

DREAMS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

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Dreams are much more prominent in Papua New Guinean culture than they are in the West. They are used as a means of communication, and are full of symbolism.

My first encounter with dreams, as a means of communication, was when young people wanted to test my reaction to an idea without making a direct approach. On one occasion, a girl on a course, told me how she had dreamt that she and her friends had been climbing an Okari tree to collect the nuts, and I had come, and had been angry with them.

Family fortunes are often the subject of dreams. At the time, exactly what will happen is not very clear, except something good, or something bad, is going to happen. In retrospect, the symbolism is clearly understood.

Religious dreams usually involve religious personalities, either from the past or the present, or have the religious theme. One night, an Anglican sister dreamt of a lake, with a house on one side, and a mountain on the other. Many people had gathered for a celebration of the Mass by the Archbishop. However, when a fire started on the mountain, the people began to run away. The religious sisters in the congregation were frightened also, but the Archbishop told them to stay, and not to be afraid. As the Archbishop continued to celebrate, a huge tree behind him caught fire, and was shooting out sparks. When it started to fall, the Archbishop led them around the lake towards the house. Months later, this was seen as a prophecy of the resignation of a bishop, which resulted in a lot of confusion, anger, and misunderstanding. The sisters were, unwillingly, caught up in it.

What guidance should we give to our people as to how to know when dream is from God, and not the result of worries, indigestion, or

sickness? There seems to be no clear indication in the Bible as to how to judge a dream, except by whether the interpretation is proved true or not. This is only a valid test if the dream contains a prediction, but it is no help in deciding whether or not you should act on that prediction. In Papua New Guinea cultures, I have seen dreams to be almost as destructive as gossip.

In today's terms, Old Testament figures, such as Daniel and Joseph, would probably be said to have the gift of being able to interpret dreams. Is the Papua New Guinean church prepared to recognise anyone as having this gift? Can we rely on the gift of discernment to distinguish between the dreams that are of God and those that are not? Should we use the same standard of measurement as scripture gives us for false prophets and teachers: "By their fruits shall you know them", or should it be left to other members of Christ's body to judge their interpretation, as Paul directs in 1 Cor 14:29?

From my own experience, I would say that dreams are very much like speaking in tongues. They are private, rather than public, and provide edification, or revelation, for the individual. I don't think that dreams, in Papua New Guinea, can be equated with the dream experience of the cultures of the East, such as Tibetan Buddhist, or Hindu yoga, experiences. All the dreams that have been shared with me by Papua New Guineans, I can relate to similar experiences of my own, except that I would interpret them according to a different worldview. I have never established whether sorcerers, who travel to other places by non-physical means, do so by dreams.