

# The Evangelization of West New Guinea

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## Abstract

Penulis mengangkat tema evangelisasi di Papua Barat dengan bingkai pemaparan sejarah. Kekristenan di Papua Barat memiliki sejarah yang panjang dan berliku-liku. Situasi sosial politik turut mempengaruhi. Sebagai bagian koloni Belanda, keadaan dipengaruhi oleh situasi sosial politik Belanda yang ketika itu didominasi kalangan Protestan Calvin. Tidaklah mengherankan, ketika daerah itu kemudian dibagi menjadi beberapa bagian, masing-masing menjadi hak dan tanggung jawab gereja tertentu, baik Protestan maupun Katolik. Misi-misi Kristen berkembang maju sejalan dengan pembangunan ekonomi, baik oleh pemerintah Belanda, pemerintah pendudukan Jepang maupun kemudian oleh pemerintah Indonesia. Sejalan dengan terbukanya wilayah pegunungan yang dihuni suku-suku asli sekitar tahun 1950-1960-an, misi-misi ini menyentuh hampir seluruh bagian wilayah tersebut.

Situasi berubah banyak, ketika Papua Barat menjadi wilayah Indonesia pada tahun 1963. Pemerintah Indonesia mengakui lima agama, yakni Islam, Protestan, Katolik, Hindu dan Budha. Komposisi masyarakat pun berubah sejalan dengan masuknya transmigran yang beragama Islam. Tantangan bagi Gereja semakin bertambah ketika terjadi penindasan masyarakat lokal karena alasan ekonomi. Gereja Katolik dan para imamnya sering berada dalam posisi terjepit.

**Keywords:** evangelization, missionary association.

West New Guinea went by different names (Dutch New Guinea, Papua Barat, Irian Barat, Irian Jaya), and in 2001 was officially called the Indonesian Province of Papua. It was recently split into two provinces. The native population shares many features with the inhabitants of a group of islands normally called Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji). It received missionaries from the West, being the only part of Melanesia to experience this. In fact, to the rest of Melanesia Christian missionaries came from Polynesia. While sharing the obscurity of the whole of the New Guinea area, this part was annexed surprisingly early by Holland, in 1828 and was combined with its other Indonesian islands, becoming Dutch New Guinea (*Nederlands Nieuw Guinea*). The first missionaries came eastwards in 1855, sent by a small society called *Comité van de Christen-Werkman* (Society of the Christian Workman) in Batavia (now Jakarta). They set foot on the island of Mansinam, in the bay of Doreri, near the present town of Manokwari. These

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were German “mechanics” called Carl W. Ottow and Johann G. Geissler, disciples of Berlin preacher Johannes Gössner, and helped by Dutch preacher Ottho G. Heldring. They learned Malay in Hollandia and Numfor when they finally arrived travelling through Tidore. Ottow died of malaria in 1862 and Geissler developed tuberculosis, returned to Germany, and died there in 1870. But in 1864 he had built the first church, on Mansinam, and the next year he baptised the first convert, a woman now called Sarah. By 1900 this first mission (“zending”) had baptised 250 “Papuas”.

After this shaky beginning, various agencies of the Dutch Reformed Church such as the NZV (Dutch Missionary Union), the NGZV (Dutch Reformed Missionary Union), and the UZV (Missionary Union of Utrecht) all sent numerous missionaries to their half of New Guinea. The most famous was pastor van Hasselt who spent decades working in the bay of Doreri and whose son continued his missionary, ethnographic and linguistic endeavours up to and beyond World War II. Despite numerous losses, mainly to malaria, the renewed Protestant mission survived. It was encouraged by the colonial government, and awarded an annual stipend. This government had adopted bazaar Malay as a lingua franca, and the missionaries also tended to use this “*bahasa*”, but local languages were also used, particularly Biak-Numfor, of which the van Hasselts completed a fine dictionary. Very soon the Dutch missionaries were reinforced by teachers and catechists brought over from the Moluccas. In these early decades progress was slow. Between 1855 and 1905 there were only 150 baptisms (at least, of indigenous converts) living in the Protestant mission, and the total number of Christians (including resident Europeans) was about 300. They had five stations along the coast: Mansinam, Kwawe, Andai, Roon and Windessi.

