

KomKui – A Christian Community Makes a Covenant with God

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Abstract

In the highlands of Papua New Guinea it is unusual for a clan to be able to boast that they have not had a tribal fight for sixty five years. Yet the KomKui tribe in Tilling village have done this. In the seventies the wise men and women recognised the futility of war and went to the New Testament to find, in the words of Jesus, an alternative way of life. In December 1980 they made peace with former enemies, received baptism into the Catholic Church and made a Covenant with God – to put God first, forswear fighting and payback and use the words of Jesus as their guide in all their dealings. Today their community is governed by the church council of the seven churches in the clan, who work together to build a strong moral and educated body of men and women. This brief study tells the story of how this has been accomplished.

Introduction

In the years between 1900 and 1930 there were a number of major tribal fights in the lands around the present township of Mount Hagen. The situation at that time was one of complete anarchy. The tribal lands were scattered and few of the clans had settled borders.

As well as the major tribal fights, skirmishing was a regular ritual practice, during which warriors were, from time to time, injured and occasionally killed when the arrows were thick and fast. However mostly the fighting was a ceremonial display, in which both sides came dressed in their fighting *bilas* [finery, decoration], to yell insults and exchange insulting gestures. They then threw spears and shot arrows at their enemies. Having shown their contempt of their opponents and demonstrated their courage, they could then return to their own settlements to boast about their prowess in the dangerous game of war.

Fighting usually grew out of past events to avenge past killings, land disputes, women raped, property destroyed or pigs stolen. It was a world of attack and counter attack. Clans and whole tribes were constantly on the move, seeking for a place of safety and a place where they could settle permanently. People constantly moved about, fearful that they would be attacked by their enemies. Survival was fundamental and it was best secured by alliances, for help in fighting, food, marriage arrangements and the Mokka pig exchange. Forming alliances became the essential quality of a leader.

Alliances were made at the personal level between leaders who could claim on obligations from past dealings, in things such as payment of goods, assistance in resisting common enemies, help in a tribal fight, marriage arrangements, gifts of pigs or help when pigs had been stolen. All agreements were reciprocal, and later, the recipient would be obliged to return gifts of equal or greater amount.

The Komonka and the Namboga were two clans of the Mokei tribe, who, for the past forty years, had both been claiming the present site of the Mount Hagen township as their own land. At this time the Namboga were living at Hagen and the Komonka at Tilling across the Kum river. Several fights had occurred in the recent past where warriors on both sides had been killed and so the situation was always tense.

Arrival of the white men and the government

When Jim Taylor and the Leahy brothers came to the Western Highlands in 1933, the tribesmen were completely bemused. They had never thought it possible that there were any other people in the world except themselves, their friends, their enemies and their trading partners, so they were wondering who these strange beings could be. At first many thought that they might be spirits of people who died and had now come back again. They wanted to know: 'Did they eat, would they eat greens and *kaukau* [sweet potato], go to the toilet, have sexual organs the same as our men, and did they sleep with women?' In due course all these questions were answered and the strangers were accepted.

The colonial government administration arrived with a *kiap* (patrol officer), and several local policemen and local carrier boys. They mobilised the tribesmen to build an airstrip and they built houses for the *kiap* and the police. Later more buildings were added for *didimen* (agricultural officers) and a hospital. They were making contact with the local people to establish the colonial government functions, and attempting to maintain a somewhat nervous truce between the Namboga and the Komonka.

A significant story from that time is the story of the gun. One of the tribesmen had a pig to be killed and the white man came along and shot it dead with his gun. There was a loud noise and the pig fell dead. The people, who were not watching, thought that it was some bamboo which was on fire and had suddenly exploded, but the ones who had seen it happen saw the smoke and saw that the pig lying dead. It was so far beyond the experience of the tribesmen that the gun was seen as having some kind of fearsome magical powers, so that it was best not to think or talk about it.

Government officers go off to join ANGAU

In 1942 when the Australian administration was just recently established in Mount Hagen, the war against the Japanese was at its most threatening stage. All the white kiaps and most of the native police were called away for various jobs with ANGAU or with the coast watchers. All businessmen and

government officers were evacuated. Fr Willie Ross was an American citizen and a law unto himself, so he stayed.

