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RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS FOUND AMONG
CERTAIN NATIVES OF NEW GUINEA

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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Approved by: E. L. Zimmermann Advisor
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PREFACE

The writer of this paper has never been to New Guinea and therefore writes only concerning things others have reported. Men who have been to this last of the unexplored territories have written down their experiences and observations. It is from these writings and from various personal letters the writer has received from men who are doing mission work in New Guinea that the facts in this thesis have been drawn.

In 1947 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod began mission work in the Central Highlands District of this island of New Guinea. It is that work which has given the impetus to this paper, for without a good knowledge of the religions of the people one hopes to convert to Christianity, the task is made more difficult.

This paper, however, would be of no real value if it did not have a greater purpose in mind than merely listing the many and varied beliefs of the New Guinea native. As the reader learns of the fear in the lives of these people, as he sees how all of their faith and action is directed by Satan, as he notices the hopelessness of their entire life, may the fact that our Lord Jesus died also for these blind heathen and that they too must be brought to His love come to remembrance. If then these few pages bring one prayer

to the lips of a reader for the peoples of New Guinea, if it shows the great need there is for mission work among these people, then the writing has not been in vain.

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND PEOPLES

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE NATIVES AND THE TERRAIN OF THE ISLAND OF NEW GUINEA

More than 7000 miles southwest of the western coast of the United States, and just north of Australia, lies the great tropical island of New Guinea. New Guinea is second in size only to the island of Greenland, having an area of more than 310,000 square miles. Laid out on the United States it would reach from New York to Denver and is equal in size to the area of the New England states, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois combined. In all the world there is no other island like New Guinea. It is continental in its aspect, having high mountain ranges dividing it into north and south areas. These mountains rise to a height of 16,000 feet and are as rugged as any in the world.

The climate of New Guinea is tropical, and lush vegetation can be seen everywhere. There is probably no greater yearly rainfall found anywhere, which helps to account for the luxuriant growth. The mamalary life is very scant, but birds and reptiles abound. Nowhere else in the world are there as many different kinds of birds. It is virtually

an ornithologist's paradise. High in the center of the island there are plateau regions which have moderate climates and are sometimes given the name of "Land of Eternal Spring".

The exact population of the island is unknown, but the Australians estimate that in the eastern half there are over 1,050,000 natives.¹ The natives are made up of three primitive types: Papuans, Melanesians, and Negritos. They are all on about the same material level of development, late stone age and early iron age.² They live in communities scattered all over the island, and very seldom do anything individually. The average number of inhabitants of a village is between one and two hundred people. While the cultural level of these people is not very high, they do have a large number of religious practices and superstitions which are very interesting. It is this phase of native life that the body of this paper will describe.

The means of livelihood for the majority of the natives of New Guinea is agriculture with hunting and fishing running a close second. Though their culture is one of the stone age, many of these natives are excellent farmers and some have said that they could put our own to shame with their

¹Current Affairs Bulletin, (Sydney, Australia, Commonwealth Office of Education, Vol. 4, No. 4, May 1949).

²M. W. Stirling, The Native Peoples Of New Guinea (Smithsonian Institution War Background Studies), (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1943).

production and neatness. One must remember, though they are primitive, they are not stupid or unintelligent. Because of their great dependence on agriculture for food, much of their religion is connected with growing things.³

New Guinea is one of the last large areas of land to be explored and inhabited by white people. It was about 1895 that the German government first took an interest in New Guinea while looking for an island empire. Not to be outdone, the English and the Dutch also laid claim to the island. To avoid any friction the island was divided into three sections, the northwestern half to the Dutch, the southeastern quarter to the British and the northeastern quarter to the Germans. This arrangement continued until the end of the first World War when the German section was turned over to Great Britain by the League Of Nations as a mandate. The British Commonwealth turned it over to adjacent Australia, one of the Commonwealth members, to take care of. After the second World War it was turned over to Australia as a trusteeship by the United Nations through the Commonwealth. Since about 1946 the Australians have administered the two eastern sections as one, calling it the Territory of Papua and New Guinea as of 1949.⁴ In the remainder of this paper New Guinea will refer to this Australian territory.

³Ibid.

⁴R. W. Robson, Pacific Islands Yearbook 1950 (Sydney, Australia: Pacific Publications, 1950), pp. 287-336.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

No matter what people may say or think, the natives of New Guinea do have a concept of God. Often this concept is hazy and confused, but it is there. Senior John Flierl, who spent the greater part of his life in New Guinea, comments:

Anyone who believes that the natives of New Guinea have no religious conceptions of their own, that their heart and mind are like empty vessels that can easily be filled with Christian content, are badly mistaken.¹

That the knowledge of God which these peoples have is not of the true God is readily conceded, however, there is a chance that they once did know of him. There is a term in the language of the Kai tribe for God, though the people do not worship anyone by this name nor pray to him. "Malengfung" is the word. It means creator of the land or the world.² This indicates to some, who have studied the problem, that there once did exist at least a partial knowledge of the true God. It has all been forgotten long ago however, and now the people worship spirits of every type and description, including those of their ancestors.³ Generally the people are very pious and

¹John Flierl, Forty-Five Years in New Guinea (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, c. 1925) p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 52.

³Ibid.

use their spirit charms on every possible occasion to protect themselves from the evil spirits.