The less favoured Dutch Catholics were showing interest in evangelisation of the new territory. As far as religious affiliation was concerned, the situation in Holland was dominated by a Protestant ascendancy (in this case, Calvinist), while the Catholics were largely confined to the south, and discriminated against in public life. In the Dutch Indies public positions were often closed to Catholics and there were attempts to divide the Protestant area (the north and much of the south as well, e.g., Fakfak) from the Catholic enclave. On 12 January 1912 the Governor-general A. W. F. Idenburg set the mission boundary at 4.5° Lat. South, attempting to split West New Guinea into two spheres of influence, thus reproducing (perhaps accidentally—the north had always been better known and earlier visited) the north-south division of Holland itself. Catholics still worked around Fakfak, though Fr. Cappers was refused permission to open four stations there on 5 July 1925. But the Dutch parliament had already opposed Idenburg, and in Ambon, July 1928, representatives of both the “zending”

and the "missie" both Protestant and Catholic representatives were shown a letter of Governor-general A. C. D. de Graeff declaring that the policies against "double mission" had no legal basis, and should lapse. However, it seems that unlike Australian Papua, the restrictions in the West were taken seriously by local authorities up to 1928.

The Protestant missions supported by the UZV (from Utrecht) were of course in the north of the territory, and from 1907 they finally began to flourish. There were many new mission stations and an increasing number of baptisms. The baptised adherents had reached 25,000 by 1931 and ten years later they were about 80,000, in more than 400 communities. From the year 1917 mission personnel, teachers and catechists, were formed in a school situated near Manokwari, of which I. S. Kijne was for many years the director. On the outbreak of the disaster of World War II the Protestant mission was running more than 200 schools, with more than 10,000 pupils. Beside these there were the small hospitals, dispensaries and leprosaria. The Protestant Church of the Moluccas was constituted in 1926, and missionaries sent from there also contributed to the success of the New Guinea mission. Two districts were now created, one in the South-West and another in the originally Catholic South-East, where they opened many schools. A decade later there were 76 congregations. A little before the Japanese invasion, the total number of Protestant West New Guineans was about 130,000. There was a typical reaction too—a series of messianic movements, called Koreri, developed on the culturally dominant island of Biak and which began to stir up opposition to the Dutch and to the missionaries. But it was the missionaries who studied them.

In the area reserved originally for Catholics, progress had been much slower. It was only in 1891 that the famous Jesuit missionary Cornelis le Cocq d'Armandville set himself up on the island of Seram, in the centre of the Moluccas, and from that base began to visit the west coast of New Guinea. In 1895 he established the first Catholic mission station at Kapaur, a place near Fakfak, some way eastwards along the southern coast. But the very next year, on a voyage of inspection of neighbouring territories, he seems to have been killed (or drowned) at Kipia, on the Mimika coast. In 1902 the Vatican erected the Prefecture Apostolic of the Moluccas and of Dutch New Guinea, and entrusted it to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. The headquarters of this apostolic prefecture was at Langgur, on the Kei islands. In 1920 it was elevated to a vicariate apostolic.

Over to the east of the south coast of Dutch New Guinea there was a considerable stretch of land and river systems before the enormous mountain barrier of the interior, and in this very isolated area the first group of Catholic

missionaries entered the territory, on the 14th of August 1905, led by Father P. H. Nollen, using the port of Merauke. The first administrator, J. A. Kroesen, had begged for missionaries from the MSC in Tilburg, to help him pacify this dangerous territory. The peoples there had free movement over the artificial 141° meridian into the Fly River basin in Australian Papua, which was to lead to many diplomatic problems in years to come. Gradually the mission moved up the rivers to the North, into territory dominated by the Marind-Anim, famous for their headhunting and cannibalism. Some of the white bird of paradise hunters and visitors had imported a venereal disease, which caused widespread infertility. Their sexual customs favoured rapid spread of *venerea granulomatosi (lymphogranuloma)* and they probably had less resistance to it than its importers did. The Belgian priest Fr. Petrus Vertenten (arrived 1910) remembered something similar happening in the Belgian Congo, imitated the Congolese "Model Village" policy, and began a solution. Men were separated from women, and adults from minors. The people survived, but in a decimated state. Medical help from Hollandia added medicines to the techniques of the mission and the administration, and the disease was conquered.

The Catholics later extended their activities to the West, reaching Mimika by 1927 and the Paniai plateau by 1934, by the difficult and dangerous land route. The great figure here was "God's bushwalker", Fr. Misael Kammerer the second white man, after the 1952 Meijer Ranneft patrol, to see the Baliem valley from the ground. As was common to all such missions, this was accompanied by the opening of schools and medical dispensaries, i.e., Aid Posts. Sisters, catechists and teachers assisted the pastors, and like the Protestants, the "local" teachers and catechists were at first not local at all, but came from the dominant peoples of the Moluccas (especially from the Kei Islands). In 1933 the Catholics numbered more than 7,000, ran 103 schools with 3,300 students and 115 teachers. In 1939 the MSC missionary Tillemans set up a mission station high up in the lakes district of Paniai, among the Me people. Three years later there were nine stations in that area, mostly staffed by catechists.

