

# **MANSINAM: CENTRE OF PILGRIMAGE, UNITY, AND POLARISATION IN WEST PAPUA<sup>1</sup>**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Annually, on February 5, especially in every round fifth year, thousands of pilgrims populate the tiny island of Mansinam in the Dorehri Bay in the Regency of Manokwari, West Papua, Indonesia. While the mainly Protestant Christians commemorate the arrival of the first missionaries in 1855, the local hotel industry has its peak season.

Coming from Manokwari town on the mainland – some having travelled from neighbouring Papua New Guinea,<sup>2</sup> or farther abroad – the pilgrims reach Mansinam by traditional canoe in less than 30 minutes. Because an islet of 450 hectares is not very well suited to accommodate thousands of people, the worshippers, often including the governors, and other VIPs, of

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<sup>1</sup> The author presented this paper in abbreviated form on June 23, 2011, during the Inaugural Conference of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), held from June 21-24, at the Pacific Adventist University in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. A special word of gratitude goes to Mr Wolfgang Apelt, librarian at the Archive of the Rhenish Mission/United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Wuppertal Germany, who provided the author with some of the bibliographical data.

<sup>2</sup> In 2010 and 2011, delegations from the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea (ELC-PNG), which, since October 26, 2009, has an official partnership with the Evangelical Church of West Papua (GKI-TP), have attended these celebrations.

the two provinces of Indonesian Papua<sup>3</sup>, can hardly move towards the memorial site<sup>4</sup> for the torch-lighting opening ceremony on February 5.<sup>5</sup>

But, there is another reality as well in Manokwari: while the largely Christian indigenous population is joyfully celebrating, the Muslim settlers, about half of the population in coastal cities, such as Manokwari, are in great fear. “Irian”, as they still use to call West Papua, has become their home, too; they refer to history for proof of some deep Muslim roots in the ground of Manokwari. Unfortunately, some politicians and religious leaders on both sides exploit such fears and religious sentiments.

### **THE MISSIONARIES AND THEIR JOURNEY TO PAPUA**

Johann G. Geissler<sup>6</sup> and Carl W. Ottow<sup>7</sup> were so-called missionary-workmen, pious craftsmen, without much formal theological education, prepared during some months in the missionary seminary of Gossner<sup>8</sup> in Berlin, and thereafter by Heldring<sup>9</sup> in Hemmen in the Netherlands. They had left the Netherlands for the Dutch Indies by ship on June 26, 1852, and arrived in Batavia three-and-a-half months later. While waiting for permission from the Dutch authorities to do mission work in New Guinea,

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<sup>3</sup> The provinces of Papua (bordering PNG), and Papua Barat (the “Bird’s Head” of New Guinea, bordering the Moluccas). Until 2000, the region was officially called Irian Jaya.

<sup>4</sup> Since 2010, a huge white cross, flanked by statues of angels, marks the centre of the memorial site. Greenpeace supported this project by donating a renewable energy plant. This hybrid power station produces electricity from sun and wind, allowing the memorial cross, and the nearby memorial church building, to be illuminated, as well as the speakers and musicians to use microphones and amplifiers during the celebrations. Cf. *Inisiatif Energi Terbarukan di Pulau Mansinam: Revolusi Energi berawal disini!*, Greenpeace internet web-site, *Greenpeace/Shailendra Yashwant*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ichwan Susanto, “Puluhan Ribu Peziarah Padati Pulau Mansinam”, newspaper article in *KOMPAS*, February 5, 2010 (translation by U. Hummel).

<sup>6</sup> Johann Gottlob Geissler (German spelling: Geißler) was born on February 18, 1830, in Langenreichenbach in Torgau, Kingdom of Saxony (later a part of Germany), and died during furlough in Siegen, Westphalia, on June 11, 1870.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Wilhelm Ottow was born on January 24, 1827, in Luckenwalde, Mark Brandenburg, Kingdom of Prussia (later a part of Germany), and died on November 9, 1862, in Kwawi, Manokwari, Dutch New Guinea.

<sup>8</sup> Johannes Evangelista Gossner (1773-1858).