Policeman from Morobe joins the Namboga

When the Australian Administration went off to the war, they left a skeleton staff behind, consisting of one 'reliable' policeman from Morobe, some police boys and carriers to handle the administrative functions and look after the compound. The reliable policeman also held keys to the armoury. The administration centre was on the Namboga land and it was not long before the Namboga supplied the policeman with a wife, and adopted him into the tribe. In due course, it came time for next skirmish, and now the Namboga had a man with a rifle to assist them in their cause. The Komonka were not aware of this.

Fr Willie Ross, (who was in regular contact with all the tribes in the vicinity and knew that the Morobe policeman had married into the Namboga), personally went to the Komonka tribe and warned them specifically not to be involved in any fight as he was concerned that the coastal policeman would be armed with a gun. He told them that if the Namboga warriors came out to fight against them, they must remain on their own side of the Kum River because this was the accepted boundary between the two tribes. The Namboga would not cross the river, because the land on the other side of the river was not in dispute and crossing the river would be an infringement of the accepted boundary.

The Kum river massacre

The Komonka came down the hill to fight and, ignoring Willi Ross's advice, crossed the river. None of the Komonka recognised the policeman, disguised as he was in the traditional fighting *bilas* and face paint of the Namboga. The rifleman allowed them to cross the river and move up the hill onto open ground, where there were no trees and no gullies and no places to hide. And the killing began. Ten people received gunshot wounds, seven of whom died.

It was so catastrophic that Namboga and Komonka were equally shocked by what had happened. They had never experienced so many deaths before. The Namboga did not follow up on their victory. Their culture would have forbidden it because it was not the way of a tribal fight to exterminate the enemy, but rather to humiliate him, drive him off the field and destroy his crops and burn his houses. The effect of the massacre on the Komonka was one of trauma and devastation. In a tribal fight, the loss of one warrior was serious and the loss of more than one, a calamity.

While the Komonka tribe was physically and emotionally broken, some of their neighbours tried to take advantage of their situation and came to attack them. By various means they survived and fled into the mountains. Fortunately the neighbouring tribes never really set out to completely annihilate them, so that when invaders moved back to their own land again the Komonka could always return from the hills and continue to mend their broken clan in Tilling.

Eventually it became their normal practice to avoid fighting and to flee when attacked, and then return when the threat was over. As confidence returned they were able to make Tilling their permanent place of residence.

Plans for vengeance

Gradually, over the years, they became more settled, but the story of the massacre was told and retold to keep alive the hatred for the Namboga and the firm belief that eventually they would demand repayment. They began a policy of marrying off their young men in order to produce more fighting men to replace the lost warriors and always, if the opportunity presented itself, there were confrontations. But secretly they all knew that this was foolish talk because they did not have enough fighting men or allies. The Mokei Kuipi, settled in Mambila adjoining Tilling area, among the Mokei Komonka. There they prospered, grew in numbers and the union was called KomKui.

By now many changes were taking place. Kiaps and churches were calling for an end to tribal fighting. Independence was coming and they knew that they must prepare themselves. More important than any of these, they saw that it was the educated foreigners from the coast who held the government jobs open to native people. The highlanders resisted independence, because they lacked education, and feared that they would be disadvantaged by better educated coastal men in government. Also they began to realise that tribal fighting disrupted the whole social fabric of schools and business opportunities, so progress required that they must develop a more pacifist outlook or they would be left behind.

A change of heart

Andrew Dokta was a small boy when the massacre took place in 1942 and for years he had been indoctrinated in the language of hatred. As a child he had been raised in the belief that revenge was required of the honourable man and failure to take revenge was the mark of the coward. All through the years the theme of hatred for the Namboga had been kept strong among the Komonka. Now, as a mature man, he realised that hatred produced disastrous side effects. Revenge had turned inwards and was corroding the souls of the youth, producing violent and antisocial behaviours which were vandalising and weakening their own community. On a more mundane level the only school available to the children of the KomKui was in Hagen township, the land of the enemy Namboga. It was impossible for the children to hear the hatred repeated at home and not be influenced by it, when they went to school among people whom they believed to be their traditional enemies.