Along with a belief in spirits, there is a belief in the soul of man. This will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter. For now it will suffice to say that the natives believe the soul not only lives in a man's body, but in everything with which he comes into intimate contact, such as clothing, leavings at a meal, and excreta. From any of these an enemy could capture the soul of a man and harm him, even unto death. Natives are very careful, therefore, that they never leave anything of this sort around where others might find it.⁴ For this reason, sorcerers are people who are very much revered and feared.

All sickness and death, according to these people, is caused either by a spirit or a sorcerer. There is no such thing as a natural death.⁵ Because of these beliefs, whenever a man dies some one else is killed in revenge. Thus a bloody chain of murders is started. All this produces in the natives a dread fear of anything unusual and a mistrust of one another.

As with the majority of heathen peoples the world over, the natives of New Guinea practice a form of ancestor worship. The spirits they fear and try to placate are all thought of as being ancestors. Much is made of ancestors in connection with the Balum festivals, the tribal initiation of young

⁴Ibid., p.52.

⁵Ibid., p.53.

boys into the status of manhood.⁶ At this time much is made of the grandparents and great-grandparents of the initiates and many musical instruments producing shrill eerie sounds are used to indicate their presence. During this festival the boys are also circumcised, after having been taught a moral code vaguely resembling the Ten Commandments.⁷

Many of the natives also have a belief in demons which they call "puruduri". These evil spirits live in the bush on the mountain sides or in strangely marked stones. A traveler in the bush may be attacked and disemboweled by a "puruduri".⁸ Some of the natives today hold this to be a mistaken belief of their fathers; they claim it is only the regular ghosts who attack travelers.⁹

Strangely enough these people also have a system of spirits that the Christian natives liken to our angels. High in the sky dwell the "yailyagari". They are good beings and the ones who give rain. Nothing is known of their origin, but the way they cause rain is by splashing big sticks in the great lake in the sky.¹⁰ The "yailyagari" are not prayed to

⁶Ibid., p. 55.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Willard Burce, "Religious Beliefs and Practices at Irelya, New Guinea, as Reported by Natives", Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (November, 1950), 834-43.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

or worshipped in any way; they are merely there.

Many tribes have forbidden areas of ground which are fenced off and covered with bush and trees. In this space is found the fertility god of the tribe, the "yainanda". The "yainanda" is usually a stone of some peculiar shape, although it may also be a snake. Once a year, at the time of spring planting, the members of the tribe fix a time for once more obtaining the good will of the "yainanda". At this time the young men of the village go out and hunt opossum. When they have bagged a sufficient number, they return home and an opossum feast is held in honor of the stone. No women are permitted at this festival. The animals are roasted over a traditional spot inside the forbidden area, the "yainanda" feeding on the spirit and smell of the opossum and the men on the flesh. Then a libation of grease or oil is poured over the stone and it is buried until the next year. In this way these people try to insure good crops.¹¹

These primitive peoples also have concepts of a life after death. There is no clear distinction between a 'heaven' and a 'hell', but there are different places for people to go after death. Many speak of a tree which is invisible to people, in and around which the spirits of those having lived a good life dwell. If the wicked want to reach this tree, they must pass through much pain and trouble; but they can

¹¹Ibid.

eventually get there. This idea resembles the Roman Catholic idea on purgatory. The souls of women and children go to one spirit world, the souls of men who failed in life to another, the souls of murderers to another, the souls of those eaten by crocodiles to another, and the souls of brave and noble warriors to still another. In this way the life on earth does determine the life hereafter. Some believe that these spirits, except for murderers, can leave their spirit world and come back to haunt the living. Life in the hereafter is much the same as life on earth. It is somewhat easier however, because the discomforts of this present existence have been removed.¹² Wilson Wallis tells of the fate of murderers as conceived by the people of New Guinea:

In most portions of Papua, the spirit of a murderer is an outcast from the Abodes of other spirits. It dwells in a bog-like swamp from which it continually attempts to escape, and where it is sucked down until only the top of its head is visible. By extraordinary effort it struggles upward, but when about to step out of the bog, it is again sucked down. Arms, hands, and fingers grow long and gnarled like the roots of the mangrove tree. The spirit, in a vain attempt to escape, flings them over the surface of the swamp. Its cries and moans sound like the whining of the wind. Those who wish to assist it are afraid to approach. It rises and sinks forever, its eyes bulging under the agonizing struggle.¹³

To say the least, this shows the vivid imagination of these people, giving one an idea also of their system of merits and rewards.

¹²Wilson Wallis, Religion in Primitive Society (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co. C. 1939), p. 241.

¹³Ibid.

To sum up, then, the native in New Guinea generally believes in a god of some sort, life after death, spirits which invade the earth, ancestor worship, a human soul, a system of rewards and punishments and "black magic". Some of these will be explained more fully in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

SOUL AND SPIRIT

There are almost as many different legends and theories concerning spirits and souls among the natives of New Guinea as there are tribes. This chapter shall not even make an attempt to cover them all, but will rather confine itself to the most general and most interesting of these beliefs. At times various statements may seem contradictory, but that is only because of the conflicting teaching which one finds on the subject among the natives. Instead of presenting a unified picture, we shall have to take the subject piece-meal, for that is the way it comes.