<sup>9</sup> Otto Gerhard Heldring (1804-1876).

they did some manual labour to provide for their living, because missionary-workmen did not get a salary, or other regular support, from an organisation.<sup>10</sup> They used their spare time to learn the Malay language, and soon were able to teach local pupils, as well as tending to the sick in the villages.

One-and-a-half years later, the permit arrived and Geissler and Ottow embarked on a steamship for Ternate in the Northern Moluccas, bordering New Guinea. This journey lasted more than five months. On Ternate, they stayed at the parsonage of Revd J. E. Höveker for a few months of intensive preparations, after which they got the opportunity of a free trip on a Dutch merchant's vessel,<sup>11</sup> taking them to Mansinam, with their livestock, and a prefab house (which, unfortunately, was incomplete, and of no use), as well as a 12-year old boy by the name of Frits Weggers, who served as a Malay translator.<sup>12</sup>

### **BEGINNINGS OF MISSION WORK ON MANSINAM**

On February 5, 1855, Geissler and Ottow stepped ashore on Mansinam, thus being the first missionaries to serve on New Guinea. Falling on their knees, they proclaimed: "In the name of God we set foot on this land"<sup>13</sup> – a dedication today known to every Christian child in West Papua.

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<sup>10</sup> For their basic equipment, and initial travelling expenses to their destination on Dutch New Guinea, the Amsterdam Society of Women in Support of Mission (*Amsterdamse Vrouwenvereniging tot Bevordering van de Zendingszaak*) provided the means. In Batavia, the "Committee of the Christian Workman" provided the means for travelling to Ternate.

<sup>11</sup> Mr van Duivenbode, the merchant, generously offered other necessary logistic support to the missionaries as well.

<sup>12</sup> In the wake of celebrations in 2011, Izak Morin wrote a remarkable reflection on the use of Melayu Papua, the dominant lingua franca of Papua-Indonesia. In this article, he reflects also on the contribution of young Frits, son of a teacher on the Moluccan island of Ternate, as translator to the first missionaries on Mansinam. Regarding the key role of communication in missionary work, little Frits' role should not be underestimated. Cf. Izak Morin, "Melayu Papua dan Injil di Tanah Papua", in: *Artikel & Berita – Bedah Bahasa* (Internet forum), February 7, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps also spoken in Malay: "dalam nama Tuhan kami menginjak tanah ini".

On the return voyage, the captain of the merchant vessel, witnessing the poor state of health of the missionaries, left a 12-year old girl by the name of Saptu behind as cook. Saptu and Frits became indispensable supporters of this initial missionary venture. Thus, the “Apostles of Papua”, as they are affectionately called, who introduced Christianity to New Guinea, included two children.

The early beginnings of missionary work on Mansinam<sup>14</sup> were extremely difficult. The missionaries suffered from various illnesses, and, initially, the indigenous Numfor and Arfak kept their distance from, or even reacted somewhat hostile towards, the intruders.

In order to sustain themselves, the missionaries engaged in retail trade in birds of paradise, tortoise, shells, etc. In return, they could get medicines, wheat flour, coffee, tea, and other necessary things. These trading activities gradually strengthened relations with the local population.

Geissler and Ottow followed the method of a comprehensive missionary approach,<sup>15</sup> which included development work, mediation in conflicts, and education. Like others on some other primary “mission fields” in the Dutch East Indies, they also manumitted some slave children, took them into their home, and educated them, both informally, as members of their household, and later also formally in school. They became the core of the first Christian congregation on Mansinam.

In April, 1855, Geissler had to leave Ottow, Frits, and Saptu behind to have a dangerously-infected foot injury treated in Ternate.<sup>16</sup> On his return,<sup>17</sup> five Muslim tradesmen, who built the missionaries’ house, which was dedicated on July 6, 1856, accompanied him.

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<sup>14</sup> For the following data in this chapter, I depend strongly on the work of Helga and Johannes C. G. Ottow, *Im Namen Gottes betreten wir dieses Land*, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Roeber, K., *Zum 175. Geburtstag von Johann Gottlob Geißler (1830-1870)*.

