

The Relationship Between a University and its Sponsoring Religious Community: The Vision of DWU as Challenged by the Reality of Higher Education in Papua New Guinea*

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Abstract

Divine Word University's (DWU) vision is challenged by the current reality of higher education in Papua New Guinea and the relationship between the university and its sponsoring religious community. The higher education environment is very diverse, unsustainable and subject to unpredictable decisions of the government. Government policy and legislation of higher education have grown without any proper strategic planning or coordination with the providers. Another challenge, common to the leadership of most Catholic colleges and universities around the world, is the relationship between the university and its sponsoring congregation. The key to strengthening the relationship between the sponsoring religious congregation and the university is the shared development and ownership of the university's vision and purpose in relation to the church, the mission of the congregation and the people of Papua New Guinea. The leadership of DWU and the leadership provided to DWU by its vision, are challenged in this environment to make a positive significant difference in the quality of higher education in Papua New Guinea.

The main theme of this paper is Divine Word University: Vision, challenged by the reality of higher education in Papua New Guinea and the relationship between the university and its sponsoring religious community. This paper is organized through a discussion on the following sub-themes:

- Higher Education in Papua New Guinea
- The relationship between the university and its sponsoring religious community
- How DWU can meet these challenges.

Higher education in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea (PNG) comprises the eastern half of the world's second largest island with 1400 neighboring islands. There are more than 800 languages. Approximately 45 percent of the population is literate. The 1990 National Census indicates that 42 percent of the population is younger than 15

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years of age. In the PNG 10 percent of children still do not receive any formal education. About 91 percent of Papua New Guineans live in rural conditions and meet most of their basic needs through subsistence agriculture.¹

The officially recognized higher education (HE) sector in Papua New Guinea comprises 34 institutions of higher learning.² In addition, a number of institutions offer franchised or validated programs under license from overseas universities and overseas universities and colleges offer distance education programs. This is a large number of universities and colleges for a country with a population of 5.2 million growing at about 2.3 percent per annum. These institutions of higher education (IHE) differ in the level and duration of their programs, the approach to education and the method by which their programs are accredited.³

Government policy and legislation for higher education have evolved without realistic strategic planning and without coordination with the providers of higher education. The National Higher Education Plan II 2000-2004 (NHEP) aimed to correct this shortfall by stabilizing and developing higher education in PNG. The NHEP intended to improve institutional management, quality assurance and accreditation and develop distance and flexible learning.⁴

However, government funding for HE sank with the falling value of the kina and the declining national economy. Lack of funding meant that little was implemented as projected by the NHEP. The national government and international donors have assigned higher education relatively low priority and this approach has influenced many of PNG's policymakers who do not see that, 'while the benefits of higher education continue to rise, the costs of being left behind are also growing. Higher education is no longer a luxury: it is essential to national social and economic development'⁵. On the other hand, the market demand for access to higher education still continues to increase in developing countries, with the public and private sectors seeking to meet this demand through the establishment of new higher education institutions. A fast and confused expansion of institutions of higher learning is the result in almost all developing countries, with the public sector generally under-funded and the private sector having problems with establishing quality programs that address anything other than short-term, market driven needs. In this New Millennium most developing countries are left with a difficult task - expanding their higher

¹ Report of the Feasibility Study on Distance and Flexible Learning in Papua New Guinea, 2001, Commission for Higher Education, Port Moresby, p. 5.

² 'Higher Education' means all types of education of post-Grade 10 level, but does not include National High Schools or similar institutions or religious institutions. Higher Education Act 1983, Printed by Government Printer, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, p. 4.

³ Lim, David 1996, Higher Education Project, Awards, accreditation and advanced standing in Papua New Guinea Higher Education, Commission for Higher Education, Port Moresby, p. 7.

⁴ The National Higher Education Policy and Implementation Strategy Volume I & II, 2000. Commission for Higher Education, National Research Institute Press, Port Moresby.

⁵ Higher Education in Developing Countries, Peril and Promise, 2000, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / the World Bank, Washington, D.C. Printed in the United States of America, p. 14.

education system and improving quality of education within tightening budgetary constraints.⁶

Higher Education in PNG is complex in relation to total enrollment; under funded in its operating structure; and uncertain of the future, as demand for access grows. Grade 11 and 12 enrollments grew by 73 %, from 6,566 in 1999 to 11,335, in 2003.⁷ However, government scholarship assistance dropped by 15%.