We had to go to school among children from other tribes and if we continued our hatred of them openly, we would be the sufferers, because we were fewer and geographically more distant than they were (Pius Tikili).

A new outlook became necessary. Andrew, a far seeing man, was able to put aside his prejudices and take a more pragmatic view. Now, as an adult he began to place a greater value on the sacredness of all life, not only as a body to protect the clan but as something sacred in itself.

Reading the Bible

At this time the Pentecostal Churches around Hagen were practicing Bible reading. In talking with church leaders, Andrew learned that the teachings of Jesus were an antidote to the way of hatred and revenge. Tilling belonged to the Catholic Church, but Catholic pastoral activity was centred on the sacraments and conversion rather than Bible reading, so he could not go to them to meet his needs. Also he felt that it would be inappropriate to bring in the Pentecostals and disrupt a Catholic area and so he decided to begin Bible reading with the community.

Fr John Ryan was just beginning his mission work at this time and was appointed to Tilling. He wrote:

The main person I saw behind the revival was Andrew Dokta. Another young man who impressed me at that time was Gabriel Timbi, who was instrumental in helping to build the new church. All the time I was there I had no [church] building. Everything was out in the open. Pius Pil was another man who was active. There were many more, but Andrew was my '*tanim tok*' [interpreter] and the leader of the Catholic community. There was a wonderful revival starting at that time in that area and thank God I did not stop it. My fear had always been that new in the country, I would stop good people through my own ignorance, but I followed the golden rule of all [sports] referees, 'Never blow unless you're sure'. So I just let the revival go. I encouraged them to read the scriptures and made sure women as well as men read the readings at mass.

Churches selected their readings according to their preferences. Some gave preference to revelation and some to the more esoteric qualities such as the gifts of the Spirit and speaking in tongues. The KomKui also had its own set intentions, for they had many issues to be settled. Mostly they needed to gain peace both internally and externally, remove the hatred that was eroding the tribe and obtain directions on how they should live their own lives and teach their children. For this they needed the words of Jesus, and so the Gospels became their field of interest. This spilled over into the liturgical celebrations in Tilling.

Apart from many other gifts, many new local hymns became part of the liturgy, spontaneous prayers for prayers of the faithful and a real love of the scripture. This enthusiasm probably started around the Tilling area and soon spread all over the diocese, as far as Catholics were concerned, and it was heavily influenced by the Pentecostal Churches, especially at the beginning (Fr John Ryan, February 2008).

The Covenant

The fruition of their studies came in 1980, when the KomKui made three formative decisions. They were reconciled with the Namboga who had been their enemies for as long as anyone could remember. They settled their conversion with a ceremony in which more than one hundred people received Baptism. And finally, like the Jews in the desert when they had escaped from the Pharaoh, they made a Covenant with God.

In its briefest form the Covenant required the KomKui to place God first; to make all decisions of the tribe in conformity with teachings of Jesus; and most significantly in their cultural situation, they made a vow that they would never go to war or retaliate against those who harmed the KomKui, its people and its property. The day was 18th December 1980, which for all KomKui is remembered as the day they made a Covenant with God.

Pius Tikili – his story and influence

Pius Tikili brings the reader to the next step in the story of the KomKui. He writes:

I was born in 1957. My father was polygamous and had two wives. I was the last born son of the second wife. My father migrated out of the district and so I was left to be cared for by my mother. As the second wife, and not a very assertive one, my mother was neglected in any distribution of my father's goods, because there was a vicious family feud going on. And so I had to go to my other mother who was my grandmother. We were poor.

Our house was small but we had to share it with the pigs. The pigs slept on one side of the room and we slept on the other. We had no money, no plates, cups or saucepans, not even a lamp, and I did not have a blanket to keep me warm during the night. We had almost nothing in the house except ourselves and the pigs. We had an old bully beef tin from the government rations store. Sometimes we used it for boiling water and sometimes we used it for boiling our food but most of food was roasted in the fire (Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07).