<sup>16</sup> In the meantime, Ottow had thoroughly studied the Numfor vernacular, primal religion and customary law. After a while, he was admitted to attend meetings of the elders. His anthropological studies, started during these solitary months, and published after his death in 1862, was the first authentic report about Papua.

<sup>17</sup> Geissler returned to Mansinam on February 12, 1856.

While Ottow stayed on Mansinam, Geissler again left the isle from March until June, 1857, in order to rescue shipwrecked persons in the Gelvink Bay (today Teluk Cenderawasih), for which both missionaries were awarded 250 guilders, plus an annual aid of 600 guilders each. Ottow accompanied the three rescued seamen to Ternate, and stayed there until the arrival of his fiancée, Auguste.<sup>18</sup>

In 1857, Ottow and Geissler opened a school, in which they taught their “children” (the manumitted slaves), as well as some local boys. At the end of 1858, Auguste, the wife of Ottow, who had arrived at the beginning of the year, added a class of seven to nine girls.

On October 1, 1860, the Ottow couple moved over to a new missionary house in Kwawi on mainland Manokwari – in sight of Mansinam – while Geissler remained on Mansinam. Ottow translated the gospel of Matthew into the Numfor vernacular, and published a little hymn book containing 27 songs in Numfor. As of 1861, he held two worship services on Sundays, for men in the morning, and for women in the afternoon, using the Numfor vernacular.<sup>19</sup>

In 1862, Geissler married the Dutch Pauline Justine Reynaert. They stayed on Mansinam, where they completed a house for themselves, and some years later built the church.

On November 9, 1862, Ottow died of malaria, leaving behind his pregnant wife, Auguste, and his son Johannes.<sup>20</sup> He was buried near the missionary

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<sup>18</sup> Wilhelmine Auguste (called Auguste) Ottow nee Letz, (born July 2, 1830, in Luckenwalde – died November 20, 1899, in The Netherlands). Auguste was the first European woman to stay permanently in New Guinea.

<sup>19</sup> When Geissler and Ottow got the message that the Utrecht Missionary Society wanted to send out three of its missionaries to Mansinam, they began seriously to look for another mission post in Amberbalken, and developed a mission and development plan, which was later, in 1863, acknowledged by the colonial authorities.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Carl Gottlob Ottow (born on November 12, 1861, in Manokwari – died on December 21, 1945, in Zeist, Netherlands), became a missionary and seminary teacher on Talaud, but later requested a transfer to another area in the Dutch East Indies, which was rejected. He then became a successful teacher (later headmaster) at public elementary schools in the Dutch East Indies.

house in Kwawi. The grave in Kwawi has become a memorial, which, like the island of Mansinam, is held as a sacred place for most Papuan Christians today.

Auguste left Mansinam for Ternate on March 16, 1863.<sup>21</sup> Two days after her departure, three missionaries of the Utrecht Missionary Society<sup>22</sup>, two of them with their wives, arrived to join the Geisslers on Mansinam. They were missionary J. L. Van Hasselt and his wife, missionary T. F. Klaassen and his wife, and missionary W. Otterspoor. After an earthquake and a tsunami hit the islet the next year, only the Geisslers and Van Hasselts stayed on.

Van Hasselt, who served on the isle until 1907, is the founder of the Christian congregation on Mansinam.<sup>23</sup> On February 5, 1880, after 25 years of mission work and the death of 17 missionaries and 20 Papuans, the first fruits of New Guinea, were baptised. The spread of Christianity in West Papua, however, was a later development of the 20th century.

### **SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN WEST PAPUA**

By the beginning of the 20th century, a movement by Papuans had sprung up, in which Christianity spread from village to village in the northern regions of Dutch New Guinea.<sup>24</sup> The village elders themselves asked the Protestant mission to send Christian teachers and evangelists. These usually came from the neighbouring Moluccas.

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<sup>21</sup> In order to give birth to her second child, Wilhelm Martin Ottow (May 18, 1863-November 22, 1916). Little Johannes, too, was seriously ill, and needed treatment on Ternate.

