

GOD IN PAPUA NEW GUINEAN POLITICS

Peter Hinawai

Peter Hinawai is a diocesan seminarian, studying theology at the Catholic Theological Institute in Port Moresby. He is originally from Homaria village in Margarima Parish in the Diocese of Mendi, Southern Highlands Province PNG.

How do people see, decide, and react to a national general election in Papua New Guinea? From my observation and experience, many people think that an election is a game. There is a saying, “One has to win and one has to lose – why not try?” However, if politics is a game, why are people spending so much money giving free handouts of money and materials? Hence, politics is not merely a game.

Some people think politics is a business, because it involves millions of kina. People are beginning to realise that politics is the quickest way to make money. Hence, many candidates enter into politics to contest either for open or regional seats, because politics means power and money.

However, a few people realise and think that an election is a serious business, and not a mere game, or a way of making money. They know that the brief moment of electing a candidate to parliament will determine the future of our country for the following five years. So, an election is going to determine the life and future of our country.

To God, politics is not a mere game and business. Politics is a serious concern, affecting people’s lives. God is in politics, because He loves all humankind, and desires to restore human dignity and life. God does not love the “love of power”, God loves the “power of love”. This means that God wishes to restore justice, the value of human dignity, truth, and life, which are the political platforms of God. Adam and Eve loved the “love of power”, wanting to be like God. This resulted in greed, lies, injustice, and wanting power, which are political platforms of the serpent (evil). Where are we, PNG? What is our response, PNG? Do we want changes

in our lives? Who will make the changes in our lives – God alone, or people alone, or leaders alone? Are we walking Jesus’ way, telling His truth, and living His life?

TERMINOLOGY OF “ELECTION” AND “POLITICS”?

What is election? Election is the time to allow individual people to exercise their right to freely choose a leader to enter parliament. Election, by definition, is an act of choice. Politically, election connotes “democracy”; an ideology that enjoys favourable opinion, as it is one based on freedom, liberty, rights, and human dignity.¹

What is politics? It is a way of forming government, and of delivering goods and services to the people in the country. However, at the present time, people see and act as if politics is “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matt 5:38). They fight for power and money, and, consequently, innocent people are suffering from a leadership crisis, and a breakdown in accessibility to goods and services in the country. Where are we going, PNG?

WHERE ARE WE, PNG?

In PNG, we are facing a leadership crisis. People find it difficult to find a person whom they can trust to lead with honesty, accountability, and transparency. The country is facing instability, in terms of economics, politics, social structure, culture, and religion. The poor condition of infrastructure development is a problem. There is no sense of respect for law and order. There is rape, violence, and tribal fighting, causing people to live in fear. There is poor management of health services, and very low literacy rates. If it continues like this, there is little hope for the country. The present situation is the result of people electing selfish leaders to parliament. Leaders think that their work is to attend only the parliament sessions, but not to educate people about their rights, and freedom of choice, or of the common people’s role of leadership in the country. We are facing an attitude problem, caused by all kinds of influences, including

¹ Bill Mathias Kuglame, “Election: Profanation of the Human Power of Choice”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 12-2 (1996), p. 55.

modern life styles, adapting politics to cultural ways, and the breakdown of good leadership authority.

Is it the fault of God? No. God is not the author of the political crisis. Our God has shown how to make right decisions and choices, by creating heaven, earth, and human beings. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve to eat the fruit. Our first parents have shown us how to make the wrong decisions and choices by disobeying God's will. They lost God's free gift of grace (Gen 3:1-5). Today, we are suffering, because we, too, have made wrong decisions. We choose leaders who disobey God's will, with the result seen in our present state of chaos.

God gave authority to our first parents (Gen 1:28b). Authority is "life giving life" through relationship with God. Adam and Eve accepted God's authority to give life, and, in their relationship with God, they were to rule over other creatures in a life-giving way. Likewise, political leaders have been given authority to give life to people. This authority is "life giving life" under God, the author of life. The serpent is the author of death. The serpent gave the curse of death to Adam and Eve – a curse that would bring suffering and death to our world.

After they ate the fruit, our first parents' eyes were opened (Gen 3:6-7). In their suffering and pain, they realised that they were naked, and that they needed God again. In PNG, we realise that we need God to restore and uphold our lost human dignity, so that we can live authentic lives.