As was stated in the first chapter, the natives do believe in spirits and they have a concept of a human soul. There is a definite separation in the mind of the natives between these two, i.e., the human soul and the "cemongo"¹, or ghost. It is believed that the soul remains within man, leaving only during sleep and at death. All souls are immortal and end up in a spirit world after death.² It is interesting that some natives believe the soul is made up of

¹Otto Hintze, "Newsletter from Yaramanda, New Guinea", dated March 11, 1949. Concordia Seminary School of Missions, St. Louis, Missouri.

²The New Guinea Handbook (Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1943), p. 360.

two parts, a long soul and a short soul. It is the long soul which leaves a man at night and can commune with friends and relatives. The long soul can get into much trouble and frequently does according to the natives. Any dream one might have is explained as the nocturnal wanderings of this soul. It leaves through the mouth, and if it fails to return before a man awakes, he dies. The short soul never leaves the body until a short time after death. While the long soul goes right to the spirit world, the short soul will remain about checking on its body and funeral, and taking care of whoever caused its death. At a death, therefore, care is taken not to offend this soul, which being unhappy because it is separated from its body, might harm one.³

Many of the natives also believe in the transmigration of souls. It is possible for a soul to pass into almost any of the indigenous animals and continue its life in them.⁴ Most tribes have their own special creatures into which the soul is supposed to pass, such as cassowaries, dugong or pigs. The natives will refrain from eating these animals which might be their dead relatives. For example:

In Simbang, a village at the mouth of the Bubui river in German New Guinea, there is a family who will not harm crocodiles, not merely because they fear the vengeance of the creatures, but also because they reckon crocodiles their kinsfolk and expect that they themselves will turn into crocodiles at death. As the

³Robert Lowie, Primitive Religion, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1948), p. 65.

⁴The New Guinea Handbook, p. 360.

head of the family, they recognize a certain aged crocodile, everywhere known as "old Buttong", who is said to have been born of a woman at Simbang. . . . if their neighbors at Yabim are so unfeeling as to kill a crocodile, the Bubi people protest against this outrage and demand satisfaction.⁵

Among other natives the cave-hunting swine are thought to be the final resting place of the soul. These natives will neither kill nor eat these swine. If one of these pigs breaks into their garden, they will do nothing to drive them out except to endeavor to appease them with coconuts and other articles of value.⁶ Again others believe that all the game in certain 'haunted' areas, usually dark and gloomy gullies, are the dwelling places of the souls of the dead. The owner of these lands may slay and eat the game if he first placates the spirit which dwelt in it.⁷ Very often disasters are blamed on the failure to properly appease the spirits. The souls of the dead are often appealed to for help, especially those of relatives, before fishing, fighting or hunting. These spirits are presumed to be friendly, but they may be evil as well as good.⁸ Some of the Yabim people believe that the worms and other vermin which infest their gardens are moved by human spirits. For this reason they will politely ask the insects to leave and go to the

⁵ James George Frazer; "Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild", II, 106, The Golden Bough. (New York: MacMillian Co. 1935.)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The New Guinea Handbook, p. 360.

village. "Ye locusts, worms, and caterpillars who have died or hanged yourselves, or have been killed by a falling log or devoured by a shark, go into the village".⁹

It was stated above that there is a belief in transmigration of the soul, yet there are some natives who do not believe in any such thing. These people have a belief in a type of hereafter in which the spirits live. After death the spirit of a young person, under forty, travels to the mountains and becomes one of the flickering shadows of shimmering light seen in the rank undergrowth. The spirits of people over forty also come to the mountains where they become a large fungus which is found only there.¹⁰ The natives will not step into such light nor touch the fungus. It is hard to determine whether the spirits are supposed to "become" fungus and lights, or only live in them. They are still able to return to their home village and "haunt" people, and yet they do not appear in these forms. The intention of the ghosts is always evil so these people will do much to appease them.¹¹

A spirit, according to the New Guinea concept, is not free from such earthly things as hunger. It is in a search for food that the ghosts work their evil deeds.¹² The food of the spirits is the spirit of any food the people of the

⁹Frazer, op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁰Robert Williamson, The Mafulu Mountain People of British New Guinea (London: MacMillan Ltd., 1912), p. 267.

¹¹Ibid., p. 269.

¹²Ibid.

area eat. When a man becomes sick, therefore, they know a ghost wants something to eat, for this is its way of asking.¹³ In order to determine which spirit wants which pig, an elaborate ceremony is performed. In the Central Highlands District, as reported by Missionary Otto Hintze, the natives use a spear to determine the spirit and the pig it desires. The name of a dead friend or relative is called, then the spear is stuck into the ground. If the spear comes out easily it was the wrong one. The process is repeated until the spear sticks fast telling them which spirit it is that is hungry. The whole thing is repeated for the pig the spirit wants. When this is determined the pig is killed in a special ceremony and the spirit eats the pig's spirit. Finally the family feasts on the flesh of the pig. This is a sure cure for all sickness and trouble.¹⁴

Besides spirits of the dead there are other ghosts in the religion of these natives. While these are not as greatly feared as the souls, they are respected and occasionally prayed to. Field spirits are invoked for good crops. Water ways also have their spirits as do certain strange rocks and trees.¹⁵ Every precaution is taken to treat these spirit

¹³Willard Burce, "Religious Beliefs and Practices at Irelya, New Guinea, as Reported by Natives", Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI, (November, 1950), 834-43.

