TRANSCRIPT:-

"WEST PAPUA: kindling the sacred in political discourse and activism"
Council Chambers, Building 1, Globalism Institute, RMIT University
Wednesday 28 May 2003

A seminar for an invited audience of academics, street politicians, church workers, ngos, meat-eaters, bean-munchers, mainstream and alternative journalists, and a bevy of thoughtful but demanding Melanesians – who had been asked to prepare for the 'interactive hypothetical' by reflecting on the ways they pursue social change. The seminar will begin with a ten-minute visual recapitulation of a religious ceremony for West Papua that was led by Melanesian cultural custodians in All Saints Anglican Church on 10 November 2002.

PANEL:- Rev. Janet Turbie-Johnston, Professor Paul James, Bishop Hilton Deakin, Jennifer Mondia, Dr Robert Wolfgramm. CO-ORDINATOR:- Kel Dummett.

KEL DUMMETT. The first thing I would like to do is acknowledge the traditional land of the traditional owners, the Kulin people whose land we are on at the moment. Then I'd like to introduce our panel. Jennifer Mondia, a cultural custodian from the highlands of PNG; Dr Robert Wolfgramm, a sociologist from Monash University; Rev Janet Turbie-Johnston, a Gunditajamara woman and Anglican priest; Professor Paul James from the Globalism Institute at RMIT which is hosting this event; and Bishop Hilton Deakin who is the Patron of the Australia West Papua Association (Melbourne) and Vice-President of Caritas International.

Our panellists are here this evening not so much as experts, but as people who have proved they are capable of taking language and shaping it into a particular discourse. We also have a very knowledgeable and distinguished audience to whom I will also be directing questions. We will also, hopefully, have time for open discussion. I think everyone here is experienced enough to construct their contributions in two to three minutes.

I would like to start by asking the panellists if they would like to tell us what the term 'the sacred' means to them.

JANET TURBIE-JOHNSTON. Thankyou. Let's start at the cross. My sense of the sacred is very much that everything that is anything is sacred, in that it demands our respect and it demands dignity. That it is in our response to each other, and to all aspects of creation is how we acknowledge and know the sacred. In the sense that if I acknowledge the sacred in someone else, then I am immediately recognising the sacred within myself. This sense is of course coming from my indigenous heritage. I acknowledge this land is sacred – trees, the water, the animals, the air, are all sacred. In that, I develop a respect not just for myself and others, but also for the world about me. My responsibility is to learn the ways, so I work with the sacred in everything and within myself, and not once ever seeing myself as something other than others. One of the tensions I find in western Christianity in particular, is that it has been created very much by creating the other, as in need of something that it can offer. I think that is a very dangerous place to be, because the boundaries it sets up are very clearly 'I have

something that you do not have, and you need what I have'. As much as I am hoping over the next generations, Western Christianity will change and learn something from indigenous people; I still think that there isn't one thing that is not sacred. That from the moment of singularity, if I start saying 'this is sacred, and this isn't' I am causing division, I am causing that division within myself. So it's a very organic dynamic thing, and it is not something that I would want to put into any kind of category.

JENNIFER MONDIA. Melanesian indigenous people belong to clans and tribes who collectively own the land and all the resources within it. Women are the cultural custodians of the sacred – in that I mean indigenous wisdom and knowledge, the skills, talents, and all the history - as well as being the providers and managers of their home, and the mothers. Women are culturally highly valued, because they are integral to the sovereignty, the self-determination, the economic resources, the justice, and the political stability of the indigenous world. In some societies, non-respect to women causes violent tribal wars. Without women's full participation in information sharing for decision-making, in planning and implementation, no indigenous society can survive. Which leads me to telling you about a story. A sacred story about an eagle. An eagle as you know has two wings and flies high over the valleys and the mountains and the rivers, and it goes as high as it can go. That is only when the two wings are functioning. But if one of the wings breaks, what happens to an eagle. It comes down at a rate that no one can stop, and it crashes. And that is the situation in today's modern society; what our societies are going through now. We need to go back fifteen centuries where women are valued as the custodians of the sacred.

BISHOP HILTON DEAKIN. I think if I started talking about the sacred, we would need a couple of weeks. I would draw on my experiences as an anthropologist, and as a person who mixes with other people. And I would thoroughly endorse what the last two people have said. Namely, and I think that this is at the crux of all this …people whom we reach out to, such as in West Papua and Fiji and places like that, have an integral understanding of what life's all about. You've heard a myth just now; you've heard about people belonging to clans. So you've got social structure, you've got myth, and you've got an extra-ordinary sort of cultural link with the land. And that's the triad that forms the integrity of sacred and secular all together. One cannot characterise any more than just that and talk about the sacred and secular. Durkheim started all this a long time ago, and it's become characteristic of our intellectual exercises that we chop social experience up into various categories. But they are only characterising categories, because it's an integrated thing. If we go into a culture, for instance, that is not our own – I won't talk about our own culture, because that's the one I'm trying to avoid – that of the indigenous people of Australia, or wherever, we are moving into something that people live. There's a totality about it that we don't very particularly have here in this country. And it's the search for what they understand that totality to be based on, which one would call the sacred. Something that is other, and beyond, whatever it is, that provides explanations that our scientific endeavours don't need to take hold of. We don't need to, and it costs us dearly for it.

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. Well Kel, in all the years of sitting around the kava bowl in Fiji with my relatives, I don't think the word 'sacred' has ever come into the conversation. So I'm trying to think how we translate this idea – which I heartily endorse here – into the experience of the everyday in the islands. I guess it just comes out of the values you're brought up with, the way you go about your business, the way you treat each other, and the environment. Respect is a key work or a key idea in the Pacific. So respect and the sacred is pretty much one and the

same. Showing respect is also showing that you regard the other person as sacred. There are rituals of respect, which must be honoured and are central. I think that's the sacred, for me.

KEL DUMMETT. So it becomes very naturally to Fiji people?

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. Through respect, but I would say for Pacific people, not just Fijians.

