



'Sanap Wantaim 2005'
St Paul's Anglican Cathedral,
Melbourne, 31 July 2005

Report—Louise Byrne and Erwin Bleskadiť. Photos—Nick Chesterfield and Jen Hughes

Bishop Hilton Deakin's Homily

May I express my thanks to the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and to those who supported him in the invitation to us who work for the West Papuan people in their painful search for self-determination. We are happy and grateful to be here with you.

I suppose the first point I must make is a question: why address the issue of West Papua and its struggles?

Some people like to think that such a question is a purely political issue, and that a political analysis totally exhausts any understanding of such an issue. That assertion claims it is none of our business addressing such an issue in a place like this.

I beg to differ. Some of us happen to be caught up in the Scripture stories of people learning God's vision and intent on who they are and what He wants them to be about. A discussion on human affairs is never exhausted until we break open the Word of God to reveal more to us. Such an exercise is fraught with challenge, even danger—but do it we must.

One of the Beatitudes comes to mind immediately. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

This statement challenges us, our very selves, to be concerned with the social morality of our world—here, there, everywhere, anywhere, even West Papua.

We may ask ourselves carefully: Do we actually thirst, in any fashion, to see people fed? Are we really hungry for freedom from war? You work out a war to think about. Hungry for freedom from military oppression, economic, or political oppression? If we say 'No' or 'Yes .. but' we have not listened carefully to the Lord. The Beatitude is a clear call to all Christians. This is *one* reason why I am here today with you to plead the cause of West Papua's people.

In April 1963, Pope John XXIII of Rome wrote a letter to all people of good will. It was titled, after the Roman fashion, by the first couple of words "Pacem in Terris" or "Peace on Earth". It was a catch-up call by a master of catch-up as he did via the Second Vatican Council.

This time he wrote about human rights. In fact his letter proved to be a charter of rights, anchored deeply in scriptural reflection and the Catholic tradition. Until this time, rival intellectual approaches to human rights differed, sometimes enormously, in the stresses placed on individual or collective rights. They were generally light on understanding any responsibility connected with such rights.

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Procession into St Paul's. John Narik (Australia West Papua Assoc-South West) & Wiwince Pigome



Kees Faas (Royal Netherlands Airforce, Dutch New Guinea 1961-62) preparing to light the Dutch candles. Also Rev. Anne Wentzel (St Paul's) and Bishop Hilton Deakin (President, Caritas Oceania, & Patron, AWPA-Melbourne).



Flags of the Melanesian nations. Foreground—Kevin Buzzacott, leader of the Arabunna Nation, Australia. Background—The Very Rev. David Richardson, Dean, St Paul's Cathedral.



Kardu, traditional owner of Murray Island (Torres Strait) singing the Gift Exchange. Also John Sousis, from Maluku's independence movement (with red headband).



Rev. Robert Stringer (Uniting Church); Kevin Buzzacott; Mrs Jackson and Keith Jackson (who served on the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea) preparing for the Ode to Melanesian soldiers killed during WW2.

You may have your various wellsprings of ideas from which you gather insights about human rights and also about the problems of the human condition wherever it is lived and under whatever burdens it is forced to carry.

West Papuans have their own ways of making claims for themselves. Their leaders articulate clearly and carefully what their people hope for. They make their claims based on declarations of universal rights, on reasonable analysis of problems, issues, and challenges they constantly face.

A particular feature of their calls to justice is the widely spread belief they have about the Bible as a base for the points they make. They are, by and large, a God-fearing people who seek His help in their struggles. This is the second reason why I am here—united with them, seeking your good will and help.

So what is it that they seek? Where do we begin? Who are we talking about?

We must be clear about this, for it is pivotal. We are talking about Melanesian people. They share an ethnic and cultural identity with other Melanesians in the southwest and south of the Pacific. There are 250 tribes in West Papua. There are also migrants and settlers, many married to Papuans'.

So West Papuans with a solid Melanesian core of origin, are many, and they seek to be one. They want to be true to their origins, with legal and cultural protection for newcomers. One West Papuan leader put it well: "My people need to discover a first nation ideology that allows for a shared national identity".

This must mean something else. It means their self-identity cannot be found in calling themselves Indonesian in any deep sense. They see themselves as different ethnically and culturally. They see their present historical links to be recent and contrived.

This, then, raises further questions about how they came to be where they are today—that is, a number of provinces in someone else's country.



So I raise questions of recent historical processes—the details of which may be found in good books and journals. Firstly, as one leader said “West Papuans have a right to know the truth, especially about what took place in the 1960’s when their land and people became part of another country. There are questions like:

Was the country annexed after the fashion of a colonial power swallowing up a defenceless neighbour without consultation, and for its own expansive and/or exploitative purposes?

Was the country integrated with some pretentious claim to commonality of ethnic or culture?

Was the process of absorption actually based on legitimate consultation and self-determination, or was it contrived—similar to another such exercise in East Timor a few years later?

In all this, where are the signs of justice, of free choice, or self-determination?

Secondly. It is on record that the initial take-over has been followed persistently by suppression and suffering. Suppression of local cultural values and customs, imposition of foreign value systems, systematic violation of person and property, economic exploitation of natural resources such as timber, copper, gold, and now oil and gas. There is widespread defoliation of environment, intensive militarization of provinces, supping up of militias to terrorize the country.

In all of this, do we hear the cry of the poor? The groans of those being tortured, killed, oppressed?

We Australian are near neighbours. What ideas do we have about these people? Do we hear their cries? Or do we listen to our powerful neighbour? Or do we just listen to ourselves?

Our call today is not about political rectitude. Nor is it about how West Papua and its people might be useful to us, or to our collective pockets.

Our nation was called to help another small nation in similar circumstances thirty years ago. We refused to listen for twenty-four years. Then, as a nation, we gave them some help. But even still, over oil and gas, we clearly demonstrate our self-interest first, over the rights or needs of others. We have contrived and bent laws and legal observances to our own immediate advantage.

Are we positioning ourselves to do something similar yet again?

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Top—Letter to West Papua’s Heroes and Heroines by Jacob Rumbiak.

Singers Jeannie Marsh, Paul Dillon, and Marian from the Church of Hope. Read by Sixta Mambor (above)



Bishop Huggins, Anglican Archdiocese of Melbourne, and Ronny Kareni from Serui Island, West Papua.



I do not expect secular governments to adopt the Beatitudes. Self interest, or national interest as government defines it, is their aim. Any humanitarian response is low-key—perhaps even a whisper.

We hear a call, loud and clear. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness"

Australian showed their capacity to hear the cry of the poor when the recent tsunami wreaked its havoc. Let us all pray that we hear the cry of the poor, the suffering people of West Papua.

Traditional Hunting Dance—Hein Arumisore, Erwin Bleskadit, Richard Rumbiak; and (below) Sixta Mambor and Wiwince Pigome. Also Penny Meeng with his own Morning Star flag.