Pius Tikili began school at Holy Trinity Primary School in 1966. He was a good student and quickly learned to keep his social class among the Komonka students. After Grade 6 he was selected to attend Divine Word High School in Madang. His relatives provided him with his school fee at £5/0/0, his plane fare at £6/0/0 and as he was about to get on the plane his mother came to him with £2/0/0 which she had saved for him.

At Divine Word, among his peers, he experienced feelings of unworthiness and rejection, not that other students spurned him, but that his own self image was almost non-existent. He compared his lack of essentials in clothing and

personal belongings with those of other students and found himself lacking. For weeks he sat under the stars at night and confronted God with the unfairness of his condition. Then in typical fashion he took his future into his own hands. His decision was to gain the respect and be looked upon as a leader by the other boys. He says:

That night I made a decision that I was going to become a person of importance. I made a decision that I would not be satisfied until I had become a rich man.

Starting business

The first step was to earn money to relieve his shameful poverty. One source of funds was bottle collecting, but he rejected this out of hand, because he saw it as scavenging and a job unfit for him even in his impoverished state. So, with some friends he planted a garden. As a garden it was a success but as a source of cash it failed because he could not market his goods. In desperation he overcame his shame and became a bottle collector. That first day he sold his bottles and collected \$1.72 and on the next weekend he made almost two dollars.

I looked at my money as I said to myself: In just two weekends I have made almost four dollars.

He had begun to fulfil the promise he had made to himself.

Pius says:

I discovered that money is a very good cure for shame. My self image was improved vastly. The first thing that I bought was a blanket and after that a suitcase. The blanket was a very good one and I paid three dollars for it. My proudest moment was when I bought my new big suitcase. I spent five dollars on it because it looked such superior quality. Then I bought the things that I had seen other students using – a pillow and a spare towel.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

The year finished and his thoughts turned to business. He invested all his money to buy two copra bags of *buai* (betel nut), to take back home to sell. He tells how he felt.

As soon as we landed, I came out with my suitcase and my two bags of *buai*. All the families were there to meet us. My mother and my uncles were there too. When the other boys picked up their luggage, I still had my suitcase and these two huge bags of *buai* sitting on the tarmac. We stood there and looked. My family didn't know what to do and neither did I. (Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

In those days *buai* was a status symbol of the foreigners (coastal people in government jobs). Highlanders had not begun to chew betel nut. So first

of all he had to study the Government workers, to find out prices and involve his relatives in the selling procedures.

We were amazed. We made enough to pay my school fees for the next three years. And there even was money left over. For my uncles who had helped me, I bought each of them a good blanket and a saucepan. And for my mother, all the things that she had never had when we were so poor.

In later years I made a great deal of money, but none brought me the satisfaction that I obtained from selling two bags of *buai* and handing out favours to my uncles and my mother who had helped me when I needed it most.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

A haus kapa

At the university, Pius saved all his national scholarship money and built a *haus kapa* [house with roofing iron]. This was an important step in his development which he probably did not recognise at the time.

It was 1975, the year of independence when I built my *haus kapa*. My people said to me, ‘You can’t build a house *kapa* in the village. We don’t build house *kapa*.’ I did not need this advice and went ahead. Looking back, I now know I was sending a message that was supposed to bury the ghost of the extreme poverty of my childhood.

Learning from the Japanese

The KomKui people were still intensely conscious of the years when they hid from their enemies and retreated whenever they were threatened. Now they wanted to gain the upper hand but not by going back to the tribal fight. They had the example of the Japanese, who had been defeated during the war, using guns and ships and aeroplanes, but who after the war had won the peace using business methods. It seemed to the KomKui businessmen that there was no reason that they could not do just what the Japanese had done. This was to be the new model. If they put their whole energy into educating their young people and directing them towards business, they could regain supremacy and forget the humiliations of the years when they were shamed and humiliated.