PAUL JAMES. What people have been talking about effectively have been two kinds of relationship. One is a relationship between people, and the other is the relationship to nature. In the secularisation and process of almost-vandalisation which have occurred across the period of the modern, these things have been unpacked, dismembered, fragmented, abstracted and turned into moments which we think we can understand by looking at the immediacy of them or their fragmented bits. What the sacred implies is the contextualisation of the relationship, and the naming of an identification, which cannot be defined. So it becomes a relationship question, but it doesn't need to be enunciated as directly as 'I think this is sacred'. It just is. It's the naming of the relationship by virtue of being unnameable. Which means that when we come to talk about the sacred in this context and think about its relationship to the political, you are left with the feeling, if you are a complete modernist, that they are irrelevant to each other.

KEL DUMMETT. Good. And that leads very much onto this idea of the role of the sacred in the modern society. In our western governance structure, the concept of the sacred has been lost, deliberately separated from the state, perhaps for good reason. There are numerous questions we can explore tonight along the lines of the sacred. What is its role today in the governance structure, especially at the national level? Should it have a role? Should western solidarity activists pay more attention to it, particularly in their dealings with indigenous societies and cultures? I'd like to turn to our three panellists who are indigenous people, and ask you whether you think the sacred is still alive in your societies, and does it have a role in the national governance of the countries that you come from?

JANET TURBIE-JOHNSTON. I'll start from underneath first. I believe, and from my experience with indigenous people, I believe that the sacred is, as Robert said, just a state of being. And in the dialogue across this land, the most important thing is – and I heard this from a group of elders today – 'ah, the ways of the spirit' – in a sense that there is a spirit which connects us. We don't go around naming it or defining it by naming the other. We just know it's there. For me, there is a sense that there is this living network that connects us. We recognise each other often without ever being introduced. We recognise our place in the land without needing to define it, or talk about it, or write a thesis on it, or put it into other kinds of category. We know our elders almost without needing to speak. There is this world that connects us.

In regards to the government, I would really love to think that our government had spirituality and a sense of the sacred. If I have to use this language of 'sacred' and 'secular'…. If I was to use my template, that everything is sacred, I have to say that the government is sacred, and that the members of the government are sacred. Their relationship to me quarters me to think about, and to respond to their lack of thinking and to their lack of action. Maybe in some ways, their sort of anti-ness, or their lack of humanness, of their lack of being able to respond to me as a fellow human being, and in particular in this land to respond to indigenous people as being integral to this land, there is something sacred happening. And maybe that 'something' is that indigenous people are rising up without the government's permission. So in that there

is still sacredness in the relationship. I think that our responsibility is to be able to hold onto that, and to keep rising. To keep speaking, to keep being active. And to really put it on the agenda of this nation, and of the world, that we have a very important place. Sixty thousand years, or sixty thousand and two hundred years is not going to go away. Anybody who lives in this land, and who has come to this land, must integrate our story into their story. To me that says something quite sublime about the sacred. That it works whether we realise it or not. And even when we think it's not working, it is. But we're the ones who need to hold onto that.

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. The sacred does have a role in the national government of Fiji. It's embedded – is that the word, at the moment? – in us, like the cream is in the coconut. You can squeeze the cream out, and what are you left with? Desiccated coconut. Tasteless. You might as well throw it to the chooks. Whereas, the sacred is just in us. You know it; you don't have to ask questions, and don't have to analysis it. So it affects everything that people do. In the Pacific of course there are two notions of the sacred. The Sacred-sacred, and the Christian-sacred, if you like; and sometimes they compete with each other, because they can be – they don't have to be – set up as opposing or dialectic ideas. That's not good. Pacific Islanders have been trying to work out what that relation is ever since Christianity came to the Pacific with a seemingly different view. I think that it is only very recently that people have been beginning to appreciate the common sacred ground between Indigenous sacred and Christian sacred. I might be wrong, but it seems that way, because the history of missions is contradictory. The welfarist versus the holiness tradition in missions had a different effect on Pacific Islanders. So I think it's very much alive, in everything, and in all governments – from Fr Walter Lini in Vanuatu and Ratu Maru in Fiji. Everyone spells it out their way, but the sacred is there.

JENNIFER MONDIA. I agree with Robert that it is alive. But I would say that one of the major issues facing us in Melanesian nations and others in Pacific, is how others define it. By others, I mean outsiders and the colonisers, not the indigenous. And I would come back to the women as the cultural custodians. As I pointed out, they were valued; traditionally they were valued. But today, if there is a constant, it is that women are fighting for their rights. They shouldn't be. I would like to quote from an article published in 1992. "Women are central to economic and social life and must have an equal and full participation in development, or progress fails. A renewed focus on women in development is necessary to strengthen the government's efforts towards sustainable development". Traditionally women were valued; now they want to renew it. Before colonisation, civilisation, women were valued, but now they are being undermined. So I think the sacred is living in PNG, but how it is defined and valued is different.

KEL DUMMETT. When we look around at modern governments around the world, we have a range of involvement of the sacred, or the church, or religion, or whatever you want to call it. In Iran there is a Shiite government where Islam is an integral part of the government; they are one and the same thing. To secular Indonesia, which is a good country to think about; it's so close to us, and there's a lot happening there at the moment; a secular state where the Church and the State are separate, but no one would suggest that Islam doesn't have an influence on the government. To the American situation, where the Church and the State are separated formally under the constitution, but when we look at the current administration, which is dominated by fundamentalist Christians, it's very obvious that it is a fallacy that the Church and the State are separated. To Australia, where again the Church and State is formally separated under our constitution, but we've just been through a tumultuous period, where our Prime Minister appointed a man of the Church as the Governor-General and brought the Church in a sense back into our governance structure. Last Monday, after this General-General

resigned, Archbishop Pell said that he thought the separation of the Church from the State was a good thing. Bishop Deakin, do you agree with Archbishop Pell? I don't mean on everything, but do you think it is a good thing for the Church and the State to be separated?