¹⁴Hintze, loc. cit.

¹⁵Robert Lowie, op. cit., p. 60.

right and above all to leave them alone. Charms are used to protect one from them when traveling, especially in strange country.¹⁶

These other spirits are those who rule over love, madness, earthquakes and epidemics. Some of these spirits are even thought of as body snatchers. Some are very shrewd, and others are rather stupid; but all are rather easily fooled or deceived by human beings. The majority of these spirits have the power to take on human form and delight in seducing women, whom they then punish.¹⁷

A supreme being or god was spoken of in the second chapter. There it was stated that though these natives know of a god who created all things they do not worship him.¹⁸ Some natives, however, do pray to and sacrifice to an all-powerful creative god, called "Anuto" by some of the people and "Old Panku" by others.¹⁹ To this god is offered all the first fruits and the first food at banquets and festivals. Besides being the creator, he holds up the heavens with his head.²⁰

This chapter endeavored to bring together the beliefs of the New Guinea natives in things spiritual, but it only succeeded in showing the great diversity. In this connection it

¹⁶Robert Williamson, op. cit., p. 274.

¹⁷Robert Lowie, Op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

is well to remember that these natives have lived in almost entirely isolated groups for many centuries,²¹ In such circumstances it is well nigh impossible to have or expect unified belief.

²¹Willard Burce, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

SUPERSTITION

In dealing with a topic as broad as superstition, one could include almost everything in the religion of these natives. The intent of this chapter is not quite that broad. Hence the remarks on superstition are confined to those things which would come under the heading of charms, omens, and minor practices. Many of these beliefs and practices can be likened to our knocking on wood, throwing salt over the left shoulder, the seven years bad luck that is supposed to result from the breaking of a mirror, the fear of black cats, carrying a rabbit's foot or good luck penny, and other such notions which people of our land have.

Charms are a very important part of the superstitious beliefs of these island peoples. There are charms for every thing; success in love, averting illness and death, success in hunting or fishing, help in time of war, and just general good luck. These charms may be stones or pieces of bark or flowers and in some places even bones. They are most often carried in small charm bags and the owner never takes them off.¹ Charms are also used on inanimate things such as spears. A certain beetle is placed in the shaft of the

¹Robert Williamson, The Mafalu Mountain People Of British New Guinea (London: MacMillan, 1912), p. 235.

spear before the head is fastened down. It is supposed to make the spear head stick fast in the game it hits, just as the beetle sticks to a man's skin when it bites.² Another charm used is a fruit called by the natives "five corners". It is placed into a new canoe at its launching to "prevent accidents and ensure the bouyancy of the craft".³ Ginger planted in a new garden is supposed to give a good crop and keep out vermin.⁴ Still other types of charms are made out of the dead, both men and animals. The brains and other parts of a dead enemy's body is eaten to give one the strength they had.⁵ Again in certain parts of New Guinea:

. . . a man who has killed a snake will burn it and smear his legs with the ashes when he goes into the forest; for no snake will bite him for some days afterwards.⁶

Along with the belief in charms one notes that omens also play a large roll in the life of a native. If the omens are good, nothing can stop them; if they are bad, nothing can make them take part in the activity the omen is against. Flying foxes and fireflies are two classes of creatures which are

²James G. Frazer, "The Magic Art", I, 104, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1935).

³The New Guinea Handbook (Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1943), p. 365.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Frazer, "Spirits of The Corn and The Wild", II, 152, op. cit.

⁶Frazer, "The Magic Art", I, op. cit.

used as omens. They usually are bad ones, and anyone seeing either when starting on a hunting or fishing trip will turn right around and go back home.⁷ Among some natives a custom is followed while a part of the village is away from home to indicate how the journey is going, viz.:

. . . when some of the inhabitants have gone on a long journey, the people who stay at home engage in a Tug of War among themselves to determine whether the journey will be prosperous or not. One side represents the voyagers and the other side those who are left behind. They pull at opposite ends of a long bamboo and if the bamboo breaks or the side which represents the home people is obliged to let go, the omen is favorable.⁸

Very many other omens are believed by the various tribes in New Guinea, but to list them all would be impossible and impractical.

Along with a belief in charms and omens many superstitious practices take a very great part in the life of these peoples. Some of these practices have their counterparts in Western culture, as was indicated at the beginning of this chapter. Others are only minor practices which have no deep religious significance, but which are interesting. In some parts of New Guinea "small boys are beaten lightly with sticks during December 'to make them grow strong and hardy'".⁹ Some superstitious belief also seems to be connected with the practice

⁷Williamson, loc. cit.

⁸Frazer, "The Scapegoat", 178, op. cit.

⁹Ibid., p. 265.

of permitting only women to work in the gardens once they have been planted.¹⁰ Of course, this might be an invention of the male population to keep from doing the hard and tedious work of gardening. The Yabim people, to continue in gardening, have a practice of offering up a sacrifice of sage-broth and pork to the spirits of the former owners of the land, when the taro plants begin to leaf up. This is to make the former owner 'kindly disposed' to the fields and not harm the crops.¹¹

The natives also have practices which they use to ward off danger while they are on a trip. In speaking of a trip with some natives Baron Macclay reports the following practice on approaching a strange village.