Beginning the KomKui business arm

Pius completed his university studies in the significant year of 1980, with a first degree in Economics and a second degree in Financial Management. He was at once offered a job with Coopers & Lybrand. He used his salary to buy real estate and remembering his roots, he joined with Barnabas Pareka, another Divine Word graduate, to initiate a business venture – the KomKui company. Their first venture was to purchase a large six-storey building in the heart of

Mount Hagen township and later on they would buy the nearby ACJ building as well.

At meetings with the KomKui village people, they explained the idea of running a KomKui business, and the need for funds to start it up. The people themselves were required to bring in what money they could afford. After that they had to obtain a loan from the ANZ bank. Collateral for the loan was provided by the properties owned by Pius Tikili, and other business people.

Pius said:

It was an extremely difficult thing to set up, because we were dealing with people who had no background of business. How do you explain to an illiterate tribesman the meaning of a company, shares, collateral, bank loans, dividends and the servicing of loans? I had to explain the idea of shares in the company and how the profits came to the *hauslain* [clan, family] in direct proportion to the amount of money that they had paid. What made it all the more difficult was the fact that they all had their own agenda, ideas and plans how the business should be run and how they could make the most profit from it individually. Eventually we divided the KumKui up into fourteen different *haus* lines. Each house line had a chairman who was responsible for the cash payments to the company and the handling of dividends. This gave us fourteen spokesmen and representatives of the company. It was at this time that they came up with all their various ideas. I had to scrub out many of their ideas to make them more realistic. It took a long time with discussion and talk. Each of the house lines put in the amount of money that they could afford or that they had available. Thus some of them put in as little as 3000 and some of them as much as 22,000 or 23,000. In my own house lines the villagers put in 2000 or 3000 and I put in a fair amount in the way of property. (Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Business failure

Business prospered, until in 1993, the Prime minister Sir Julius Chan floated the Papua New Guinea Kina and it fell to half of its former value. KomKui could not service its loans and the KomKui building and all the real estate were claimed by the bank.

I was in Wollongong (Australia) in the middle of a course to become a chartered accountant and had to continue my studies. I was burning the candle at both ends and sometimes I had as little as two hours of sleep at night. Then, for the first time in my life I failed an examination in the tax module. Up to that time, I had never failed in anything that I set myself to do. This had never happened to me before and I was psychologically devastated. I needed a break and for the break I came back to Hagen. I thought I would be able to get everything fixed up in six months and then I would go back to my studies. There were so many things that I had to consider that I did not know which way to turn. (Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Crisis time: decision time

We had to get our money from the bank and make arrangements to recover the KomKui business. I had to see the KomKui project through to fruition. Coopers and Lybrand were calling on me to return to the company. There were people who believed that the failure of the company was due to my own incompetence, and there were others who believed that I had stolen their money. My clan needed my presence to rescue their business. My family were crying for my presence and my private life and spiritual condition were in tatters. It was time for me to take stock of my life and what I wanted from it.

Ever since I had bought my first house in Boroko, I had been pushing myself to achieve wealth. My overwhelming desire to become rich was driving me to extremes. My ambition was driving me to a point where I was treating other people as objects to be used, and any who got in my road were pushed aside. The wealth was attractive but the expense side of the ledger was enormous. I was already married and I was neglecting my wife and my child. I was ambitious but I did not like the person that I was becoming. In the years when I had been so successful and my wealth flowed like water I did not have time to think and when something troubled me about my life it was easy to push it into the background. I realise now that I had to lose much of my money in order to come back to my authentic self. My decision was not an easy one and there were many things to consider. I felt that I had to rearrange my life. I had to become more God conscious. I retired from Coopers and Lybrand and I chose a new direction for my life. It included the village, the Covenant with God that had been sworn on 18th December 1980, and the KomKui business venture that had grown up with the assistance of myself and other men with business skills.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07).

Developing the covenant

The making of the Covenant was the most dramatic event in the history of the KomKui. Together they had gone through a deep spiritual experience, which brought about complete change in their attitudes towards God, each other and their neighbours. They had put aside for ever their hatreds and all thoughts of returning to the tribal fight. They had chosen a completely new approach to their former enemies, with other tribes and with God. And they had chosen the path of business to protect their future strength and prosperity. It was not a matter of feelings; it was an act of the will. But the Covenant was not a single event written in stone; it was a live entity that had to be developed by the people themselves, in line with the teachings of Jesus.