BISHOP DEAKIN. Thank you for making the distinction. I appreciate it. Well, to take the Australian context, the Australian context really doesn't allow us to be fiddling around with developing even a substitute form of relationship between Church and State. Personally, I thought that the appointment of Archbishop Hollingsworth as Governor-General was a disaster. I think the total body corporate of Australia is going to pay for this, because it's forced the Prime Minister to act like a governor-general, and that shouldn't be. The Anglican Church is going to pay for it too, because it brought all sorts of skeletons that should never have been in cupboards in the first place. But there it all is. No, in a situation like this, certainly not. I can remember when I was young, Archbishop Makarious, a Greek Orthodox, was the saviour of some sort of parliamentary government in Crete. And if he hadn't been there, manipulating not just the political capacity that he had, but also the spiritual and sacred that he had, Crete (Cyprus) wouldn't be anything like it is today. So it depends on where you are, and how you look at just what it means. It's now our liberal democratic tradition that they should be separate. But what does it mean when we say they are separate anyway? Even in a secular society, is there in fact a substitution of the sacred symbols being exercised anyway? I think, for instance, Anzac Day is almost religious in the way in which one looks at it and how it's manipulated by the secular society. One could also put up a good case – without being flippant - for Australian Rules football. If people don't look for what is classically sacred, they look for a substitute. So it's a complex answer to what appeared to be a very simple question.

KEL DUMMETT. It's a complex issue. Professor James, is there anything wrong with separating the Church and the State?

PAUL JAMES. I'll actually give a simple answer to a really complex question. That is, Church and State are two institutions, which should be kept completely apart. To make a claim like that is not to talk about the sacred, because we are talking about institutional relations, and institutions with enormous power. When you are administering a nation state, you are administering it as a polity in relation to the people. Under those circumstances, it is the institution of the church, or any other institution, that should stay out of it. But the interesting thing for me is we are seeing a return of the sacred inside all of those institutions. Even in the Church we are seeing the sacred come back in, for moments. One of the people who missed out on that process I think was Bishop Hollingsworth. I think that he was more concerned to protect the institution of the church and his own reputation than anything about the sacred. And that's one of the things we see with George Bush at the moment. The evocation that's occurring of the religious – which I distinguish from the sacred. If we were talking before about the distinction between the institution and the sensibility or the ontology, then he evokes the ontology of the sacred, under a guise of religious evocation, which for me is entirely empty. So, in fact, the sacred may not be dead, but I think in our current culture, religious evocation doesn't mean that it's alive. For George Bush, at the end of his speech, before he invaded Iraq, to say 'the American people didn't invent freedom; it's God's gift to the world'. What he was doing was actually the hubris of standing beside the sacred, as somehow a handing over process was occurring. And he was deferring to the sacred. But the deference to the sacred doesn't occur in that manner. In the way we were talking about before, the sacred is the inexplicable relationship between things, not placing oneself in a moment to legitimise

one's actions through it. And therefore, you can have political and the sacred together, but you cannot have the church and state together.

KEL DUMMETT. Your response brings in this whole idea of the political discourse, particularly of activism, which is what we are here to investigate tonight, and to think about tonight. Particularly to deepen our activism in relation to West Papua, and to increase the awareness of what the role of the sacred is in western activism today. As you all know, half of the population of East Timor is Melanesian. Melanesia is indigenous cultures spread across the Pacific, where the sacred is still very important. Louise Byrne you were very active in Melbourne during the Timorese struggle for self-determination and independence. Do you feel that the sacred was prevalent in the political discourse of activists in Melbourne during this period of time?

LOUISE BYRNE. I think there was a sense in a lot of events that there were some sacred feelings. But they weren't part of the discourse. Most of our events were of a distinctly secular nature. We had lots of street demonstrations, and seminars, and Memorandums of Understandings with trade unions, and those sorts of things. Certainly, the Timorese, because of their political aspirations, went along with that. But, given a choice, they chose the Church; and they always wanted the Bishop – if he was too busy, we had to change days to ensure his presence. What I felt was happening was, we weren't listening closely enough to mostly unspoken things. You actually had to ask them indirectly about their sense of sacred. They didn't come out expressing it freely and saying 'No, let's not go to Parliament House, let's go to St Pat's instead'. They'd never say that. So you had to listen at this other level to pick that up. And I feel that if we had picked it up much more strongly, and encouraged them to develop a verbal discourse about; a description about it – which goes against what some people are saying here. But we're in the world of politics now, and its' hard-working politics. I think that if they had been encouraged to describe their sense of the sacred, we could have been forced to read it – even if we couldn't hear it. That would have helped things at independence time, when a whole lot of strangers came in with models to set up their political institutions and their policies. The Timorese were frustrated because they couldn't offer competitive alternatives. We hadn't helped the Timorese, or encouraged them to develop description about the sacred. We hadn't either investigated or analysed their sense of sacred, so it wasn't in our language either. So there they were, confronted with this huge bureaucracy, the United Nations and hundreds of development agencies saying 'well, this worked in Cambodia, and South Africa, and a hundred other countries, so it will probably work here as well'. And the Timorese objected, but couldn't object strongly enough, or present an alternative that the bureaucrats would or could accept. And behind the Timorese were western activists who had been there for fifteen or twenty years, and we weren't able to help them either. So I think this seminar is really important, in that however much we feel that we have a sense of the sacred, somehow in this awful world I feel compelled to develop some description of it.

KEL DUMMETT. Carmela Baranowska, you've made several films in East Timor. How did you express the sense of the sacred in your films?

CARMELA BARANOWSKA. I am totally unprepared for this question. I kind of disagree with what Louise said. Because I'm not Timorese, it's difficult for me to speak on this huge issue. I could make some general statements about the films I've made. I feel the sacred, for me, Carmela, from St Kilda, is too large, and I would prefer to hear Timorese speak.

KEL DUMMETT. Balthazar, do you agree with Louise? That the United Nations wasn't aware of the traditional sense of the sacred in East Timor? Did they ignore it?

BALTHAZAR KEHI. The United Nations, the westerners, came from a different perspective. Anti-clericalism, and anti-Church. And that I understand, because the Church has often abused its power. So they went to East Timor with this perspective. But the Catholic Church in East Timor is a different case. The Catholic Church won the hearts of the people because it responded to the needs of the people, of their liberation struggle. So there is a strong sense of respect for the Catholic Church. When came these international people and put aside the role of the church, it was quite painful for the people and also for the Church. During the occupation, the Catholic Church in East Timor defined itself differently to other Catholic churches in Indonesia. That's why it won the hearts of the people. Secondly, concerning the notion of the sacred – going back to my childhood – it is about respect for the other identity, not as an object to be destroyed - like the trees and the plants, and also human beings. In the rainforest, if one cuts a tree, there's respect, and a certain ceremony. When the tree falls down, you have to put a stone there. When people pass the tree – not jump the tree, it's a sign of respect. Then they sacrificed that tradition for the sacredness of the Catholic tradition.