<sup>22</sup> *Utrechtsche Zendings Vereeniging* (UZV), 1859-1907 (in 1907, UZV merged with other Dutch Reformed Missionary Societies in the *Samenwerkende Zendingscorporaties*).

<sup>23</sup> On March 15, 1865, the Utrecht Missionary Society wanted to stop all missionary work in New Guinea. But, because of the protest of Geissler and Van Hasselt, and especially also of Auguste Ottow, the move was reconsidered and the work continued. Geissler, together with Pauline, and their son Gustav, left Mansinam for furlough in 1870. Due to the death of Geissler, they were never to return to Mansinam. The work, however, was continued by the Dutch brethren.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Siefried Zöllner, "The culture of the Papuans in transition", pp. 66-72.

The Roman Catholic Mission started in south-western Fak Fak in 1894, and later in south-eastern Merauke. Here, the missionaries of the Sacred Heart from the Netherlands were very successful. Today, about 18 percent of the population of West Papua belong to the Roman Catholic church.<sup>25</sup>

From 1912 until 1928, the Dutch colonial government had a policy of avoiding “double mission”, allocating the North to the Protestants, and the South to the Roman Catholics.<sup>26</sup> In 1939, Protestant mission work in the Western Highlands (Eranotali) was started by an American missionary of The Christian & Missionary Alliance (CAMA) with his Dayak assistants.<sup>27</sup> In the 1950s, the Dani of the eastern parts (Baliem Valley) were reached by CAMA, and, in 1960, the Rhenish Mission commenced its work among the Yali.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, a movement, similar to that 60 years earlier on the north coast, established Christianity in most parts of the highlands. Various Christian missions competed with one another. Franco Zocca rightly calls it a “real race for souls, as, indeed, it was also a desperate race to ‘develop’ the region”.<sup>29</sup> Siegfried Zöllner, a former Rhenish missionary and West Papua expert, summarises the significant impact of the gospel on the indigenous people of West Papua as follows:<sup>30</sup> it ended “tribal feuds and vendettas”, and broadened the horizons of the people to an expanded world. Christian education, often at the request of the Papuan people, brought about a “shift in values”, resulting in a gradual change from traditional to educated leadership. The Christian worship, which, unlike the primal religion, does not exclude women from ritual activities, but, rather,

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Franco Zocca, *Melanesia and its Churches*, pp. 130.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-130.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Benny Giay, Zakheus Pakage and his Communities, pp. 27-31. The Dayak are the major indigenous people of Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo.

<sup>28</sup> Siegfried Zöllner was the pioneer of the Yali. Today, in his retirement, Revd Dr Zöllner is the chairman of the Advisory Board of the German West Papua Netzwerk. His dissertation on the mythology and primal religion of the Yali has just been published in Bahasa Indonesia (Zöllner, Siegfried, *Pohon Yeli dan Mithos Wam dalam Agama Orang Yali*, Penerbit Wahine, LAL, Jakarta, 2011, ISBN 9783941387041).

<sup>29</sup> Franco Zocca, *Melanesia and its Churches*, pp. 128.

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried Zöllner, “The culture of the Papuans in transition”, pp. 67-68.

encourages them to participate, contributed towards the emancipation of women. While Christianity introduced Western medicine, in order to combat illnesses, which traditional remedies were unable to cure, at the same time, it opened the interiors to previously-unknown diseases, and paved the way for the introduction of modern currency and trade, which, though unavoidable, had rather negative effects on the life of traditional communities.

Today, it is estimated that 90 percent of the indigenous population of West Papua not only adheres to Christianity, but also values it as an integral, if not the most important, part of its identity. It marks a major difference between the vast majority of Melanesian Papua, and most of the Asian settlers. Great efforts have been made by the Indonesian authorities, and (until recently) even the Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI), to keep the Protestant churches in West Papua apolitical, if not even supportive of the state ideology of “unity at all costs” (even at the expense of human rights) from Sabang in Aceh to Merauke in West Papua. Despite this kind of indoctrination and intimidation, the Papuan churches have maintained (and, in the past decade, significantly increased) their role as human rights defenders. In this respect, the Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Secretariat or SKP,<sup>31</sup> and the Human Rights, or JPIC,<sup>32</sup> Desk of the Protestant GKI in Tanah Papua, take a lead, while there are also significant contributions by the Baptist Union in Tanah Papua, the Christian Tabernacle church (KINGMI), and others. Amid continuous gross human rights violations,<sup>33</sup> especially committed by elements of the Indonesian

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<sup>31</sup> *Sekretariat untuk Keadilan dan Perdamaian*. There are offices of SKP in Jayapura, Merauke, Timika, and Sorong.