Other churches

In the beginning, the Covenant was an affair of the Catholic communion alone. It was the natural fulfilment of the Bible reading, the reconciliation with the Namboga and the decision to accept baptism in 1980 when KomKui was mostly Catholic. But during the ensuing years other churches grew up among the KomKui who were not a part of the covenant. This required a solution. Jesus' words were clear. He had said, 'And there are other sheep that I have, that are not of this fold and these I have to lead as well' (Jn. 10:16). It was necessary that all the KomKui people, both Catholic and other Christian groups, should understand the nature of the Covenant with its obligations and the promised rewards. It was a Covenant made with God by their forefathers in 1980 for all KumKui people forever. And so the new arrivals were invited to take part, not as onlookers, but as the governing body of the Covenant community.

Developing the Covenant structure

When all the churches came together to support the Covenant there was an opportunity to reorganise and formalise the whole structure under the Council of Churches.

The Council of Churches is the governing body of the Covenant for the KomKui community. They are bound by the Covenant, of which the essence is: God's position must not be compromised. They must ask themselves: 'What would Jesus have done in this situation?' 'They must accept the words of Jesus as the deciding factor in every decision.'

Its duties are the welfare and growth of the community – following the mind of Jesus, education, in-house training and maintenance of the business arm of KomKui.

Today the Council is made up of six Catholic members, five members from each of the Assemblies of God and the Christian Fellowship Churches, two from Christian Apostolic Church, one each from the Seventh Day Adventist Church and one from Life in the Spirit. (Other churches – Lutheran, Youth with a Mission, Destiny Fellowship, Revival Centre of PNG, PNG Church of Christ – have representation within these groups).

The work of the Council is to oversee all major plans, decisions and business affairs of the KomKui. It is active in the social, spiritual and educational life of the community and mediates between the churches where there may be a clash of interests or activities.

In the wider community, churches often have difficulties in working together, because each is independent of the others and each believes they have a mandate from God. Among the KomKui there are minor disagreements from time to time, but the Council of Churches not only reduced the number of

disagreements, but built a strong co-operative body with a single goal and a uniform approach, based on the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

It is in this way that the KomKui avoids the danger of the *bigman* [leader, chief] mentality, which dominates so much of life in the Highlands. A council of twenty people is more likely to heed the guiding force of Jesus' words in the Gospel than one self-styled big man.

The introduction of the annual renewal of the Covenant

Time had passed since the KomKui had made the Covenant with God in 1980. The founders were getting much older and some of them had already died. The ones who remained were afraid that the new generation would forget the Covenant unless there was a regular reminder.

Pius Tikili says:

The Covenant was made when I was a young fellow of 23 coming out of the university. I was busy making money, and it was a long time before I grasped the importance and significance of the Covenant event. I am sure that most of the others of my age group were in a similar position. We needed an annual remembrance so that the younger generation would become fully aware of the progress of our history, to this the most decisive event of our clan.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

In their Bible readings, they learned how Jews recalled the story of the Covenant, every year at the feast of the Passover, when Jews all over the world tell the story of their escape from slavery in Egypt and recall its significance. For their own situation they knew that a similar storytelling would be needed to maintain the remembrance of the Covenant. And so it was arranged that each year the people would gather at Tilling to celebrate the Covenant.

How the Covenant is applied in the day to day life of the KomKui

Business

Pius Tikili, running the commercial interests of the company, reports to the Council of Churches regularly so that they can consider whether these decisions meet the criteria of the Covenant.

Retaliation

There are young ones in every community who want to be somebody of importance and when their pride is hurt by insult or injury they feel a very urgent need to retaliate. The KomKui deal with this by having an internal flying squad, who handle the situation quickly and effectively, often taking action to prevent a problem before it comes to the surface. They try to foresee problems but also they teach the young men to think in terms of dialogue rather than violent retaliation. Finally they impound the equipment for retaliation – guns, money or motor vehicles, and weapons of any other kind.