KEL DUMMETT. Robert, do you feel that western activists ignore the sacred in their dealings with people in your country? And does it matter if they do?

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. Just to respond to what my colleagues have said here, the situation in the Pacific is totally the inverse to what it is here. In the Pacific, the secular is a dirty idea, and here it is a treasured honoured idea. There, the sacred is the key thing. So somebody like a Bishop in the Pacific would be a wonderful President, or a wonderful Governor-General. So, religious people are honoured and respected in the way that Balthazar mentions for East Timor. So the idea of separating the Church – you wouldn't want that – because the state without the church would be a place of liars and thieves and cheats. So you couldn't conceive of extracting the sacred idea - and that can be embodied in ordinary people, not necessarily the clergy. I agree with the distinction between the religious and the sacred and the institutions. It's probably the case in a place like Fiji that you couldn't find a cleric worthy enough to be, but if you did, people would think that was a wonderful idea that such a person was the president. So it runs in the opposite direction to the way that the western have pushed apart these ideas. So, no, you wouldn't want to separate church and state.

KEL DUMMETT. Jennifer, do you feel that western activists ignore the sacred in their dealings with people in Papua New Guinea?

JENNIFER MONDIA. Yes, because most of the nations in the Pacific are rated as Christian countries, after the colonisation and the missions went in. We are now looking to the cross. But previously, we were more spiritual. We had our spiritual beliefs, and our spiritual stories, and that was sacred. Moving onto an introduced religion. All of us are now Christians, and Papua New Guinea is a Christian country. In its policies it didn't allow for other religions to go in. Just in the past two years, I've heard that other religions have gone in, other than Christianity. You cannot separate church from politics - I fully agree with Dr Robert - because it started principally from our way of living during our time. It is a broad introduced Christianity, because we had an existing spirituality where we valued and respected things. People respect a tree that has been grown for a long time. If it were cut down, there would be tribal fights. I'm speaking for the highlands. They fight for women, who are the custodians.

They fight for the environment, the trees, or a mountain that they respect. Then Christianity came, and built on that foundation. Now, in the political arena we cannot do without it.

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. I think the Church in the Pacific is elevated above the secular, because the missionaries came well before the politicians, or colonisation. They were the first new idea, or the first introduction to the western. The fact that religious missionaries were there fifty years before the administration arrived meant that they were elevated in the order of things in those times. And that situation still continues. A minister of religion will have first place, before the politician.

PAUL JAMES. I think you have both been very much too easy on western activists and socially engaged researchers. So, because I am western and a socially engaged researcher, let me say so. I think that we have taken the sacred as a motif of colour, and we've put it into our particular engagements politically, and we've used it as a way of saying we are colourfully showing ourselves to be aligned with your political movement and your way of life. But we don't actually take it on at all. What we do is we put it in as a preliminary part of an occasion. We put it in as an area, which gives life and vibrancy to a meeting like this. We put it in as an activity, but we're actually waiting for it to be finished, we're waiting for it to be over, because it's actually a bit yucky to spend our time doing too many sacred things. Because it entails doing stuff that's uncomfortable for the secular. What it means though, if you start to think in that way, is that it becomes dead ritual. Just like religion becomes the dead sacred, it becomes dead ritual. And dead ritual actually undermines something much more fundamentally than ignoring it. What it does is give the impression it's still there, while totally undercutting it, and turning it into a Hollywood Disneyland approach to the other. What we are doing in effect is not recognising cultural difference in its depth. We're just simply taking the content of cultural difference, sticking it onto a podium, wearing its clothes for a moment, before going on to say you must therefore become a modern, rationale, bureaucratic state, organised along the lines of a parliament and democracy. That's the direction we're seeing a whole lot of countries going in. I think that, for example, the examples that Louise gave where they said it's been successful in a hundred different places– and I thought, those examples are the worst and most disastrous examples that we can possibly think of. I agree with Louise, that unless we can confront the other in its complexity, then we'll turn us all into western democracies. As profoundly important as Australia and the United States are, they are not the only ways of organising a polity.

KEL DUMMETT. So, in other words, we'll take it away from you, but we'll leave you with a token; a charade of what it was like.

PAUL JAMES. You can wear the clothes you want to, you can play a didgeridoo; at the start of a meeting you can have an evocation to landscape. Increasingly there is a sense in which people say 'let's recognise aboriginal sovereignty here' and then effectively it gets forgotten.

KEL DUMMETT. I'd like to continue with this critique of the role of westerners, particularly western activists in the Pacific. Maureen Powles, you've lived and worked in the Pacific for many years. Do you agree with what Jennifer and Robert were saying about the role of western activists when they go to Melanesian nations? Is that your experience?

MAUREEN POWLES. Yes, to a large extent I think that's so. The missionaries of course were the first NGO in the Pacific, and they certainly did not take a great deal of account of the

indigenous sacred. One notable exception would be Samoa. The Samoans grabbed Christianity and indigenised their church very early, and haven't been at the mercy of people who have insisted on the superiority of the Christian sacred. I think it's changing. One example would be Vanuatu, where twenty years ago the Presbyterian Church was still very, very Christian sacred, and now, is accepting; more than accepting and perhaps going more in the other direction. So I think that things are not quite as bad as they were. I think Paul is a little hard on European researchers and activists. I think many people genuinely want to try and accept the indigenous sacred as a meaningful entity. In any case, I think that local people are perfectly capable of looking after their own interests and taking things the way they would want them to go.

KEL DUMMETT. Mark, you're with the Fiji Australia Foundation. Do you have any comments to make about how western activism has embraced, or failed to embrace the sacred in Fiji or other Melanesian nations?