. . . one of the natives who accompanied him broke a branch from a tree and going aside whispered to it for a while; then stepping up to each member of the party, one after the other, he spat something upon his back and gave him some blows with the branch. Lastly, he went into the forest and buried the branch under the withered leaves in the thickest part of the jungle. This ceremony was believed to protect the party against all treachery and danger in the village they were approaching.¹²

Other practices of similar form are found among almost all the tribes of New Guinea. A very interesting custom is followed by mothers after childbirth to insure the future of the child. The navel string of the infant in some places

¹⁰Frazer, "Spirits of The Corn and of The Wild", I, 123, op. cit.

¹¹Ibid., p. 229.

¹²Frazer, "Taboo and The Perils of The Soul", 109, op. cit.

is carried by the mother on the net bag which holds the child. This way no one can harm it through the navel cord. Other natives plant the navel cord of a male child with a coconut or bread-fruit tree, in order to make him a good climber and help his growth in life. The navel cord of a girl is thrown into the sea when the mother goes fishing the first time after childbirth. This will make the girl a skilful fisherwoman. There is even a modern innovation to this custom. A young man considers it a must, along the coasts, to take a trip in a white man's boat. Without such a trip he has no social standing and is not thought of as desirable to the girls. To insure this the mother will tie a boy child's navel cord to the anchor chain of some passing vessel. This will make a future voyage certain.¹³ The natives also believe that evil can be gotten rid of by sending it out to sea and passing it on to someone else. Thus during small-pox epidemics among the coastal natives:

. . . they used to make a little model of a canoe with masts, sails, and rudder. Then they said to the small vessel, on which the spirit of the small-pox was supposed to have taken his passage, "Bear him away to another village. When the people come forth to draw you ashore, give them 'the thing' and do to them what you have done to us." Lest the spirit should get hungry on the voyage, they put some taro on board, and to make sure of getting rid of the disease they wiped their hands on the tiny canoe, after which they let it drift away. . . and said to each other, "We have had enough of it. The sickness has happily gone away."¹⁴

¹³ Frazer, "The Magic Art", I, 184, op. cit.

¹⁴ Frazer, "The Scapegoat", 188-89, op. cit.

Through these and other practices and beliefs of superstition the native tries to make himself feel secure.

CHAPTER V

MAGIC AND SORCERY

In speaking about magic in New Guinea, a differentiation shall be made between 'black magic' and other kinds. Actually it is all the work of Satan, but only that type of magic which seeks to do harm to someone else will be called 'black magic'. In general there are two types of magical practices in New Guinea; sympathetic magic and imitative magic.¹ All the ceremonies and rituals, no matter what their ultimate purpose, fall under one of these two. In both of these types there is a similar mode of operation, the difference lies in the subject being effected and the exact method. In almost every case of magic being used, there is the recital of a fixed formula, a certain mode of procedure and the sorcerer or magician is under obligation to follow a set pattern of behavior.²

Much of the magic practiced in New Guinea is beneficent. Through this type of magic the natives try to insure good crops, successful hunting and fishing trips, control of the sun and the rain, and safety in various walks of life.³

¹E. W. Pearson Chinnery, Anthropological Reports, Nos. 1, 2 (Melbourne, Australia: Government Printer, c. 1925), p. 159.

²Robert Lowie, Primitive Religion (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 1948), p. 58.

³Chinnery, loc. cit.

To perform these works sorcerers are used in most instances, but each native can work certain spells for himself. The 'nepu', or sorcerers, are greatly feared and respected for their powers of good and evil. Very often these men are the chiefs of their individual tribes. Some of these men are supposed to be able to control the sea and make it stormy or calm at will, others can make the rain fall at any time they desire, still others have power over growing things and also over hunting and fishing, and all do have the power of sending sickness and death to their enemies.⁴ There are cases where one man claimed all of these powers, but most often the magicians specialize.⁵

The action of an entire group of people is often needed in a magic rite. We do not only refer to dancing and other acts of worship, but to the life of the people of a village while some of their numbers are away hunting, fishing, fighting, or just traveling. To give the best examples of this, we shall quote a few of these practices from "The Golden Bough":

While the men . . . are away hunting or fishing; fighting or any long journey, the people who remain at home must observe strict chastity, and may not let the fire go out. Those who stay in the men's club-house must further abstain from eating certain foods and from touching anything that belongs to others. A breach of these rules might, it is be-

⁴James George Frazer, "The Magic Art", I, 337-38, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1935).

⁵Ibid.

lieved, entail the failure of the expedition.
 . . . when men are gone on a long journey, the wives and sisters left at home sing to the moon, accompanying the lay with the booming music of gongs. The singing takes place in the afternoons, beginning two or three days before the new moon, and lasting for the same time after it. If the silver sickle of the moon is seen in the sky, they raise a loud cry of joy. Asked why they do so, they answer, "Now we see the moon, and so do our husbands, and now we know they are well; if we did not sing, they would be sick or some other misfortune would befall them".
 . . . as soon as a vessel that is about to sail for a distant port has been launched, the part of the beach on which it lay is covered as speedily as possible with palm branches, and becomes sacred. No one may thenceforth cross that spot till the ship comes home. To cross it sooner would cause the vessel to perish.⁶