There was a sticky incident about two years ago when one of our fellows was killed outside a nightclub in Hagen. Some of our boys went in and captured two of their fellows as hostages. We handed back the two hostages to their clan, without conditions. We are not going to sacrifice the Covenant promise and all of our hard work over the years for the sake of small revenge.

There have been occasions when our properties in Hagen township have been vandalised by people jealous of our success. Our adversaries tried to provoke us to retaliate. They came in with guns and shot up our buildings and broke glass windows and damaged a lot of the panelling. There have been two major episodes. One happened in 1989 and another one in 2005.

This kind of event has happened often enough for us to look for a regular control. We do not want to deal with this directly ourselves. If we took the matter directly to court ourselves, there would be a danger of setting up a bad relationship with the other tribe, because it would appear too personal. To avoid this difficulty we have employed a professional security firm who is able to track down the people who cause the damage, present a case in court, and provide the evidence so that we were not directly involved. We are merely invoking the law. Our hands are clean.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07).

Security internal

The village courts are an official body for minor crimes requiring mediation. But if it is a more serious matter, we call in the police and the case goes to the court. The police know that we do not provide a safe haven for criminals. We do not protect criminals, nor do we use an internal process of money compensation to buy off the crime that has been committed. There is no protection for the rapist.

Activities of the Council of Churches

All of the churches have a number of activities which are essentially their own. Some church activities, such as Habitat for Community, provision of a water supply or a clinic in one or more villages, can be completed with a sharing of ideas and costs by several churches working together. Community development is very much at the heart of the covenant. The Council follows up a variety of activities to develop awareness, knowledge and information which will inform the residents and improve the quality of life.

Education

Youth and students are a foremost target group. Young people who have stopped their educational progress are sometimes offered special courses to prepare them for matriculation and university studies. Back to school seminars are available for students who want to continue learning after they have been pushed out of school.

There was a time when girls were not considered to be fit objects for education, because it was expected that money spent on their education would be wasted when they went off to get married to somebody outside of the tribe. This thinking has been replaced and now boys and girls are given equal opportunity.

Mentoring

KomKui aims to develop a reputation in Papua New Guinea as a community that produces citizens who are honest, dedicated and competent. Training for both boys and girls is of great importance. The Council provides students with goals and models whom they can imitate to achieve their aspirations. It brings back clan members who have been successful, in the university or in business, to speak to the young people and encourage them.

Churches are encouraged to set priorities for our children: God first, education second, and all the rest to fall in line. If we constantly reiterate these values while children are young, then we stand a good chance of producing honest citizens.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Critical examination of KumKui Covenant people

Strengths

Pius Tikili believes:

Our greatest strength is our spiritual awareness. Our aim is to develop spirituality by word and example rather than by controls. When we have a team of good citizens, many of the other problems take care of themselves. The peace and tranquillity of our community is another of our strengths. Our people grow up in peace and stability and this is an advantage for our young men and women going out into the world. The Council of Churches, our governing body is a source of strength. Power is placed in the hands of a body of twenty men and women from different churches who balance one another in their beliefs, aims and expectations and are bound by the covenant.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Weaknesses

We deliberately train people to become affluent in business and enterprise. There is always a danger that, when people become too affluent, they lose contact with their roots and become corrupted by the company that they keep and the world around them. They may forget the values that brought them into their affluent position. We are conscious that the roots of materialism grow in an insidious manner. A materialistic outlook and the love of material goods which is out of control, is not the sort of thing that we want to produce among our people. There are ill feelings because some of the house lines among us may feel that they are not as doing as well as others both as prominent citizens and wealth coming into the community. This invariably produces jealousy which could

cause damage within the community. A lot of the women's problems are connected with polygamy. Polygamy and early marriages were a part of our attempt to build up the numbers within the tribe, when we were weak. We still have polygamous marriages and they are a source of great conflict and embarrassment to us. It is a matter of considerable shame to us that we have a problem with unemployed youth. In spite of example and encouragement, we have young people who spend their days sitting around, listening to their FM radios and gambling for money.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Opportunities

In our seminars, we often talk about the future and the possible projects and activities which are within our scope. We are hoping that we will be able to provide a model for other people in the country. We are pushing to get our people into positions of authority in government and public service and any positions where their influence will be felt. We believe that we can make a difference by providing the country with people who put God first. Eventually, we will not have enough land for all our people. By that time we propose to have our people educated with an alternative income, derived from services, intellectual property and processing. Another solution to our land problem is to incorporate our village as a part of the Greater Mount Hagen township. As the Mount Hagen township grows out, some of our land will become available for rent, lease and property development.