MARK SCHUBERT. I must confess that my experience with the Pacific is from my colonial upbringing, and I haven't been involved with too much activism. I'm not sure that a western activist can really take on the sacred as a Pacific Islander would, without, as some missionaries found in their own experience, without wanting to stay. The problem is, as many anthropologists find, and early missionaries found, it's very hard to withdraw. I agree with what Rob said – that one of the reasons the Church is so important is because it was the first experience Pacific people had of the West. I was in Port Moresby in 1979 looking for a house. It was a Sunday evening, and we were driving around, and it seemed to me that every possible brand of church was out that evening, having their hymn singing and speaking in tongues. My friend from Melbourne said it seemed as though the town was a religious smorgasbord. He was in fact right. I suspect that it is one of the ways in which people in the Pacific continue to engage with the west, engage with the modern. You can see it in the incredible circulation of people between different religious groups in their one life. For example, in Fiji, from Methodism to Adventism, from Adventism to groups called bible believers, and then perhaps onto the Anglican Church.

KEL DUMMETT. Tommy Latupeirissa, you are from Ambon in the Moluccas. Do you think that there is any sense of the sacred able to exist either for Christians or Muslims within the political framework of the Indonesian secular state?

TOMMY LATUPEIRISSA. Yes, we in the Moluccas, or Maluku, are Melanesian too. In the Moluccas, there are the Ali'furu people, the original people, and the Christians and the Muslims. Before January 1999 the three religions lived in harmony and were free to express their religion beliefs and practices. However, in 1999 the Indonesian state sent 10,000 Laskar Jihad to disrupt the relationship between Muslims and Christians, and to divide the independence movement. Four hundred churches and a number of Mosques were burned. Three thousand refugees fled to West Papua. More than 10,000 people were killed. After the Bali bombing, the Laskar Jihad organization left the Moluccas. Now Christians and Muslims are beginning to reconcile and refocus on our self-determination process.

KEL DUMMETT. Jason McLeod, you're also an activist, and recently returned from West Papua. How has the sacred fitted into your activism?

JASON McLEOD. I would agree with what Rev. Janet was saying, that either everything is sacred or nothing is sacred. For me, the sacred is what my life and activities revolve around. I

think I'm still learning a lot. I think it's about trying to make those values more explicit, and to try and more consciously choose what to affirm and strengthen, and then from that basis to try and enter into a dialogue with West Papuans. For instance, when I was in West Papua, you couldn't help but notice that this imaginary veil, which exists in the west between the secular and the spiritual, is not there. All of life is sacred and spiritual. You can see this in a lot of different ways. The Morning Star flag is an obvious example. In the highlands for example, where men still wear the traditional penis gourd, choosing to affirm indigenous values and tradition, and at the same time resisting the imposition of colonial values, and also resisting military operations which forced them to abandon wearing the penis gourds. But on the other hand, you also had younger indigenous activists – I don't know whether they were conscious of this or not – who saw wearing traditional clothes and the penis gourds as somehow dirty or primitive. They were abandoning that, and were really embarrassed when they saw older people upholding these indigenous values and traditions. I guess I'm at a point where I think that the role of western activists is to try and understand what our life role revolves around, what our activism revolves around, and to try to enter a dialogue with indigenous activists, and for both of us to try and affirm that which helps us live to more peaceful and just lives.

KEL DUMMETT. Many of you in the audience and in the panel are involved in various ways supporting the West Papuan struggle for self-determination. During the late 1940s and early 1950s the Dutch government was preparing West Papua for independence, which sadly never came. Henry Licht, your origins are from West Papua's former colonial power. Do you think Holland took account of the sacred during those preparations for independence?

HENRY LICHT. Yes, it's a good question. By the way, from the outset I would say that missionaries on the whole have done more harm than good. I'm happy to argue that one. Some time ago, I read a book by a popular Dutch journalist called 'The Century of my Father'. His father was a missionary in Indonesia before and immediately after the war. He also visited West Papua. Just reading that, I gained the impression that Dutch missionaries – while they tried to fuse and respect the local customs and myths - were, on the whole, paternalistic. I think they imposed a fairly rigid, or what I call Calvinist or Dutch Reformed Church values, on the local community. I'm not saying they didn't respect the local community. They also introduced some good things, like singing and health and education. But it was patronising and paternalistic. Now I think that sort of attitude lasted until the 1960s. Since that time, the Dutch social conscience has been pricked by their residual guilt of 350 years of colonisation in Indonesia. I think the Dutch mind has become very liberal. So I would say that since the 1960s the Dutch government and Dutch anthropologists who worked in West Papua, would have a much greater understanding and much greater respect for West Papuans, and would take a bit of a jaundiced view of Indonesia. Having said that, the Dutch are a very pragmatic people, and always have in mind the commercial interests of their own country. They'll back anyone who serves their commercial interests. So, I'm still a bit suspicious of the Dutch motive, having been born there. Now, in terms of the sacred, I think the Dutch conscience is very pluralist, and has changed quite dramatically in favour of toleration of West Papuans customs and so on.

KEL DUMMETT. We've heard from Jennifer and Balthazar about the importance of land to this concept of the sacred. Janet, how important do you think land is to this conversation?

JANET TURBIE-JOHNSTON. I don't know. Just give it all back to us. Ultimately, I think that is what is under all of this. The sense of how we relate to each other is very symptomatic, especially in this land, of how those that colonised or invaded this land related to the

indigenous people. Aboriginal people were very meditative, quiet, gentle people. We now know this. They were not a warring people, cutting each other's throats, stealing land and food from each other. But they were not heard at all. Any sense of who they were in the last two hundred years right up until 1967 – because we were still flora and fauna, animals and vegetables until 1967. So the whole of Australia was completely ignored. Australia that had existed for tens of thousands of years, for thousands of generations, was absolutely ignored. And the attempt was to wipe it out. Our colonisers and invaders saw the land as theirs to be utilised, to be turned into another form of Europe. We'll destroy the forest, because we need to bring sheep and cattle, which ultimately destroyed the land. We need to plant wheat, which also destroyed the land, and we need to plant pine forests, and English flowers and European trees. So in a sense, they completely missed the point, because ultimately they did not know what they were. They had no concept that they had any obligation to this land, to its peoples, to its trees, and to its waters. They came here obviously with no sense of obligation to their own lands and their own peoples. They came to this land, ignoring any sense of obligation to the impact of their activities. Not just as they were invading and murdering and slaughtering. But now, two hundred years later, when we're beginning to call this a nation-state, we have a politic of the superficial, of Hollywood film stars and sports stars. This is the value, which we imprint on the world, completely denying our obligations and responsibilities to the very thing that gives us life. For without the land we have absolutely nothing. And the ethos that we have developed is that we won't share it with anyone. So, we're allowing Asian nations to buy it up in great tracts, without any consideration that ultimately we are going to destroy it, and destroy ourselves. And the issue is that she will destroy us. Mother Earth that sustains us, that gave birth to us, and nurtures us, will allow us to die. Because it is not in her interest to sustain us. We're not unlike the dinosaurs. We've become a cancer, and a cancer that does not understand its obligations and mutual responsibilities to everything else that exists in this planet. So, in talking about land, I actually have to talk about what obligations and responsibility are. And that I think is the ultimate form of the sacred. There is not a step I can take, or a word I can say that doesn't have an impact somewhere. I am responsible for almost every breath I take. And let me tell you it gets hard to breathe in Melbourne sometimes.

