut na makim man husat ie can bringim service ie kam*. Thank you.
 23. This even extended to some people not being able to identify him when shown a photograph I had taken.
 24. The ballot box for Mungaro (Aliya LLG) held four ballot papers (the four names on the roll were from another electorate, Imbonggu), and that for Waro (Erave LLG) held three ballot papers. Pawabi (Aliya LLG); Pobu Worok 2 (Erave LLG); Pawabi 2 (Erave LLG) all received neither ward rolls nor ballot papers. The following wards had ward rolls but no ballot papers (Mendo 2, Aliya LLG; Mapuanda, Aliya LLG; Kumbianda, Aliya LLG; Muguri, Aliya LLG; Suiyaibu, Aliya LLG). It was not possible to vote at two polling stations in Erave LLG (Sirigi and Sopise) because the ballot papers and boxes could not be delivered before polling lapsed.
 25. It was difficult to arrive at a definitive date, since people had a vested interest in presenting their own situation as particularly hard. The date of 2001 was given by the local Councillor, though some others claimed it was of the order of ten years or more.
 26. Ibia Council ward comprised Ibia 1 and Ibia 2. Ibia 1 consisted of the following villages: Mai; Wokuma; Maribit; Molonda; Rakenda; Ibia; Arepe; Koi; Rendenasu; Petame; Kerelum. Ibia 2 consisted of: Mutulum; Alalu; Wariputi; Yamerika; Mambu; Umbu Mapalu; Asala.
 27. Cargo cultists believe that European goods can be obtained by magical or ritual means.
 28. When I suggested that some people single out the Pope he refuted this, saying God would not "*bugerap*" another man.
 29. Seventh Day Adventists also subscribe to premillennialism and put great stress on the end times scenario set out in the Book of Revelation.
 30. This contrasts with the more optimistic postmillennialists who believe that it is possible through human effort to bring on the reign of Christ and who expect the conversion of all nations to Christianity prior to Christ's return (see Erickson 1977:55; Ammerman 1991:7; Wessinger 1997:49).
 31. Despite many mainstream churches historically being major deliverers of health and education services, they are continuing to lose members, even when their services are improving through AusAID initiatives, such as the Church Partnership Program. This suggests that service delivery is not necessarily a key determinant of church membership.
 32. Variants of premillennialist Christianity are becoming increasingly common in Papua New Guinea as a result of the efflorescence of evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches. See for example Robbins (1997, 1998, 2004), Strathern and Stewart (1997). This is largely due to the current wave of aggressive missionisation from Protestant Christians from the United States, Australia and New Zealand, who subscribe overwhelmingly to premillennialism. Most Bible-believing Protestants in America, as Harding has said, are premillennialists of one sort or another (1994: 57) and there is a long history of premillennialism and Bible prophecy there. A substantial literature addresses these issues, see for example, Boyer (1992), Fuller (1995), Harding (1994) and Robbins and Palmer (1997).
 33. There is a growing literature exploring the relationship of fundamentalist churches to politics and political processes, especially in the Latin American and African contexts (Freston 1998, 2001; Gifford 1998; Ter Haar and Ellis 2006; Maxwell 2000; Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1997; Ireland 1995; Smilde 1998). There is considerable variability, with some actively involved in politics, while others disdain it. In Latin America, politics

appears to be more readily embraced. In Brazil, evangelical Christians are actively involved in the institutionalised political process (Martin 1994: 82). This has led some to argue that: "The stereotype of all Latin American Pentecostals as political conservatives or apolitical has long been abandoned by scholars" (Ireland 1995: 135). Similar arguments have been made for Africa, where some argue that fundamentalists are not as conservative as they appear and there is the possibility for them to be engaged in political processes more generally. For example Marshall argued that the beliefs of Pentecostals in Africa embrace: "an explicit critique of government, which in part forms the backdrop for the possible politicisation of the born-again community, and its intervention into the realm of institutional politics" (1993: 235; and see also van Dijk 2000: 18). Other scholars like Gifford are less inclined to subscribe to this view, pointing out that many of these churches stress evangelism to the exclusion of everything else (1991).

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