<sup>32</sup> Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation. The main office is situated at the Synod Office of the GKI-TP in Jayapura.

<sup>33</sup> Authoritative reports by UN Special Envoy Hina Jilani on the ill treatment of human rights defenders in West Papua in 2007, and by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak on March 7, 2008 (cf. UNOG, Special Representative of Secretary-General on Situation of Human Rights Defenders concludes visit to Indonesia, June 12, 2007; UN News Service. See also articles in West Papua Rundbrief No. 43 (January, 2008, pp. 13-14, on the web-site of the German West Papua Netzwerk ([www.westpapuanetz.de](http://www.westpapuanetz.de))). For a recent report on severe torture in custody and violence committed against civilians by the by the security forces, impunity, and also attacks by



security forces, and impunity by the judicial courts against the practices of human rights offenders, the indigenous Papuans turn to the churches, rather than to any other bodies (including NGOs), for protection and advocacy. Often Papuan churches openly support the distinctly Melanesian identity of the Papuans.

### **ISLAM IN WEST PAPUA**

Christianity, however, has not been the first world-religion entering these parts. For hundreds of years, possibly as early as the 16th century, the Muslim sultanate of Tidore in the Moluccas had claimed Manokwari as its hinterland, but had failed to set up any kind of regular administration.<sup>34</sup>

Mainly due to the influence of Muslims from the Moluccas, certain regions, such as Fak Fak, Kaimana, Bintuni Bay, the Raja Ampat Islands, Sorong, and Manokwari have a strong indigenous population, traditionally adhering to Islam. Papuan Muslims, who have traditionally lived peacefully alongside their Christian neighbours, make up about 10 percent of the total indigenous population of West Papua.

The heavy influx, especially since the 1980s, of mainly Muslim settlers from Java, Madura, Bali, Sulawesi, Moluccas, and other parts of Indonesia, have, however, changed the harmonious social and demographic composition dramatically.

### **TRANSMIGRATION AND SECTARIAN STRIFE**

Since the implementation, by presidential decree in 1978 (*Impres* 7/1978), of the Indonesia transmigration program in West Papua, and also,

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PNG security forces against West Papua refugees (so-called illegal border-crossers), see the report of West Papua Advocacy Team (WPAT), *West Papua Report February 2011*. WPAT is closely affiliated to the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation, and is serious in its documentation of human rights violations in West Papua.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Th. Van den End, et al, *Ragi Carita 2*, pp. 112. The Sultanate of Tidore was founded in 1495 by Sultan Ciriliyati (cf. *Tidore Sultanate*, Dunia Melayu Se-dunia, Melayu Online.de). The neighbouring Sultanate of Ternate likewise claimed New Guinea as part of its territory near the end of the 16th century (cf. *History of Ternate: From Islamic Sultanates in modern Indonesia*).

exceedingly, on their own initiative (*swakarsa*), tens of thousands – if not hundreds of thousands – of people from other parts of the country have settled in West Papua. The vast majority of them are Muslims. Therefore, in towns and cities, such as Jayapura, Sorong, Timika, and Manokwari, Islam is growing rapidly, gradually outnumbering the Christians, and gaining control over the economy.<sup>35</sup> Some estimates, though without solid statistical basis, put the non-indigenous (and, therefore, mainly Muslim) part of the population at 40-45 percent.<sup>36</sup>

Especially since the more-recent settlers do not adjust to the Papuan way of life, but, conversely, with the assistance of the national authorities, often enforce their cultural values on public life, this dangerously increases the potential for sectarian conflict.