KEL DUMMETT. Thank you Janet. I'd like to turn to Inotoli Shimon who is a Minister of the Church. Inotoli, as a person from Nagaland, you are very active in the Naga struggle for self-determination. Would you like to tell us about the connection between the land and the sacred for the Naga people?

INOTOLI ZHIMONI. Naga is a small corner of the world, and most people have never heard of us. But the British know us. We struggled with the British colonisers, and now with the Indian government. In my opinion, the sacredness that we presently have is a hand-down, an imposed sacredness. As you say, I am a Minister, but I am the first person to say that 99% of us are Christians, and Christianity came to us with a definition of who you are and what you do is all evil, so take this Christian culture. And Christian culture is a very western culture. Jason was talking about the young people in West Papua being embarrassed about wearing their own clothes. Our youngsters too are not going to wear our beautiful traditional clothes or maintain our traditions. So for us, to be human is to adopt the western cultures. In my opinion, the present sacredness that the Naga people hold, we should look at that sacredness with suspicious eyes. We need to re-define Christianity within our own context. As our sister was saying, we do have a strong connection to the land. We worship the trees, we respect human beings, we respect every living being. There is this good spirit, and bad spirit. We believe that everything we do, we are accountable for. That is the kind of community we are. Now, the land

has been taken away from us, and we have been dispersed by colonial processes. We have been deprived of our own land and our own rights, and don't know how to reclaim them and own them, because Christianity has replaced this owning with a superficial knowledge of forgiveness. I personally struggle with it. We do have this sacredness towards the land. The land gives us life. There was no question of money before. The land was where we lived, where we got our food from, and our sustenance. But now the land is being completely disregarded, and we are becoming more and more disconnected.

KEL DUMMETT. Robert, I know you have very strong views about the importance of customary ownership of land. Fiji is one country where customary ownership of land still exists. How important is this customary ownership of land to the governance of Fiji?

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. The word 'ownership' is one we use, but we actually have no word for ownership. I don't think any anthropologist or official, from the beginning of colonisation in 1875 to independence in 1970, sorted out exactly what is whose land. And the fourteen tribal divisions that exist in Fiji, and the Matagali clan system that exists, is not as clear cut or as obvious as people think. Because there is no boundary; no idea of a fixed peg in the ground. So the boundaries that exist, exist out of respect for each other's place. There is this sense that even when you are planting your crops, there is no one in any village who can tell you that 'that is your plot'. Your plot has to be negotiated with regard to everyone else' plot. And to plant too closely to somebody else is an aggressive thing. Respect is about a certain distance. That is grounded in the idea of Fijianness. There is no understanding that land can be sold in the western sense, forever and permanently alienated. There is a sense that it can be sold for a little while until I want it back, but not permanently alienated. So what is feared there is that secular western style democracy is in fact a threat to this indigenous idea of Fijian-ness. Because it brings with it a set of principles, rights, human rights, values and so forth that might undo this vague but really strongly held notion of what is ours. So that's part of the problem where land is in relation to politics in Fiji, and in relation to other peoples. It's not going to be easily solved. But I think Canberra and London - or Sydney originally and London - could have worked better through the Churches to bring about an understanding of reconciliation between the values that are now considered Christian. Those values that you enumerate as good secular values are regarded in Fiji as good Christian values. People haven't always appreciated the language that is used; how good western ideas are seen through Christian filters. I can't stress strongly enough how infused they are, and wound together in Pacific thinking. And Fiji is an example. So to come along and just plonk down a parliament, and one right one value. If that isn't your reality every day, if your day-by-day reality is Church and Chief, then it is a ridiculous idea to imagine that people will just simply come along and say 'sure, one vote one value', even if it means alienating the land. It can't happen that way.

KEL DUMMETT. I'd like to ask Guy Powles, who has also lived and worked in the Pacific. I can imagine there is a lot of pressure from western countries like Australia on Pacific nations to abandon their customary ownership of land. As a legal person with a lot of experience in the Pacific, how do you respond to what Robert has said? Why is it that western countries want to see customary ownership of land abandoned? And are they being successful in the Pacific?

GUY POWLES. In answer to the last question, I don't think they have been successful. I should go back to fill in a little with regard to the Pacific Islands generally. What Robert has said about Fiji is of course echoed in Pacific countries generally. By and large they are very fortunate compared to Aboriginals in Australia, in that ownership of land is guaranteed under their

constitution. Part of the difficulty is, I think, this guarantee has allowed people to become a little complacent. Although they will tell you that they have inherited their land from their ancestors and that they are holding it in trust for their descendents. There is still great temptation to do business with people who have money to offer; who would, for example, grant you a loan over your land, perhaps a mortgage or some sort of security, which would make the difference between being able to send your children to be educated, perhaps overseas, and not being able to do so. In other words, it's the drive for economic development.

