

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have focused specifically on the Dani people and the Dani church in Irian Jaya. Chapter one provided background information on Irian Jaya, the Dani people and the advent of Christianity amongst the Danis, while chapter two dealt with the various forms of development that have taken place since the North Baliem Valley was opened up to the outside world. The next chapter traced the establishment, administration and expansion of the organised Dani churches. Chapter three, together with the final two chapters were largely based on information supplied by my respondents in Irian Jaya.

Chapter four and five provided a contemporary view as they reflected on the challenges that the Dani church appears to be faced with during this period of rapid change in Irian Jaya. These included issues related to "modernisation" or more precisely, urbanisation. While these appear fairly superficial problems, they express the deep-seated fear of the people of the Dani church that their community structure will be disrupted and transformed. The threat is perceived in actions such as smoking, that are linked to the animistic past of the Dani community, and gambling and alcohol consumption which are relatively new to the Dani community. The effects of these new influences on the individuals involved and familial relationships, including marital sanctity, are seen to threaten ties of community which have been in place since before the arrival of Christianity,³⁶⁴ as well as the moral standards of the community.

As a large proportion of the Dani community are Christians, the challenges that the community as a whole is facing are fairly similar to, although not necessarily identical with those the church is facing. The concern of the Dani Christian community is largely centred on the young people, as they are the ones directly influenced by urbanisation, while they study and live in urban centres. At the same time the youth are believed to constitute the future strength of the church, and it is fervently hoped that they will stand firm against the negative influences of urbanisation.

The final chapter dealt with the influence of Islamisation and the challenge it poses for the Dani church. Direct conversion attempts were discussed as were the use of threats,

³⁶⁴ N.Melzer "Notes on Dani Culture" in *Baliem Beginnings*, (Camden Baptist Church, 1976), pp.73-75

ridicule and bribery to convert Danis to Islam or discourage their trust in Christianity, making them more accessible to Islam. Issues of nominalism and material motivation were mentioned as attitudes seen to provide an opportunity for the Muslims to gain converts through material enticement. This weakening of the beliefs of some Christians, together with the example provided by the Muslims with regard to polygamous marriages, has also led to the emergence of the practice of *kawin dua*, having two wives. While the fear of the spiritual threat posed by Islam is real, it may also be viewed as a challenge as it reflects the influx of Austronesian Indonesians, most of whom are Muslims, into Irian Jaya. Although various aspects of the Islamisation process were discussed in the final chapter, the greatest threat from Islam is clearly that of ultimately being swamped and defeated by the sheer numbers of Muslim migrants as the Irianese lose control of their homeland to "foreigners". Such an influx constitutes both a religious and an ethnic challenge.

The real challenge for the church lies in preparing its members to deal with the emerging problems they have not previously had to face, before these do pose a serious threat to the church. This preparation includes a greater understanding by each generation of the other through positive and healthy communication while the church as a whole attempts to discern what it is actually up against.³⁶⁵ As one informant expressed it, there is a need for discussion of the issues in order to bring an increased awareness of the present situation and its potential problems to the church members, particularly the young people, in order to prepare them to face these new influences directly. "If we remain silent, then the issues that we have discussed will certainly influence our people."³⁶⁶ Not only will their awareness have to increase, but their knowledge of how to deal with these challenges will have to be developed also if the church and its members are to survive this period of change. Much of this knowledge will probably come from young people who have experienced modernisation in the cities and have seen friends overcome by the various, new aspects that have entered their lives, but have managed to maintain their own beliefs throughout. From my observations of the young people I met, many have been highly active

³⁶⁵ L.Kogoya *Pelayanan Pemuda di Jemaat Baptis Diakonia Sebagai Pola Bagi Pelayanan Pemuda se-Wilayah Perime*, (Unpublished paper, Jayapura, 1993), p.21

³⁶⁶ Interview, Pyramid 13/8/1994

in the church and have dealt sensitively with those who have been overwhelmed by modernisation or Islamic challenges.

The Dani church is facing problems common to Christian communities throughout the world, as well as those that result from it being a relatively young church looking to second generation Christians to maintain and build the church. The church is also situated in a society that is having a difficult time adjusting to, or rebelling against, its inclusion in the Republic of Indonesia. Despite these circumstances, the Dani church seems to be maturing through its experiences, particularly the direct threat to the essential beliefs of the Dani church represented by Islam. This will lead to the Dani Christians having to become increasingly certain of their beliefs and the basis and doctrine of Christianity. This seems likely to unite the Christians even more strongly, particularly as the community bonds loosen with the urbanisation of the region and they face various challenges together. It is possible that Christianity may become stronger as a badge of ethnic solidarity and anti-Austronesian/Indonesian sentiment if the divisions between native Irianese and others intensify. One young man even stated, although with the religious aspect in mind, that the determination and resultant division between Muslims and Christians could, in an extreme case, lead to war.³⁶⁷

The Dani church seems to be facing numerous issues that could seem overwhelming and discouraging. Yet I met so many Danis, from all age groups who have not lost their faith. They expressed disappointment, but not discouragement and display an awareness and preparedness to deal with what they may come up against. From the information supplied by my respondents, during the period I was in Irian Jaya, together with contemplation of their attitudes, it would seem that the future of the Dani church is fairly stable and that it is responding to the present challenges with vigour and conviction.

³⁶⁷ Interview, Jayapura 28/7/1994