In 1937 the Franciscans of the Dutch province of that order came to West New Guinea, beginning in the north-west of it, on the "Bird's Head" peninsula, the Vogelkop. They spread eastwards from there across the whole north of the province, selecting locations not yet contacted by the Protestants.

In this busy decade before the outbreak of World War II other missionaries arrived to join the Calvinists and the Catholics. They were evangelicals sent by the American CAMA (Christian Alliance Missionary Association). Only two years after its discovery, they chose the Paniai lakes region as their field, in 1938.

Further developments were all disturbed by this new world-side war. Holland itself was occupied and communications with it were broken. In 1942 the Japanese seized and established massive bases on the northern coast of the country, and on the island of Biak. Many missionaries were evacuated; many were arrested and interned or killed (about 50 in fact). And the Japanese put into place discriminatory measures against all Christians, nationalising many of the mission schools. In 1944 the Allies had leap-frogged the large Japanese fortified bases in East New Guinea, starving the enemy forces out, and attacked the West New Guinea bases with overwhelming might. Many local people thought it was the much-awaited end of the world!

Mission activity was able to recommence, and the rapid creation of roads and other infrastructure by the eager Americans allowed for new development after they left to follow the island chain to the Philippines and to Japan. It took a considerable time for the missions to re-establish themselves, being deprived of leadership and with much of their precious infrastructure destroyed. And the independence movements fomented by the Japanese in Indonesia (the Dutch Indies) proper were able to force the Dutch to allow them independence, in 1949, after vicious civil strife and civil war, following on the horrors of the Japanese occupation. Holland stubbornly kept for itself only West New Guinea, on the grounds of its separate cession by the Sultan of Tidore, its Melanesian population and languages, and its separate administration between the two wars. But the pressures from both the United Nations and from the triumphant Indonesian leadership were only to increase, and the sudden Dutch effort in the 1950s to develop the territory was both late, and too late.

For the moment missionary work went on under an energetic and newly-sensitive Dutch administration, especially in the recently discovered highlands region. We can make many comparisons with the Central Highlands of East New Guinea, also discovered in the 1930s and only lightly contacted before the 1950s. The churches were able to consolidate, and to move towards the status of autonomous bodies.

The first to become autonomous was the Dutch Reformed Church, the original pioneer. After the war many new schools were opened and in 1952 the number of pupils undergoing instruction had risen to about 25,000. Autonomy came in 1956, with the formation of the *GKI, Gereja Kristen Injili*, the Christian Evangelical Church of Dutch New Guinea. Its headquarters were in Hollandia, i.e., Jayapura. Not long before this the theological faculty had been transferred to the same place, which, with the massive infrastructure left by the Americans (who in a few weeks had moved whole mountains!), was a suitable place to be the capital. After its autonomy, this church continued to follow the lead of its founding denomination.

The Catholic missions also had many new developments in the post-war years. Hollandia had not been their territory, but its growing importance suggested that it should be the centre also of Catholic missionary organisation, and at the end of the 1940s the Franciscans transferred their headquarters to there. In 1949 the Vatican set up the Prefecture Apostolic of Hollandia, which had at that time 20 Dutch missionaries on the ground. In 1954 it became a vicariate apostolic, and the Franciscan R. J. Staverman was made its Vicar, ruling over a little more than 9,000 Catholics. Four years earlier, deep in the Catholic South around Merauke, the Vatican had erected the Vicariate Apostolic of Merauke (1950). It had 23,000 Catholics, being an original area of mission. In 1953 a new group arrived, Augustinians from the Dutch province of their order, and took on the care of the *Vogelkop*. Naturally enough, their centre was the port of Manokwari, the most important settlement in the large *Geelvinck* (*Cendrawasih*) Bay, full of historically and politically important islands. This area became a prefecture apostolic in 1959, having at that time 4,000 Catholics. The Vatican reorganised all of Catholic Oceania in 1966, and Merauke became an archdiocese, remaining the centre of official Catholic administration, while Jayapura/Hollandia and Manokwari became suffragan dioceses to it. There was a fourth diocese just three years later, Agats, populated by the Asmat tribe. This zone was given primarily to the American Missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. All four dioceses belonged to the Episcopal Conference of Indonesia. At the end of the 1970s, the Catholic Church in West Papua numbered about 120,000 members.

The dramatic story of the 1950s and 1960s was the spread of the faith up to the obscure mountain tribes of the hidden valleys of the interior. Despite being discovered in the 1930s, they were protected for some decades by the Dutch administration from outside contact, mainly for medical reasons. It was only in 1952 that the territory was de-restricted, and the American CAMA came in.