A push from so many sources? You mention the Australian government. That's only one. The World Bank and a number of NGOs and aid donors are telling these countries that the path forward must be economic development. The economic planners, who write these reports that are handed to governments, spell out precisely this message, that if you want to get ahead you have to give security over your lands; security for loans for development. I have just been looking at the fate of some of the attempts to introduce the registration of customary ownership, particularly in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. What happened was that the economic planners got the ears of the draftsmen who wrote up legislation that was passed in the parliament of these countries in the past twenty years, providing for a system of registration of title in customary land. Now that's almost a contradiction in terms. Individuals can't be registered, as you know, because land is owned by the group, so there was a suggestion that there could be group registration. But these pieces of legislation were passed, and in some cases there were attempts to implement them, but it is very interesting that none of them have been put into effect. There is a very solid sense amongst the citizens of these countries that if title is to be registered, if your names go down on a piece of paper in relation to your land, then sometime, somebody is going to want to sell that piece of piece, and with it will go the right to the land. So it is fair to say that by and large the people of the South Pacific countries are holding the line, although it is a very hard one to hold in the face of such enormous pressure.

KEL DUMMETT. Well, we've heard a lot this evening about the role of the sacred in indigenous societies, and in activism, and in governance, and a recognition of it that is needed in western societies in particular. Sometime in the not too distant future, a nation of Melanesian people less than two hundred kilometres from our shores will become a new nation-state. I'm talking of course about West Papua. So to round up, I'd like to ask each of the panellists what is important to you in the creation of this new nation state just to the north of Australia?

JENNIFER MONDIA. They need to be identified with their kind. I think they are Melanesians, because their values are similar to the Melanesian values. In the Pacific, we have Micronesians, Polynesians, and Melanesians. West Papuans are identified as Melanesians. So the values, the cultures, the belief system, the wisdom, and the knowledge – they are all similar. They need to be valued, and if they are valued they need to be given independence.

ROBERT WOLFGRAMM. I think if West Papuans can learn from elsewhere in the Pacific, Fiji could serve as an example, where secularists pushed the church out, and tried to create a church-state divide in the western model. I think Fiji people still resent that, and are still trying to work out how they fit the two together. By way of example, if you look at the submissions that were made in 1995 to the present constitution, all the submissions made by indigenous Fijians pushed that unity of Christianity. They used the language of Christian state, which of course sets alarm bells ringing, because it creates the impression of a church state, or some of the Ayatollah states. But when you examine what they actually mean by that, they

mean something closer to what we would call a Christian democracy. That is, respect for other peoples religions and so forth. That idea got absolutely no recognition, except to be adopted as a nominal statement in the preamble to the constitution. If western advisers come in and give advice to West Papua as to how to go about framing their political system, they should try to find ways to bridge, or to bring Christian values – if that's what the Papuans want - and to find the language to put it into their structures, and to work with, not against that tradition. I mean, I think missionaries made mistakes, but they were so effective, that I'd go so far as to say that in the Pacific, Christianity is our ethnicity. Cristos is our ethnos. So, because it's that forceful and that engrained in us, when an idea comes along that seems to want to pull us apart, then of course we resist this. So I think that West Papua, whoever is going to shape that place, has to recognise that engrained Christian character of the people.

JANET TURBIE-JOHNSTON. I was just thinking of an incident many years ago, when some intuitive Anglican priest brought elders of northern tribes and southern tribes together for a discussion. And of course up popped the Anglican archbishops and bishops, who were forced to sit outside on the first day while the elders gathered and talked. So you had bishops and archbishops pacing up and down, wondering if the elders wanted to talk to them… "surely they want to talk to us now … surely it's time for us to go in". As each day passed, the elders gathered and the archbishops and the bishops were left outside. Every time one of them went to the toilet, it was "Do you want to talk to us now? Surely you are going to talk to us". It was only on the last day that they eventually allowed them in, and made them sit down and shut up. I actually think that any indigenous culture that is developing its own sense of identity coming out of colonisation – I loathe the word nationhood – needs to spend a whole lot of time looking at the mistakes that have been made.

I can't support the mission stuff Robert. It's been horrendous here in Australia. It may be some of the life rafts that we cling to for a sense of identity at the moment. But we need to allow West Papuans who are small enough, to allow their elders and their chiefs and their women to spend time talking and thinking and dreaming. And westerners need to get away and leave them alone, so that they can sort out a sense of who they are in all of this. Because the very thing that we're fighting for is our identity; most of us have lost it. My great-grandmother on my mother's side was taken off a mission and married to a white man, so I would be born, and now I have to prove that I am indigenous, because I don't have the colour. Nor do I have the community connections. So, in some ways assimilation was extremely successful. It did what it had to do. The stress of my family as they try and struggle with their identity. My children. My sister, who was taken from my mother. My mother, who died never having reconciled that. I think these are the stories that the West Papuans … I know that they have experienced the same kind of terror, the same kind of imposition, the same kind of constancy of western mindset … need to take their time to understand who they are as a collective before it allows anybody else to impose upon it. I think that's got to be the foundation of its own self-governance. It's own story time. It's own dreamtime. And out of that, then build relationships with those who are going to…. I mean, teaching western institutions to shut up and move away. The task for us all is to get them to back away. Get the schools to back away. Stop dividing us up. Let us get a sense of who we are, and where we want to be in the world. Let us get a sense of where our feet want to stand. Give us back some of our land here in Australia so we can get a sense of that. But the West Papuans need to hear their own story first, in relationship to all that's gone on. But the mistakes that have been made are there to be learned from.

PAUL JAMES. Mistakes are clearly there to be learned from, and you can learn from them by an enormous amount of work and collectively thinking about the possibilities of nation-states. I remain agnostic on the question of nation-state. It's actually self-determination, which I think is the key question. Becoming a nation-state solves absolutely nothing. It becomes the means by which you are simply moved into another stage of having to think about who you are. So therefore I agree with Janet. But on another point I don't actually. I think that there is no starting point. There is no point of going away and starting again with another identity, and working out who you are. You are already caught into a world, a melange of contradictions and possibilities, and the negotiations are going to occur both internally and across the boundaries of difference. And therefore, I think, yes, you should shut the bishops out and the politicians out for a period. Then you want to also draw them in and talk to them. You want to have both of those things happening along side each other.