Most IHE operate in survival mode, faced with a growing maintenance deficit and disincentive towards self-funding activities⁸. Many IHE lack the margin of resources and the experience that will empower them to advance from the present reality. Many decisions concerning HE are made by political leaders with almost no reference to the NHEP. This lack of accountability, transparency and consistency makes it extremely difficult to maintain international (or nationally validated) academic standards, especially in the absence of sustainable government policies.

Many academic leaders try to manage their institutions in a professional manner. However, foreign academics do not have enough cultural experience and national academics find it extremely difficult to withstand the pressure of the wantok⁹ system. With these professional limitations, political influence makes good governance and leadership almost impossible. This, coupled with the fact that in many instances heads of IHE do not have a positive vision about the future to motivate staff to move the institutions forward or to assist it to overcome difficulties, does not give hope for the future of HE in PNG.

These are some of the major difficult issues facing HE in PNG. Against this background, Divine Word University (DWU) has taken a close look at how progress toward its vision can be accelerated—through strong and transparent leadership, better policies, more effective use of aid, better collaboration with the funding congregation and lay colleagues. DWU has a vision, philosophy, and policy to maintain academic values for itself within the challenging PNG HE environment; to transmit and maintain these values in partner institutions; and to set and promulgate standards of academic excellence and effectiveness.

Such a harsh environment creates many challenges for a developing Christian university like DWU. In spite of this, DWU's participation in such an environment has its mission and purpose. As His Holiness John Paul II wrote, 'The basic mission of a university is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good

⁶ Higher Education in Developing Countries, Peril and Promise, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, p. 36.

⁷ Report of the Feasibility Study on Distance and Flexible Learning in Papua New Guinea, pp. 2-5.

⁸ Education Sector Affordability Studies Service, 2003, Papua New Guinea and AusAID, Order no. 09187/07, Paper 2, Financing of Tertiary Education, Commission for Higher Education, Port Moresby, p. 1.

⁹ 'The wantok system' is the system of particularistic values based on friendships, kinship and shared culture which pervades the modern sector in Papua New Guinea.

of society. Catholic university participates in this mission with its own specific characteristics and purposes'.¹⁰ Thus DWU's presence in PNG's higher education sector creates another opportunity for the university. This Christian university is obligated and committed to assist the HE sector in PNG to make an environmental diagnosis to accurately assess the current situation of the HE sector in PNG. This is an important mission that DWU has accepted. This mission is crucial to the success of the whole HE sector in PNG.

The HE sector in PNG has developed scotoma¹¹ that prevents it from seeing the truth about itself, its performance and its strengths and weaknesses. DWU's mission is to assist the HE sector in analyzing the factors that pertain to HE's present and future state of affairs, with the goal of seeing the present the way it is. Having a clear understanding of where one is, is an important first step for a positive change and future planning.

It is impossible to be aware of all things, but it is possible to increase our perceptual awareness of important factors. The more we do so, the more we are able to build our desirable future. At present the PNG HE sector not only blinds itself to some information, but it is also selective in the information it collects. Many times it is not looking for truth, but for information to verify its truth. Thus part of DWU's mission is to assist the HE system to come close to the truth about itself. In this quest for clarity, the system has to risk being 'stung' and yet remain open and non-defensive. I personally think that this is the first step the HE sector in PNG has to take to remove scotoma from all of its structures so it will know its strengths and weaknesses and be able to plan and create a successful future.

DWU must be open for dialogue with the HE sector and offer services which will assist the HE to develop a methanoea¹² process, leading it to improving the quality of higher education in PNG. It is time for the power of DWU's vision, through quality of education, to form a new generation of young, optimistic, well educated and ethical leaders to take responsibility of PNG's affairs. This new generation needs to be men and women inspired by vision and role models. This new generation needs to see its future at the service of PNG. HE must create an environment for this new generation to develop a positive vision of the future, as this is the most dynamic motivator for positive change we have and it should be passed on to the future generations.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II. 1990. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Vatican. art.30.

¹¹ Scotoma is a Greek word for blindness. A sensory locking out of information which may prevent us from seeing the truth.

¹² Methanoea is a Greek word for a total transformation; for turning from and turning towards. Such a process of positive change has to penetrate everything in a person's life. Methanoea is an ongoing process of development focused on a very clear vision.