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Challenges

Three challenges exist. The first is a need to find some way of motivating the unemployed youth spending their time in gambling and drinking. The second refers to those who damage, obstruct and vandalise the work of KomKui. The leaders of the 70's had a similar problem to overcome. We must discover some way to reconcile again with those who are jealous because they are being left behind. The third is in relation to the application of state law to crime. The state punishes, but does nothing to reform the offender, heal the trauma of the victim and provide an outlet for the community to be involved in the redress of the crime. We must go back to the way Jesus looked at crime, the criminal, the victim and the community. (Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

Threats

We see a good deal of inevitable cultural degradation and loss of our traditions. To the younger generation the Covenant is ancient history. We still do not have universal primary education. Money and the love of money has become a new God for many in Papua

New Guinea, especially in the Highlands where so many are pragmatic and materialistic. We never speak of the sin of spiritual pride and yet we should. Jesus spoke of it often. Matthew relates Jesus' sevenfold indictment of the hypocritical Pharisees, who made a great show of their wisdom, holiness and dedication to the law, but who neglected the weightier things of the law - 'justice, mercy and good faith' (Matt 23:13-32).

(Pius Tikili interview 16.12.07)

The ceremony of commemoration of the Covenant

The renewal of the Covenant comes on 18th of December each year. In 2007 it was a very basic ceremony, deceptive in its simplicity. The Catholic Archbishop Doug Young and all the elders processed from the lower field to the small official building, where the Archbishop said Mass, accompanied by a band and the voices of a thousand people.

The first reading came from Leviticus Chapter 26 which begins thus:

If you live according to my laws, if you keep my commandments and put them into practice, I will give you the rain you need at the right time. The earth shall produce its produce and the trees of the countryside their fruits. you shall eat your fill of bread and live secure in your land. I will give you peace in the land and you will sleep with none to frighten you. ... The sword shall not pass through the land. I will turn towards you and make you fruitful and multiply and I will uphold my Covenant with you.

The second reading was from Paul to the Romans Chapter 12.

Do not let your love be a pretence but sincerely prefer good to evil. Love each other as much as brothers should. Have a profound respect for each other. Work for the Lord with untiring efforts and with great earnestness of spirit. Do not give up if trials come, and keep on praying.

During the sermon the people were instructed, in a language which they understood, about the similarity between joint ventures of the mining companies with the land owners, and the Covenant which the KomKui have with God. There is an agreement suitable for both sides, for the purpose of gaining mutual benefit. The people agree to the Covenant and in return expect God to make a return to them.

Next, the people were invited to make an offering. And so it was that, church by church, they came to the front and filled the baskets with money. This they knew was a gift to God, to be used as the Church Council found fit for such things as specified hospital funds or works for the poor.

A Melanesian never needs to be told the meaning of a gift. Gifts are always reciprocal and the greater the one who receives the gift, the greater must be the return. In the afternoon they donated K12,000 – a relatively small amount, because they are saving up for the thirtieth anniversary in 2010.

For the next three hours, the people listened patiently, while each of twenty-four speakers recounted his own particular interest in relation to the renewal of the covenant. At the conclusion every aspect of the covenant, past, present and future, had been told many times over.

When, at the end of the afternoon, the Church leaders stood up to make a final prayer on behalf of the 6,000 members of the KomKui, the Covenant story had been told and the message passed on to the next generation.

Interviews

Fr Ryan John	Email comments
Pius Tikili	Recorded Interview 16/12/07
Fr Gareth Roche	Interview 17/12/07
Archbishop Douglas Young	Interview 18/12/07

Reference

The Jerusalem Bible

Author

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