In June, 2008, a report by the International Crises Group (ICG)<sup>37</sup> warned about the real danger of communal tensions in Manokwari, similar to those in the Moluccas during the years 1999 until 2002. The reason was the “change of the religious map” caused by the recent influx of intolerant migrants, both Muslims and Christians, from the neighbouring Moluccas. Certain “new strands of Christianity and Islam”, i.e., fundamentalist Christians, and Wahabite, or Salafistic, Muslims, had arrived in West Papua, as from 2000. In parts of the Bird’s Head Region of New Guinea, this has intensified already-existing communal fears caused by transmigration, implemented in West Papua since 1978, and supplemented by ever-growing numbers of Indonesians, who come on their own initiative (*transmigrasi swakarsa*).

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<sup>35</sup> For the “Demographic Situation in Papua” and the impact of the rapidly-increasing number of settlers (especially in the cities) against the very low growth of the indigenous population, as well as the economic dominance of settlers, see Theo van den Broek, “Social Aspects in Papua”, pp. 134-147. Also, Franco Zocca, *The Plight of Papuans in Irian Jaya (1963-1998)*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>36</sup> Theo van den Broek mentions one such estimate of 45 percent for the year 2004 (“Social Aspects in Papua”, p. 138). Such a figure seems possible to me, and has often been mentioned to me by Papuan tribal and church leaders.

<sup>37</sup> *Communal Tensions in Papua*, ICG Report, June 16, 2008.

## **AUTONOMY AND RELIGIOUS POLITICS**

The move, since 1999, towards regional autonomy in Indonesia, in general, and special autonomy in Aceh and West Papua,<sup>38</sup> in particular, has strengthened the tendency of religiously-biased, or sectarian, politics in Indonesia. A number of regencies in altogether 15 provinces of Indonesia have implemented some form of Sharia legislation, ranging from prohibitions on “immorality”, alcohol, and pork, “decent” clothing, public flogging of thieves and fornicators (only in Aceh), to Islamic banks, insurances, and a prohibition on interest and betting. Similar tendencies have arisen in Hindu Bali and in some of the Christian enclaves. In West Papua, the regency of Supiori-Biak-Numfor was the first to implement a form of Christian legislation in 2005. Next on the agenda was Manokwari.

### **GRAND MOSQUE OR “GOSPEL CITY”?**

In 2005, rumours were spread by SMS, and other means, that a grand mosque was to be built on Mansinam (or in front of the Manokwari airport). Some local leaders, both Christian and Muslim, eagerly took this up, and the rumour turned into a political issue, causing an outcry among Christians. As a reaction, in 2006, Christian leaders developed a regional bill for legislation for turning Manokwari into a “gospel city” (*Perda Kota Injil*). Muslims were to be prohibited to dress in a religious manner in public, or use Arabic in public. The building of new mosques was to be restricted. The call for prayers (*azan*) was not to be amplified. Public buildings and civil servants’ uniforms were to have Christian symbols. There were to be only Christian public holidays, and even public prayers were to be of a Christian kind. The first draft of this legislation was to be presented to the regional parliament on March 7, 2007, but it was denounced by both Christian and Muslim leaders. Nevertheless, the issue (in form and substance related to the much-criticised Sharia legislation elsewhere) had gained national significance.

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<sup>38</sup> The National Law on Special Autonomy for Papua Province (West Papua) was passed by the National Parliament in Jakarta on October 22, 2001 (UU Otonomi Khusus 21/2001).

In May, 2008, a second draft, called “Regulation designed to protect Christian values and traditions”, was to be tabled in the regional parliament (DPR-D) of Manokwari. Jakarta, however, did not allow this bill to be passed (quite contrary to the implementation of Sharia elsewhere, as stated above). Nevertheless, even today, at a number of locations in Manokwari, posters announce boldly that Manokwari is a “gospel city”.

### **THE MOTIVES OF THE MASS PILGRIMAGE**

Considering these social tensions, and the real danger of sectarian conflict, there need to be strong motives for thousands of Christians from all over West Papua and beyond to undertake such a pilgrimage. What makes them flock on this tiny island? Why has the event on February 5 become so popular?