The relationship between university and its sponsoring religious community

Information about the SVD

Arnold Janssen founded the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) on September 8, 1875. Arnold Janssen also found two other congregations: The Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit SSpS and the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration - SSpSAP. The SVD missionaries are present in 61 different countries around the world and on every continent. They are engaged in various apostolates. These include: Biblical Pastoral Apostolate, Education, Parish Ministries, Publishing, mass media, and other special apostolates. The SVD missionaries touched the shores of the Island of New Guinea in 1896 on Tumuleo Island near Aitape. This became the central mission station. They later moved the SVD headquarters to what is now as Alexishafen, Madang.

The relationship with the founding congregation

Determining DWU's relationship to its founding congregation, the SVD missionaries, is another challenge facing the university. DWU is not unique in this situation as this issue has been and continues to be a challenge for the leadership of most Catholic colleges and universities around the world.

Last year at its first provincial assembly in Madang, the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), asked what it means for the SVD community to be university-related. This is a valid question, as the number of SVDs available for ministry in higher education in PNG declines. In the past the Divine Word Missionaries had the members, means and motivation to provide human resources and support to DWU and other institutions of higher learning in PNG without the collaboration of lay colleagues, but these times are gone.

Divine Word Missionaries have always seen their involvement in HE as mission work and an extension of the mission and purpose of the church in PNG. The current challenges of HE in PNG have turned the SVD leadership's attention to the possible need for stronger sponsorship or support of DWU. The increase in lay colleagues as compared to SVD members has also caused the SVD leadership to become concerned that the SVD ministry may have become, to some extent, lost to civil society and therefore the university no longer promotes the gospel message or reflects a commitment to the SVD heritage. There is therefore a need to examine and compare the authenticity of the SVD commitment and method to its tradition in light of the decrease in the number of SVD personnel involved in leadership and management of DWU.

Such commitment to sponsorship calls attention to the importance of having a system or policy in place which declares the primary role of the sponsoring religious congregation in the university's activities and environment. By sponsorship I understand that the sponsoring religious congregation has some mechanism for assessing how the university reflects the mission of the Catholic

Church and the specific relationship to the founding religious community. The key to strengthening the relationship between the sponsoring religious community and the university is the shared development and ownership of the university's vision and purpose in relationship to the church, the mission society, and the people of PNG, whom the university's vision serves. Guardianship of the DWU's vision is in the hands of the university council.

Collaboration with laity in pursuit of the vision

Sponsorship by the SVD creates a variety of legal, financial, and interdependent relationships between the University Council, the SVD Provincial Council and the Congregation as a founding group. In some cases this might result in a watering down of the institution's vision. However, with the collaboration of many dedicated men and women, the social structures established out of the SVD tradition have preserved and extended the charisma of Arnold Janssen, founder of the Divine Word Missionaries. DWU's vision makes it possible to incarnate his values, insights, and mission into structures that preserve these values through the passage of time. On the other hand, due to globalization and industrialization and a declining number of SVD personnel, implementation of this mission has become more difficult. Currently it is one of the many challenges that the university and founding congregation are facing. The challenge is to translate SVD charisma into organizational structures and policies which will shape the direction and decisions of a corporate ministry in accordance with SVD mission spirit.

There is a challenge for DWU to make the collaboration in the mission of higher education between laity and religious congregation fully effective in order to preserve and make viable the Christian spirit of the university as reflected in the heritage of its sponsoring group. For this to happen, it is necessary that lay people working with a religious congregation absorb its history and imbibe its spirit. This is a challenge not only for the University leadership but also for the sponsoring religious congregation, as it has to be open and allow the laity to enter its structures, learn its history and imbibe its spirit.

The sponsoring congregation has to learn and develop a new model of collaboration with laity wherein university leadership will be transferred into the hands of laity. The religious congregation has to articulate a partnership between religious personnel and the laity and adjust their governance structures to reflect this partnership. The discussion of the benefits and liabilities of laicization continues today with the question of appropriateness and productivity of laicization.

Today, the activities of any civil corporation formed to carry out effectively whatever work the congregation undertakes continues to be under the guidance of the governing body of the religious community without participation of laity. This has to change. During discussions on the government of the university, three parties have to be present in the boardroom: the leadership of the sponsoring congregation, the university's leadership and the civil

corporation. There are many challenges facing an independent Christian university in PNG and the declining resources from the religious sponsoring congregation will test these partnerships more in the future.