To talk about some of the other issues we have been talking about in relation to West Papua. One of the questions we talked about was land tenure. You could set up the most perfectly generated modern land tenure system, which negotiated current tribal boundaries, and put modern constraints around the ways in which those tribes currently relate to each other; and you would actually destroy the system. Robert's metaphor for describing it was absolutely perfect. That is, it's a negotiated relationship over identity and the relationship to others. So land and land tenure is built into, not a modern fixing of its boundaries, but rather into – and this is where you need a modern democracy of the pluralist kind - where the constitution recognises forms of land tenure other than property and modern law. Once you did that, it would enable people not to have to sign documents, but it would set the terms and conditions by which people came together regularly to negotiate relationship across the boundaries. Tribes change. Peoples change. Land tenure change. Once you fix it on a certain group of people … group rights are actually no different to individual rights when they are framed in a modern way. They actually just set up the conditions for the group to decide to rationalise its own process of alienating itself. What we are doing in the current situation is making life worse for ourselves by not recognising that cultural difference.

If that's a metaphor for most of the political arrangements for West Papua, we would need to think about a system, a layered system, which recognised cultural difference of modern law and tribal law. It would have to recognise the role of history, and the role of history in the projection of the future. It would have to say that the Church has been there – but it's not to bring church and state together - it's to bring people who have a sense of the sacred into the state. So I think it was quite reasonable to appoint Hollingsworth as Governor-General of this country, as long as he wasn't a person of the church as institution at the same time. You cannot take the culture out of somebody and put them into an instrumental state, and think you have actually made life good. In fact all you are doing is the opposite. Having peoples' cultural backgrounds recognised as they enter into a state - because we do need a state to adjudicate a territory the size of Papua. But what kind of West Papuan state would that be? It might be very different, even to the West Papuans projection of their present. And it might be different to the East Timorese projections of its own sense of itself, which at the moment, to be a bit controversial, seems to be heading towards the classical nation state crisis.

KEL DUMMETT. Hilton, would you like to comment? How do you follow on from that?

HILTON DEAKIN. Well. There's not much room is there? I mean, I agree with everything that has been said, except the bit about Hollingsworth. When a man wants to wear his bishop's ring as Governor-General, he is still an Archbishop, and therefore he shouldn't have been there.

If I can add a little bit if I may. One of the dynamics in all this sacredness business is that the sacred captures not just the moment. It's not just a thing that happens wherever you are – there's a tree over there, there's something else there. It also collects together a memory that goes back. It's a way of a people living through – call it dreaming, call it what you like – but a collective memory that goes back through time, it goes back through the dead. Land becomes sacred, because dead bones are in it and peoples' spirits are in it. One of the very precious things that we have to do if we want to dialogue with the people in West Papua – I've done it a little, and every time I come up against this sense of the sacred. They'll call it maybe the biblical God, and evoke that in some way or another. It may be talking about this respect for one another. But it isn't just respect for one another – you can do that in an atheistic club. It's more than that. It's a dynamic beyond that which becomes the sacred. If we are going to become - and hopefully we are - supportive in some way of what might happen in West Papua towards self-determination, the sort of thing that we think they might do would have to be some sort of polity that has a subscription to universal human rights. I wouldn't be terribly interested in doing too much if that wasn't one of the goals. The Prime Minister of Malaysia says all the time, that's a western concept, but it's a universal one, and it's an indivisible thing. If we can't work towards something like that, then I think we're in a great bother.

There should be another dynamic in this, and I think I would pick this out as my contribution. I don't think we should ever stand up and say 'We know the answer to your problems. We're providing you with the solution. We've got the money. We've got the expertise. Here are all the solutions'. People in West Papua – I'm sorry – are going to ask for schools. But what sort of schools will they be? What sort of curriculum development do they want? Will it be western style? Or will it be one that will have room in it for the sacred? The dynamics of it, the technology of it – these are another matter. They want health. They want it. And we can provide something of it. But, again, providing for all the sensitivities of the sacred. So, the dynamic would be, that we would go in, or be with them, walk with them, as partners. Not people who've got something to give to you. If we see one another as partners "I'm here. Can I help you? Can I help you towards your self-determination? Can I help you towards a sense of personal and communal integrity? Freedom. Or what ever it is you're looking for". And then, listen. Don't tell. Just listen. And when you've finished listening, remember you haven't found the answer yet, so you've got to listen again. We're very good at listening for five minutes and then going away and setting up a very big marvellous program. You've got to go back and listen, and listen, and listen again.

Let me say one more thing. What is happening with West Papua, for those people who have for years been fighting for another cause, all sounds damned familiar. There is so much of what's going on that is as familiar as it used to be. And how are we going to cope with that as well? It doesn't matter what good intentions we have, we've got to take that into account as well. And that makes us political with very certain political processes. I'll say no more.

JUDY ADDISON. In the 1980s I completed an arts degree in "Asian Studies" which incorporated the theme of "tradition vs modernity". A key response to this theme was "the political" and debates around what the nature of that "political" should be. Then, I spent a lot of time exploring the "political" in terms of social change and agencies of social change. Now I

wish I had been more willing to examine my sense of "sacred" at least as much as I examined my sense of "political"; and to overcome the fear of "sacred" in my secular society and so within me too. Because I've realised there is both sacred and secular in our society. I also think it's become pointless to deny the sacred in my society and its pointless to deny the sacred in other societies. Because the sacred will manifest itself in some way or the other anyway. Just as politics will. For example, I find the following quote relevant to my day to day work in health and community services:

> " If psychological contributions to physical health and disease are viewed with suspicion, the suggestion that the *soul* – the literal translation of *psyche*- might matter is considered downright absurd. For now we are getting into the mystical realm, where scientists have been officially forbidden to tread ever since the seventheeth century. It was then that Rene Descartes, the philosopher and founding father of modern medicine, was forced to make a turf deal with the Pope in order to get the human bodies he needed for dissection. Descartes agreed he wouldn't have anything to do with the soul, the mind, or the emotions- those aspects of human experience under the virtually exclusive jurisdiction of the church at the time- if he could claim the physical realm as his own." (From: *Molecules of Emotion*, Candace B. Pert PhD, 1997, USA. Research Professor, Dept of Physiology and Biophysics, Georgetown University, Medical Center, Washington D.C., where she also conducts AIDS research).

These days I find it important in my sphere of health and community services to actively try and balance these senses of "sacred" and "politics". To at least acknowledge that the two co-exist, rather than deny one or repress one or over-determine one over the other.