There are very many more such magical practices which we could enumerate, but this gives a good idea of the general magical actions of the natives. One other instance proves very interesting in this type of magic. At times certain people are chosen, usually young girls, to keep special rites during the absence of a part of the tribe. If the trip is to be a safe one, these girls must remain in a special room, leaving only when absolutely necessary. They must sit still and straight, looking neither right or left lest they disturb the balance of the ship. Neither can they eat any sticky food, for that might "clog the passage of the boat". When the boat is supposed to have reached its destination, they can relax a bit, but they can never eat any fish that might have a sharp bone of sting, such as a ray-fish, "lest

⁶Ibid., p. 125-6.

their friends at sea should be involved in sharp, stinging trouble".⁷

Many natives, when traveling home towards the end of day, will seek to hold the sun up by a magic spell. The man wishing to get home before the sun sets, will take a piece of string and make it into a loop. He then sights the sun through it, ties it in a knot and throws it behind him saying, "Wait until we get home, and we will give you the fat of a pig".⁸ Other natives will simply say, "Sun, do not hurry; just wait until I get to the end.", and the sun is supposed to wait.⁸ Another form of sun magic consists of displaying a type of gum and a piece of pumice. Since water has no effect on these two, it is also believed that the rain cannot effect them and so must stop. Thus this charm brings the sun out.⁹

There are also many spells which one can use to cause it to rain. Most of these are imitative magic. A sorcerer seeking to make it rain will repair to the forest, where he will fill a special cup with the juice of a certain vine, until the cup overflows. The more it overflows the heavier the rain will be. Thunder is made by knocking stones together or shaking them in a dried skull; lightning is produced by tearing a certain leaf.¹⁰ But this is not the

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 317

⁹Chinnery, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁰Lowie, op. cit., p. 55.

entire spell, the wizard must mutter these words over his cups:

The cuttle-fish was devoured by the shark, whose inside turned quite black. The hen and the cassowary were traveling in a boat, but the cassowary, angered because people despised him, destroyed the boat. The hen flew into a village, which was called "Hen", and a giant tortoise carried away the cassowary to Buso; when it got to the big grassy plain of Bahom, the cassowary turned into a rock, which is still standing there.¹¹

This tale has next to no meaning, but it is prescribed. He must also go through certain tasks and abstain from certain foods. Until it rains he cannot chew betel, he cannot work, he must rub his hair and face with black dirt, and he must take a daily bath in the sea or some nearby water. By doing all this the magician is sure to make it rain.¹² If a man is successful in this 'racket' his fortune is made, for the people will pay him well in food and other valuables. If they don't pay him, he can change the weather until they are forced into it.¹³

There is one more general type of magic that is not properly 'black'. This has to do with the planting and growing of food, and the health and welfare of pigs. To give the best insight into this phase of New Guinea life, we shall quote a rather long, but very interesting, section from "The Golden Bough":

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Chinnery, op. cit., p. 162.

To procure good crops of the taro and yams, on which they depend for their subsistence, the Kai resort to many superstitious practices. For example, in order to make the yams strike deep roots, they touch the shoots with the bone of a wild animal that has been killed in the recesses of a cave, imagining that just as the creature penetrated deep into the earth, so the shoots that have been touched with its bone will descend deep into the ground. And, in order that the taro may bear large and heavy fruit, they place the shoots, before planting them, on a large and heavy block of stone, believing that the stone will communicate its valuable properties of size and weight to the future fruit. Moreover, the great use is made of spells and incantations to promote the growth of the crops, and all persons who utter such magical formulas for this purpose have to abstain from eating certain foods until the plants have sprouted and give promise of a good crop. For example, they may not eat young bamboo shoots, which are a favourite article of diet with the people. The reason is that the young shoots are covered with fine prickles, which cause itching and irritation of the skin; from which the Kai infer that if an enchanter of field fruits were to eat bamboo shoots, the contagion of their prickles would be conveyed through him to the fruits of the field and would manifest itself in a pungent disagreeable flavour. For a similar reason no charmer of the crops who knows his business would dream of eating crabs, because he is well aware that if he were to do so the leaves and stalks of the plants would be dashed in pieces by a pelting rain, just like the long thin brittle legs of a dead crab. Again, were such an enchanter to eat any of the edible kinds of locusts, it seems obvious that locusts would devour the crops over which the imprudent wizard had recited his spells. Above all, people who are concerned in planting fields must on no account eat pork; because pigs, whether wild or tame, are the most deadly enemies of the crops, which they grub up and destroy; from which it follows, as surely as the night does the day, that if you eat pork while you are at work on the farm, your fields will be devastated by inroads of pigs.

However, these precautions are not the only measures which the Kai people adopt for the benefit of the yams and the taro. "In the opinion of the natives various games are important for a proper growth of the field-fruits; hence these games may only be played in the time after the work on the fields has been done. Thus to swing on a long Spanish reed fastened to a branch of a tree is thought to have a good effect on the newly planted yams. Therefore swinging is practiced by old

and young, by men and women. No one who has an interest in the growth of his crop in the field leaves the swing idle. As they swing to and fro they sing swing-songs. These songs often contain only the names of the kinds of yams that have been planted, together with the joyous harvest-cry repeated with variations, 'I have found a fine fruit!' In leaping from the swing, they cry 'Kakulili!' By calling out the name of the yams they think to draw their shoots upwards out of the ground. A small bow with a string, on which a wooden flag adorned with a feather is made to slide down may only be used when the yams are beginning to wind up about their props. The tender shoots are then touched with the bow, while a song is sung which is afterwards often repeated in the village. It runs thus:

'Mama gelo, gelowaineja, gelowaineja; kiki tambai, kiki tambai.'