In the complex responsibility for shared leadership of the institution and in exploring the meaning of sponsorship, both congregation and lay colleagues need to:

- clarify issues such as institutional purpose
- set out mutual expectations
- agree upon the nature of services and support that each will provide the other, and
- establish methods of evaluating progress toward agreed-upon goals.

The Vatican II Council articulates the new partnership between clergy/religious and the laity and encourages the church-sponsored institutions to adjust their governance structures to reflect this partnership. The approach defined by the Vatican II Council makes possible a genuine collaboration in the service of the mission in higher education. Since the Vatican II Council, different congregations which have established and administered many institutions of higher learning, have made significant progress in sharing their vision with lay people.¹³

How DWU can meet these challenges

Background information on DWU

Divine Word University (DWU) is a national, Christian University. It is one of the newest tertiary institutions in Papua New Guinea. Formerly Divine Word Institute, established by an Act of Parliament in 1980, then established as a University in 1996. It is ecumenical, coeducational and privately run.

Our vision is to be a Christian University open to all, serving society through teaching and research in a Christian environment. DWU offers its educational services to those interested in improving themselves intellectually and spiritually so they can become responsible citizens and positively participate in the development of society.

The University is open to everyone regardless of race, creed, colour or gender who share its vision to serve society through teaching and research in a Christian environment. Students come from all 20 provinces of Papua New Guinea and from abroad. DWU has a special interest to advance opportunities for poorer individuals, women and to help build the economic and social capacity of the South Pacific Region.

DWU has been and continues to be a catalyst for improvement of higher education in the country. The University is committed to working with the

¹³ Keiss, Isabelle 1991, *The Relationship between an Institutions' Trustees and its Sponsoring Religious Community*, Current Issues in Catholic Education, Washington, USA.

government towards the positive development of PNG. As stated in the mission statement, DWU is committed to continuous dialogue and partnership with all levels of community, business, government and cultures in the life and work of the University; a mission to which DWU is true.

The main objective of Divine Word University is to become a vibrant Christian intellectual community and to continue developing into a first rate university. The University shares with all institutions of higher education a triple mission:

- the acquisition of knowledge, which is the mission of research
- the transmission of knowledge, which is the mission of teaching
- and the application of knowledge, which is the mission of public service.

Divine Word University's search for excellence is guided by its motto 'Sic currite ut comprehendatis' – 'Run to Win', not in a ruthless competitive way, but in an honest effort to achieve one's full potential. DWU's philosophy integrates total human development and it is expressed in self-reliance and community service. With this belief, DWU aims to turn out students equipped with skills required for national development as well as high-level professionals who will provide Christian leadership for the nation.

Leadership for clients

Often we say our students are the future however we must remember that they are also the present. The kind of education offered at Catholic or Christian university must not be based only on economic considerations but there must be something more. The challenge for a university is to incorporate the vision into the curriculum to include values and beliefs. The kind of education offered to our students should address the fundamental forces shaping our world and prepare them to respond appropriately to these forces, which in many respects have caused an imbalance between developed and developing countries.

All students in our universities should be equipped with knowledge that will make them global citizens. They have grounding in their own cultures, but they must learn about other cultures and respect them. The leadership of a university has to motivate students to understand that they are global citizens. The education they receive should equip them with knowledge to be able to understand and develop global strategies to address the imbalance in opportunities in education, the sharing of resources; to reduce the suffering of the world's poorest people and prepare them to receive the benefits of globalization. 'As many have stated in the context of the current world situation, the best defense against terrorism is an educated people. Education, which promises to each individual the opportunity to express their individual talents fully, is fundamental to building a peaceful world'.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ziguras, C. H. 2003, Global Leaders Forum on International Education, International Education and Development: Global Peace, Access, Equity and Sustainable Development, Paper compiled for IDP Education, Australia.

Leadership and collaboration

To meet many new challenges in this new millennium and in PNG higher education, DWU has to focus on having strong leadership within the university itself and on providing leadership for other institutions of higher learning in PNG and the South Pacific.