Catholics had been infiltrating the mountains from the south from well before the war, but had only got near the Baliem. They had connections with the Amungme and the Ugunduni, and indeed, these mountain peoples were enormously energetic walkers, and bands of them had been "investigating" the whites and the "Surabaya-men", overseas peoples, for some decades already. The Franciscans followed the Protestants into the "Great Valley" four years later, and opened their first mission station there, the home of the Dani people. Other American and Australian groups followed, the Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), the Australian Baptist Missionary Society (ABMS), the Asia and Pacific Christian Mission (APCM), the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), the Seventh Day Adventists, and the German United Evangelical Mission. It was a real race for souls, as indeed it was also a desperate race to

“develop” the region for the Dutch administrators, pressurised by the UN and by Soekarno’s assertive government in Jakarta. The holy haste of the missions may have baptised about 300,000 people in twenty years, but it also left a Christian community hopelessly divided into a host of denominations.

The Pentecostal churches had a good foothold in Indonesia, and after the war they began to send missionaries to Dutch New Guinea. The first group came from Manado in the Celebes (Sulawesi) and arrived in 1948. A few years later these were followed by Dutch Pentecostals of the Pentecostal Church of Bethel (*Bethel Pinksterkerk*). It was not long before these various Pentecostals agreed to unite, and gave great impetus to the Pentecostal Church of Bethel. In 1949 the Dutch Mennonites sent missionaries as well. As time wore on, these newcomers either grew into autonomous churches, or else affiliated themselves to autonomous Indonesian churches. In 1962 the various congregations founded by CAMA joined the Evangelical Tabernacle Church of Indonesia (CKII, or KINGMI). In 1966 the congregations founded by the Australian Baptists became the Baptist Church in Irian Jaya. In 1972 the missions of UFM, of APCM and of RBMU joined the Evangelical Church in Indonesia (GIDI), and those of TEAM became the Union of the Christian Bible Churches. The congregations, which the Protestants had founded in the Moluccas, became the Protestant Church of Indonesia in Irian Jaya (GPI IJ). Many of these churches are members of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Indonesia (PGI), founded in 1950. After the integration of the territory into Indonesia many other minor churches were established.

In 1963 Indonesia forcibly annexed Dutch New Guinea, with enormous effects on the population, including its religious affiliations. It was estimated at that time as 750,000 people, with 10% of it Christian. Now the Indonesian constitution recognised only five religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism). Thus the indigenous population was pressured to join one of these as quickly as possible, to avoid being classed as the almost sub-human “*kafir*”, pagans, heathens. In the first official census we see no sign of the traditional religions, to which at least 85% of the population had belonged at the time of annexation (see table 1). A second factor was the huge influx of immigrants, who were mostly Muslim. In the 2000 census these migrants made up 35% of the total population, now 2,230,000 persons. A third factor was the decision of the Indonesian government (from 1978) more and more to restrict the entry and the activity of missionaries, as well as to block outside support, both goods and funds, for these missions.

The churches were provided with very severe problems, as they were to be in Bougainville, because the majority of the local inhabitants never accepted

Indonesian annexation. So the local Christians could accuse their churches of collusion with the Indonesian invader, all the more so when some of the more organised churches had their headquarters or had associates in Indonesia itself, and needed to placate Indonesian officials and politicians. As in other places during this period of decolonisation, the localisation of the clergy led to more and more clergy standing alongside their people against "the oppressor", any of the colonial powers. The higher clergy were thus put in a very delicate position, sandwiched between their people and lower clergy, and the force of the non-Christian government and administration. Things got even uglier because of the use of military force, actual military occupation and exploitation, to retain a grip on the territory.

Table 1 presents the results of three censuses conducted by Indonesia from 1971 onwards. Protestants are all squeezed into the one classification. Data obtained by the author from the office of religions at Jayapura reveal that in 1998 the larger Protestant churches were: Reformed Church (GKI) 660,000; Evangelical Church (GIDI) 177,000; Evangelical Tabernacle Church (GKII) 150,000; Union of Baptist Churches 75,000; and the Union of Christian Bible Churches 43,000.

**Table 1: Religious Affiliation in West New Guinea (1971–2000)**

Religions	1971*		1980		2000	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
Protestants	88,241	58.5	691,098	60.3	1,286,476	57.6
Catholics	28,278	18.7	249,850	21.8	378,371	16.9
Muslims	33,083	21.9	129,509	11.3	561,312	25.1
Hindus	32	0.0	327	0.0	3,528	0.2
Buddhists	147	0.1	1,153	0.1	1,599	0.1
Traditional religions	***	***	***	***	***	***
Other	***	***	74,241	6.5	2,184	0.1
Total population	151,221	99.9	1,146,178	100	2,233,530	100

\* The census of 1971, on a population listed as 943,440 persons, dealt with religious affiliation in a very restricted way.

Sources: national censuses of 1971, 1980, 2000

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