The meaning of the words is unknown. The intention is to cause a strong upward growth of the plants. In order that the foliage of the yams may sprout luxuriantly and grow green and spread, the Kai people play cat's cradle.

. . . By spinning large native acorns or a sort of wild fig they think that they foster the growth of the newly-planted taro; the plants will 'turn about and broaden'. The game must therefore only be played at the time when the taro is planted. The same holds good of spearing at the stalks of taro leaves with the ribs of sago leaves used as miniature spears. This is done when the taro leaves have unfolded themselves, but when the plants have not yet set any tubers. A single leaf is cut from a number of stems, and these leaves are brought into the village. The game is played by two partners, who sit down opposite each other at a distance of three or four paces. A number of taro stalks lie beside each. He who has speared all his adversary's stalks first is victor; then they change stalks and the game begins again. By piercing the leaves they think that they incite the plants to set tubers. Almost more remarkable than the limitation of these games to the time when work on the fields is going forward is the custom of the Kai people which only permits the tales of the olden time or popular legends to be told at the time when the newly planted fruits are budding and sprouting." At the end of every such tale the Kai storyteller mentions the names of the various kinds of yams and adds, "Shoots (for the new planting) and fruits (to eat) in abundance!" "From their concluding words we see that the Kai legends are only told for a quite

definite purpose, namely to promote the welfare of the yams planted in the field. By reviving the memory of the ancient beings, to whom the origin of the field-fruits is referred, they imagine that they influence the growth of the fruits for good. When the planting is over, and especially when the young plants begin to sprout, the telling of legends comes to an end. In the villages it is always only a few old men who as good good story-tellers can hold the attention of their hearers."

Thus with these New Guinea people the playing of certain games and the recital of certain legends are alike magical in their intention; they are charms practiced to insure good crops. Both sets of charms appear to be based on the principles of sympathetic magic. In playing the games the players perform acts which are supposed to mimic or at all events to stimulate the corresponding processes in the plants; by swinging high in the air they make the plants grow high; by playing cat's cradle they cause the leaves of the yams to spread and the stalks to intertwine, even as the players spread their hands and twine the string about their fingers; by spinning fruits they make the taro plants to turn and broaden; and by spearing the taro leaves they induce the plants to set tubers. In telling the legends the story-tellers mention the names of the powerful beings who first created the fruits of the earth, and the mere mention of their names avails, on the principle of the magical equivalence of names and persons or things, to reproduce the effect.

. . . besides the prayers which they address to the spirits of the dead for the sake of procuring an abundant harvest, the Yabim utter spells for the same purpose, and these spells sometimes take the form, not of a command, but of a narrative. Here, for instance, is one of their spells:

"Once upon a time a man laboured in his field and complained that he had no taro shoots. Then came two doves flying from Poom. They had devoured much taro, and they perched on a tree in the field, and during the night they vomited all the taro up. Thus the man got so many taro shoots that he was even able to sell some of them to other people."

Or, again, if the taro will not bud, the Yabim will have recourse to the following spell:

"A muraena lay at ebb-tide on the shore. It seemed to be at its last gasp. Then the tide flowed on, and the muraena came to life again and plunged into the deep water."

This spell is pronounced over twigs of a certain tree (kalelong), while the enchanter smites the ground with them. After that taro is sure to bud.¹⁴

Thus we see what a great part magic plays in the life of these people.

Rev. A. C. Frerichs of the American Lutheran Mission in New Guinea tells of a sorcery burning ceremony which took place at Raipinka in June, 1947. Among the charms and magical instruments given up and destroyed at that time were: the male and female stones to be planted with yams, the bark of the "Korokina" tree used to plant with yams, the bulbs and lillies used in raising hogs, the snake tail charms used for seducing women and the "Gase" roots used in abortion. For these people Christ had replaced their magic.¹⁵

Along with the beneficent magic which we have been discussing, the natives of New Guinea have much "Black Magic". These people believe so firmly in the power of sorcerers and enemies to harm them, that they live in constant fear of this type of magic. This fear of being harmed by magic is

¹⁴Frazer, "Spirits of The Corn and of The Wild", I, 99-106, op. cit.

¹⁵A. C. Frerichs, The Strong Arm of Magic (article sent to E. C. Zimmerman for KFUD radio broadcast, St. Louis, Missouri).

one of the reasons these people have isolated themselves from one another. The most acceptable means of using this evil magic is to have a wizard take care of it for you, but there are some types which any one can use.