I would like to suggest the following two motives: firstly, there is the fascination of the event character of Mansinam celebrations. Godly people, of whom there are many in West Papua, enjoy an occasional evangelical mass rally. The phenomenon of tens of thousands of pious people, who regularly meet in small devotional circles (the “Quiet in the Land”), occasionally flocking to evangelical rallies and mission festivals, is well recorded in the history of the awakenings and revivals of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries in Germany, Great Britain, and North America. Even today, the German Kirchentag, and the Communaute of Taizé in France, are attracting tens of thousands of Christians. The Mansinam pilgrimage seems to fulfil the same kind of religious need.

But there seems to be also another, rather less evangelical, side to the mass pilgrimage. In the midst of a social, cultural, and political crisis in West Papua, the Mansinam event is affirming and strengthening a Melanesian Christian identity. The fear and despair, felt deeply by indigenous Papuans, is caused by the above-mentioned massive migration of Indonesians from other parts of the country to West Papua, the subsequent loss of land, and of economic and political power, cultural estrangement, large-scale exploitation of the natural resources by outsiders, and the destruction of the environment, the violation of human rights, impunity for the violators of these rights, heavy militarisation, and security forces seemingly biased

against Papua, the general failure of a pro-Papuan implementation of the Special Autonomy law, etc. In the eyes of many Papuans, Melanesia is a utopia: a place where people with dark skin and frizzy hair are being respected; where there is no oppression and violence; and this Melanesia, to which West Papua naturally belongs, is associated with Christianity (though a considerable minority, even inside West Papua, is not Christian). Indonesia, on the other hand, is associated with Islam (although a considerable minority, even inside West Papua, is not Muslim). “Mansinam”, therefore, has become a symbol of the Melanesian Christian hope for West Papua, contrasted against Indonesian Islam, causing despair.

It thus seems that the motives behind the Mansinam pilgrimage are both devotional and ideological. Whereas evangelical rallies can be important experiences, strengthening the faith and communion, and a Melanesian Christian identity can be a very positive step towards the contextualisation of Christianity in West Papua, its polarisation against Islam and the settlers certainly is not a good road for building peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Strengthening one’s own identity, by contrasting it over and against people of another culture, race, and religion can hardly be called “Christian”, in terms of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **A DREAM OF PEACE**

In January, 2008, I had the privilege of accompanying Bishop Zephania Kameeta of Namibia on his first visit to West Papua.<sup>39</sup> It was Kameeta’s special wish to reserve some time for Mansinam.

Since there were no other visitors, Mansinam was a quiet place. We were received by the pastor and a few members of the small church called *Lachai Roi*, built right next to the foundations of the first church consecrated by Geissler in 1867.<sup>40</sup> The name of the church refers to Gen 16:14, meaning “well of the one who sees me and who lives”,<sup>41</sup> and was chosen because of

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *West Papua Rundbrief* No. 44 (May 2008), p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Geissler named his church “Church of Hope”.

<sup>41</sup> This option for translating “Beer Lahai Roi”, offered by the NIV, comes quite close to the Lutheran version (“Brunnen des Lebendigen, der mich sieht”), which was most probably used by Geissler.

the holy-water well adjacent to it, which was dug by the first missionaries. After having refreshed ourselves with this sacred water, our small group entered the church. The bishop prayed for justice and peace for all of the people of West Papua. In the solemn atmosphere, it was not hard to believe that that was possible.

Weeks later, however, during the February 5 celebrations, the isle was again crowded, demonstrating the power of Papuan Christianity, so much feared by the settlers. And, alas, there is also evidence that politicians and faith-activists misused the momentum of the mass event for their ideological battles.

It would, therefore, be in line with the evangelical mission of Geissler and Ottow that the dynamics of the Mansinam event be utilised for peacemaking. Considering the significance of Manokwari for both Christians and Muslims, the churches could take the initiative to turn the former mission station of Mansinam into a centre of interreligious and intercultural learning, an oasis of reconciliation for the children of Abraham in West Papua.

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