Such leadership will come from a responsible functioning council with committed council members who bring to the boardroom a wide range of experiences as well as financial support. The university council is vital to the successful implementation of DWU's vision today and tomorrow. The SVD's active and effective presence is also significant. It will focus on coaching those who 'hold in trust' the university so they are committed to its specific and unique SVD mission - to provide a holistic educational experience aimed at touching hearts and souls and minds of the students. Council members must bring their varied talents and link them with the SVD heritage and resources to support the university's current and future ability to carry out its vision.

It does not require a prophet's skills to foresee that the future of church sponsored universities hinges both on the effectiveness of the collaboration between sponsoring congregation and laity, grounded on a joint commitment to the university's vision and on a phasing out of significant dependence on the sponsoring religious community

The changing context of Catholic higher education taking place throughout the world offers challenges and opportunities for continued growth. As my experience in PNG has shown, strengthening the university's staff by incorporating a majority of lay members from different Christian churches has not jeopardized the continuing influence of the sponsoring community. Rather, the sponsoring congregation faces the future with optimism, finding council members alert to review the university's performance in light of its declared vision and mission statement, eager to maintain public identification of the founding religious group with the university, and anxious to attract members of that group and other congregations to the ministry of higher education wherever possible.

The leadership of DWU, informed by its vision, will make a positive significant difference to the quality of higher education in PNG. It will strengthen and inspire the diverse and fragmented institutions, and give clear direction to the Government, as it confronts pressures to make unsustainable and unpredictable decisions moved by political pragmatism, whim and wantokism. The leadership of DWU will ensure that the next generation is equipped with the vision, moral grounding and skills it needs to take responsibility for PNG and South Pacific affairs. This will be accomplished through and between the founding congregation and laity.

President's leadership role

DWU or other universities should not try to mimic models of other universities; the result of such action would be a transplanted institution that is unable to effectively respond to its unique environment. Rather the university should study its strengths, learn from them and proactively address the needs of its clients and the challenges of its environment.¹⁵ I believe that this should be the approach of all universities, both in developed and underdeveloped countries.

I believe that the task of the DWU President is to provide the leadership that will:

- improve the quality of existing academic programs and maintain international academic standards at DWU
- develop and promote academic environment wherein the faculties can enjoy freedom in research and lecturing
- set academic, management and ethical standards
- make the university an international community
- provide needed resources
- demonstrate accountability and transparency and improve the efficiency with which the resources are used
- focus on strengthening the internal management structures
- extend and inspire academic standards across PNG, and inspire sustainable government policies
- invent the future with full collaboration of the sponsoring congregation and lay people
- maintain the national character of DWU
- encourage the university community to see the connection between quality and stability and
- strengthen the belief of the academic and administrative staff in the university vision, mission and goals in spite of the difficult HE environment or lack of concrete evidence. In doing so, the university vision becomes more ambitious and more visionary because it is not restricted to our present knowledge base. This is one of the important characteristics which distinguishes a high performance university from its counterparts.

The President has to understand and believe in the vision of the university. Once a vision is clear, the process or 'how to' is invented along the way.

While working at DWU on the strategy for development of the university, people ask about the direction for DWU. I like to quote the following saying, 'He who does not know to which port he is sailing has no favorable wind'.

¹⁵ Higher education in developing countries. Peril and Promise. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. p.94.

The president of a higher education institution must make it his/her business to assure the students, the university council, the funding congregation and the public that the institution is steering to a port. The institution knows its direction.

All Vice Chancellors, Rectors or Presidents of universities are global leaders in the higher education sector, thus they must help to rebalance our world to give everyone the chance for a quality higher education and the right to intellectual and spiritual development. They are in a position to make it happen. Delay is the mark of irresponsible leadership. This is a time for courage and action, for a new vision of the future. HE leaders have the most important resource – knowledge and the ability to make a difference by changing the world for the better. They have to know how to make a difference. They have to have the courage to make a difference. They have to act to make a difference and they have to have a positive vision of the future, a vision that will make a significant difference and take the university into the future, not prepare for yesterday.

Vision without leadership invites confusion and leads to tragedy.

Leadership without vision just passes the time.

Vision with the right leadership invents quality of education.

Thus the role of a President, Rector or Vice Chancellor of any university is and will be to use the power of vision to create a future, which is different from the past or present. Effective leaders accurately observe the ways things are in the current reality and continually focus on the way things will be in the future; a significant vision always precedes significant success.

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