The serpent's arrival was the moment of the birth of politics in the Garden of Eden. It played politics with God, and manipulated Eve and Adam, so that they ate the forbidden fruit of the tree belonging to God (Gen 3:1-8). Since then, people have suffered from the power of evil, which has ruled the children of Adam and Eve.

However, God's love can be seen in His dealings with humanity. Under Moses, God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God is still involved in politics, because God continues to love His people. Thus, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ – a political hero – sent to suffer and die

so as to redeem the whole humanity on earth. Jesus put everything in order again, and that is how the God of truth has fought and won over the politics of evil. God will not stop until the whole of humanity changes its heart of stone, and comes back to Him. God's politics will not end until God defeats evil in the world.

Jesus obeyed the Father, and chose the "tree of life" – the "holy cross" – an expression of the "power of love". But Adam and Eve chose the "tree of death". They had a "love of power", and wanted to be like God. We must choose and elect good leaders, whose work can bear much fruit – leaders who uphold the truth of life.

Our land is blessed, and is like a paradise, full of natural resources, minerals and food, fresh water, beautiful landscapes, and mountains. We must be proud of our linguistic and cultural diversity. God has given us all that we need, so why do we misuse it?

PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

A country does not develop itself. People make a country. Do we love our country? Both the people and politicians have been showing how to destroy Papua New Guinea, and bring it into chaos. If we, the people and politicians, really loved our country, there would not be the same political interference, and everybody would cooperate to develop PNG. The present political crisis pulls PNG a step backward every day, bringing us almost into the slavery of the land of Egypt. We are politically handicapped – misled by our leaders, and living in a world of violence, corruption, and despair.

Are we showing signs of being a Christian country? How deeply are gospel values rooted in our lives in PNG? The problems we experience indicate that we do not recognise Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection. Christ is the new Adam, and the second Moses, who redeemed us from sinfulness. Christ shows us how to make the choice for love, which is His new Law. Jesus chose to be a suffering servant. Why not we? Jesus invites us to follow His example, and to be ready to serve others, for the life and prosperity of PNG.

PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties contribute to forming a government to run the nation, and to assist in delivering goods and services to the people. They have their own political aims, directives, and guidelines, to enable them to function. A party policy should be in the best interest of the people. We have seen many political parties forming under the new Integrity of Political Parties Act.

Were there political parties in the Garden of Eden? Bearing in mind that politics was born at the moment the serpent entered the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-17), we could say that there were two political parties. One political party was for God. And another political party was for the serpent. Both parties aimed at ruling Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Did God have a political party platform and policies? God's Ten Commandments are His platform and policies, which were given to Moses as a political leader, who would liberate his people to enter the Promised Land (Ex 20:1-17). Did Jesus give His party policies to people? Jesus' party policy and platform is love. Jesus said, "Love your enemy, and do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:29). This is the best summary of God's Ten Commandments. God gives His law for the dignity and solidarity of humanity, with one purpose, which is holiness of life.

How can we know and differentiate between the parties of God and the serpent, now in PNG? A political party should be founded on honesty, truth, justice, integrity, transparency, and accountability of all political party leaders and members. These principles and goals, if put into practice, will allow Papua New Guinea to go forward with a stable and good government. Surely, God wants this to happen in our country. God's party must fight against the serpent's (evil's) parties that are full of injustice, greed, self-centredness, bribery, dishonesty, and disrespect for human rights, and freedom of choice – which is what we are experiencing now in PNG.

PEOPLE AND LEADERS

Leaders, who have not been going to church before, suddenly become active in church affairs in the months before the election. Becoming a converted Christian for a short time is a ploy to get votes. This is in addition to giving out material things, such as, money and pigs, or giving people a lift in the candidate's car. So often, village people are not aware of the candidate's hidden agenda. Without knowing fully what they are doing, people simply elect a six-month-old converted Christian to the parliament. Once many elected members have money and power, they hide themselves in Port Moresby, and do not show their face again in the village. We hear rumours that, once in parliament, they live lives of luxury, growing big stomachs, and marrying many wives. That is how Papua New Guinea is failing, due to corruption in many of our leaders.

We Christians are called to act as people made in the image of God. Rather than racing among ourselves to be the campaign managers of just any candidate, why not race to become the true prophets (campaign managers) of Jesus Christ, and lead people back to God's kingdom? Who will be the prophets? We Christians are the ones who should become the prophets, to speak out against corruption, and restore human dignity. Our leaders should be the servants of people. Jesus showed us how to be a person of true service, by washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:2-5). We do not want hypocrites and blind leaders to mislead the people (Mark 7:6-8).

