

ROMANS AND ANGLICANS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INTRODUCTION

There are several ways of looking at the history of the churches in Papua New Guinea (hereafter: PNG). One can, for instance, approach this history as a churchman, or as a businessman, or as a government official. In fact, each of these people is often unaware of their counterparts, and so their histories proceed as if each one presents the whole truth.

In mission history, the usual way is to rely on church documents, that is, on the writings of a particular mission itself. But this type of literature is not wholly reliable, because it was written for the eyes of the overseas benefactors. Thus, whatever is written in such literature attempts to advance the good cause, and to elicit monetary contributions from the distant readership.

A second method of discovering PNG church history is to concentrate on the life and work of other ecclesiastical bodies. One thinks here, in the first place, of what Roman Catholics, Methodists, and other churches achieved in their areas, especially when these areas overlapped with the spheres of influence of other denominations. There is, here, a continuous bickering over whom was first in a certain place, and over who constitutes a full member of a particular congregation.

A third way for the historian is to scrutinise other historical sources, for example, reports made by traders and administrators. Traders may easily speak out, for instance, when a mission also engages in business activities, whereas administrators are keenly concerned with maintaining law and order among competing religious groups. On the other hand, church personnel complain

about the loose living of traders, or about the lack of principles, and a certain partiality shown by the government.

In the following essay, we will try to gather information from all the said sources, particularly to retrace the advances of both the Roman Catholic (RC) and the Anglican churches. We want to see whether these churches avoided each other, or worked together, whether they tackled their objectives in a similar, or different, ways, and also whether they followed certain specific methods, which made them similar to other Christian groups, or distinguished them from others.

Some attention will also be given to the contacts between Roman Catholics and the London Missionary Society (LMS), because the two were the first bodies of missionaries on the island of New Guinea, and their mutual relations better allow us to appreciate the contacts between RC and Anglican churches. At the same time, this discussion will show us how the application of the so-called spheres of influence was gradually more and more circumvented.

It seems appropriate to divide this long history into four segments, devoted to the founding age, to the period between the two World Wars, to the lead-up to political and ecclesiastical independence, and, finally, to the most recent times, after World War II. In each of these cases, we shall treat directly of Roman Catholics and of Anglicans, and – as far as it is warranted – also of other Christian churches.*

* The following essay has been read by Dr J. Garrett and Dr D. Wetherell, and partly by Mrs Chr. Luxton, Can T. Alderitt, whose comments have been considered presently, while the whole text has been processed by Fr J. Regal, and proofed by Can Warren Croft. We thank them all for their cooperation.