PEOPLE'S FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND CULTURE

Culture and politics are tangled together, and this is one reason why PNG is facing a political and cultural crisis. Politics should be free from false culture, for the benefit of the country as a whole. In some parts of PNG, when one member of a clan is elected as a Member of Parliament, people seem to think that every clan member is also a member of Parliament, and that they have power over the rest of society. Even though a person might be a corrupt leader, who has faced the leadership tribunal for misconduct in public office, people still vote for their clan member, not counting quality. They know that, if they do not vote for their clan member, others

will get to know, and relationships will be broken. So, they feel they have to vote for a particular candidate, because of cultural ties.

How did Adam see the relationship with God and Eve? Adam accepted the fruit of the forbidden tree, given by Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:6-7). He ate it, because, to him, the human relationship with Eve was more important than his relationship with God. This story reminds us of what is happening culturally in PNG. In our culture, “relationship” is an important cultural value. So, for example, if a father makes a decision for a family to vote for a candidate, who is corrupt, his family members feel they have no choice. They have to vote for that person. To disregard the father’s decision, and vote for another candidate, would mean being out of the family.

Western culture emphasises individualism, and each person votes according to his or her individual principles. Melanesian culture is more community centred. The sense of relationship is very strong. Jesus said that, if we keep His commandments, we will have relationship with Him. From a Christian point of view, relationship is the will of God. Yet, our Papua New Guinean way of understanding relationship needs to be unveiled, purified, and transformed to allow gospel values to throw light onto our culture. Jesus came to fulfil the law, but not to destroy it (Matt 5:17). We must find ways to live our culture, so that gospel values and cultural identity can work in harmony.

BRIBERY AND EMPTY PROMISES

Many candidates bribe people with money and handouts, and make empty promises about bringing goods and services to people in the community. Why? Because they want to get power and money. Did God create us blind? Can we blame God for not creating intellectual power to think and reason? God warned our first parents not to eat the fruit of the tree. God said, “If you eat, you shall die” (Gen 1:28; 3:1-3). The serpent entered the Garden of Eden, and played politics with God, because Adam and Eve belonged to God. The serpent told Eve to eat the fruit of the tree, and promised her that she would not die, and that she would be like God, and know good and evil. Later, Adam and Eve realised they had done wrong,

and saw that they were naked. They realised that they needed God. The same thing applies to us now in PNG. When we are suffering, in the midst of a leadership crisis, now we cry out to God for help.

Campaign promises can be almost blasphemous. Candidates use the name of God, and pretend to be humble, and make sweet talk, but, when they get elected to parliament, they show their true colours. These people or parties are like wolves in sheepskins.² If, through bribery, people sell their votes to candidates, it amounts to selling the country to wild dogs. We must not be like Judas Iscariot, who was tempted by a few pieces of silver.

Adam and Eve accepted the empty promises from the serpent. Satan tempted Jesus, and promised to give Him “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour” (Matt 4:8-11), but Jesus rejected the temptation. This example reminds us to act in faith, and to make choices for the truth. Why don’t we reject bribery, and disbelieve empty promises, like Jesus did to Satan’s promises?

CASTING VOTES

In many parts of PNG, especially in places like the Southern Highlands Province, there is no secrecy in casting votes for certain candidates. Everybody knows a person for whom you vote. Moreover, people are forced to vote at the point of a gun. Supporters of some candidates held up polling officials, made them sign all the ballot papers, and put them in the ballot boxes. Election polling officials were forced to seal the ballot boxes and mark tally sheets. People also cast multiple votes until the supposedly secret ballot papers finished. Why do we claim PNG is a Christian country? The country itself is not Christian. People are Christians. If we people cannot respect the country’s constitution, we cannot follow God’s law either. We are cheating God and ourselves.

Ballot papers, themselves, are not secret and sacred, but become so when a person marks “X” on them. When a person marks “X”, or calls the name

² K. Siloi, “Don’t Let Sweet Talk Fool You”, in *Post-Courier*, Monday, June 3, 2002, p. 10.

of a candidate, he or she is expressing his or her God-given freedom. The ballot boxes should contain the trust, hope, and life of the people voting; hence their sacred character. Ballot papers should be respected. They are not merely papers and boxes, but represent human life and the future of our country. Voting is giving life for life. Those counting the votes are counting human lives, not mere ballot papers. We need to educate people to realise that the ballot boxes are like a signed contract between people and their leaders.

PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

There are various groups of people with different attitudes. Some are sensitive to the problems, and are optimistic about making changes, and electing good Christian leaders. Such people speak with faith and concern. Others feel the problems, but they are pessimistic about our ability to respond. Some say that, if they were to speak out, and reveal the truth, then they might as well prepare their coffin. People fear to die, and so keep quiet.

Whom shall we blame? When we face hardships, economic instability, violence, and injustice, we are tempted to blame each other. Politicians blame people, and people blame politicians, just as Adam and Eve blamed each other. In fact, if there is blame, then we must blame ourselves for having made the wrong choices, by electing corrupt leaders, and as a consequence, we are suffering.

Some people ask, "Why is God punishing us?" The answer is that God is not punishing us. We must not be like Adam and Eve. Adam blamed Eve, and she blamed the serpent (Gen 3:6-7). We can only blame ourselves. We punish ourselves by not listening, and not living according to God's will. We must blame ourselves that we do not make proper choices and elect good-quality leaders. Hence, the leadership crisis we face is not God's fault, or God's punishment. God enters into politics against evil powers only because of us, because God loves us, and wants to restore life.

ARE WE HERE – PNG?

God's "love" was, is, and will be, forever. God must be "crazy" with His love, or as expressed in Tok Pisin, "*God mas i go longlong wantaim tru, tru laik bilong em.*" The Triune God is a model for us to be in communion and solidarity with God, and with each other, through the authentic bonds of love. We get a glimpse of the invisible eternal Trinitarian community in human love and solidarity in community, here and now. Papua New Guinea cannot develop by itself. We, the people of Papua New Guinea, should be "crazy" (*longlong*) with our God-given love of our country. We should be showing how to love our country, by being prepared to serve our country.

God has given His authority to make God's kingdom visible on earth, through the bond of love, and through peace, justice, and harmony that witnesses to the will of God. Adam and Eve were in the presence of God, in the absence of politics, before the fall. Human beings were created perfect, in God's own image and likeness. Are we made perfect and holy, too? The political hero, Jesus Christ defeated evil in His suffering and death. He restored the Garden of Eden to us, liberating us, and making us holy. Jesus calls us not to accept the "fruit of the tree" – death – but to accept the "tree of life" – the cross – and to develop a mature faith that will make truth and holiness part of the development of our country.

CONCLUSION

We all believe that, "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). This text reminds Papua New Guineans that the "existence of people and the land is the expression of God's existence".³ Every Papua New Guinean has a heart for the land. The land is perceived as a mother, from whom a child gets its nourishment and existence. If our hearts and lives are rooted in the land, then why are we causing all kinds of crises in PNG? Are we fighting because our country is poor, with no natural resources – a desert? Is it because we are a people

³ Henry Paroi, "Decolonising Theology: Doing Theology in Melanesian Context", in *Catalyst* 33-1 (2001), p. 33.

with no political freedom from a coloniser? Surely not. Our political crises have their origin in our leaders forgetting God, and ignoring people's common interest.

We must never overlook the gift of life that God breathed into us. We should love our lives and country. We should give honour to God for the gift of life, and do so by building a better PNG. Jesus told us to be salt and light. If that is not the case, then the people should not blame the leaders, and leaders should not blame people. We must blame ourselves, and come back to God, with Christ at the centre of our lives. Only then, can we develop PNG with the truth of love, faith, and life.

There is a need for continuous education awareness, in order to change the wrong attitudes of people, and help them realise their rights, and their God-given human freedom of choice. We must allow people to write God's law in their hearts, and be ready to become true prophets (campaign mangers) of Christ. God is in the political arena, because evil first entered into the Garden of Eden. God is in politics to restore and uphold human dignity and life.

If God is powerful, why does God allow a leadership crisis in PNG, with corruption, injustice, violence, and disrespect for human dignity? Does not God want to continue to be in politics? God allows the crisis, because God wants people to recognise Him, and to turn to Him. If we want good leaders "because the country is in such bad state, and you are suffering, look for wisdom – there is no college or university for it. True wisdom comes from God."⁴

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⁴ Barnabas Orere, "A Serious Business: Not a Game", in *Post-Courier Magazine*, May, 2002, p. 13.

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