The majority of the rites of 'black magic' are used to destroy one's enemies and to get revenge for a wrong that was done to you. Of this type of sorcery there are many different kinds; we shall discuss only a few of them. In the Central Highlands district, the most practiced sorcery is "kongi". To perform this a man must be a specialist. He will sit in front of his house until he sees the enemy coming, he will then bow his head and mumble an incantation after which he gazes steadily at his enemy and spits. In two months the enemy is supposed to die.¹⁶ Another type which can be practiced by anyone is called "chira". The tools for this spell are the shoulderbone of a pig and a fierce hatred. A curse is invoked over the bone in the enemy's name, then it is crushed. With that the enemy is supposed to die.¹⁷ In a method similar to this one bark is used in place of the bone. Again the enemy's name is called over it and it is split in two. As the bark dries out the enemy will die.¹⁸ Another type of sorcery known as "malagori" uses a secret

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 840.

substance. No one knows what it is. A man who uses this to get rid of his enemies climbs a tree till he sees him coming, then he gets down and motions towards the victim with the secret material. If he motions hard, the person will die at once; if his motion is easy, the enemy will get home before dying.¹⁹

There is a type of sorcery in New Guinea which is practiced only by special people, who have usually inherited their power,²⁰ which is sure to get results. This form of voodoo as practiced by the wizards of New Guinea, requires some article of clothing, some food leftovers, or some waste products of the body in order to be effective.²¹ For this reason natives are very careful to destroy every thing with which they have come into contact, that no sorcerer have the power to harm them.²² There are many ways in which the victim can be destroyed by these men, but the usual ones seem to involve making a packet of the substance which has a part of the soul on it, mumbling a special formula and finally drying the packet over fire.²³ This will bring illness and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Chinnery, op. cit., p. 159.

²¹ Otto Hintze, "Newsletter from Yaramanda, New Guinea," dated March 11, 1949. Concordia Seminary Mission School, St. Louis, Missouri.

²² Frazer, "The Magic Art", I, 213, op. cit.

²³ Chinnery, loc. cit.

sure death to the victim unless the wizard is bought off.²⁴ The mere knowledge of being under such a spell will frighten most of the natives enough to kill them, but if that does not work there are secret poisons which are sometimes applied.²⁵

In the Central Highlands of New Guinea, there is also a belief in a type of 'black magic' known as "tromogai", or poison. Ordinarily it is practiced by the old and "big" men of a tribe. The hair and decaying juices of a dead man are mixed with a few other ingredients and are slipped into the food of some enemy or rubbed on his skin. The man is then supposed to die. Death can be avoided, however, by letting blood from the stomach if the "tromogai" was eaten and from the shoulder if it was rubbed on.²⁶ The people of the region are very much afraid of it and will not go near anyone whom they know as a practitioner of this evil art. It is quite conceivable that these people have an actual knowledge of poisons which they use in these magic rites of death. The fact that there are natural poisons has no effect on the thinking of the natives, they are still afraid of sorcerers. They have seen people die in pain and have heard a sorcerer say that

²⁴Lowie, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁵Willard Burce, "Religious Beliefs and Practices at Irelya, New Guinea, as Reported by Natives", Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (November, 1950), 841.

²⁶Hintze, loc. cit.

he caused it. The two facts add up to the native and show him that the sorcerer is a man to be feared and respected. The eating of spoiled food or poison is not the cause of death to these people, but the power the sorcerer has over the spirits. That very knowledge is sometimes enough to kill a man who knows a sorcerer has put a spell on him. Among these natives we can truly see what the Second Commandment means by witchcraft.²⁷

²⁷ Burce, op. cit.

CHAPTER VI

TABOO

Taboos are found among all the peoples of the world, civilized or primitive. A taboo is a restriction placed on certain acts or certain people by religion, society or some other authority. For example, the intermarrying of the white and the black race is taboo in the southern part of our country because of social pressure. In a land like New Guinea taboos are also found on marriage, friendship, social position and many such things. The difference there lies in the fact that almost every taboo is connected with some religious ceremony or belief. A few, however, are strictly on the social level. In discussing taboo among the natives of New Guinea a little of both types will be included, for each affects life in its own sphere.

Basically four classes of taboo are found among these natives; those dealing with gardening, hunting and fishing; those concerned with childbirth and the ever awesome concept of becoming a man or a woman; those concerned with marriage and the relationships in a family; and those which have to do with war and bloodshed. An attempt shall be made to give good examples of each of these and to show just how they work.

Among many of the natives, those people who are working in

the fields will not eat pork. To do so would invite disaster, for pigs are the worst enemies of the crops. The natives believe that the dead pig in the stomach of a worker would invite the live pigs to come and destroy the crop. For that reason, then, pork is taboo to them.¹ Among many tribes on the coast, the preparation for fishing is long and very elaborate. Two months before the season starts a holy man is picked by the tribe. If he keeps all the taboos well and does the right things, the season will be a successful one. If he breaks taboo, they will have no luck. While the nets are being made, he must live apart from his family and especially his wife. He can only eat roasted bananas after the sun has gone down. Every sundown he goes to the feeding place of the dugongs and bathes. As he is washing himself he throws certain things into the water to charm the fish. In this way the whole tribe can prosper.² In a similar way, the magician who readies things for the hunt must abstain from relations with his wife for at least a month before the hunt. Neither can he eat any food cooked by any woman, if the hunt is to be a success.³

When a woman has given birth to a child in New Guinea, she has a difficult time because of all the taboos inflict-

¹James George Frazer, "Spirits of The Corn and of The Wild", II, 33, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1935).

²Frazer, "Taboo and Perils of the Soul", 192-3, op. cit.

³Ibid.

ed on her. For about a month she cannot cook food, even for herself, and she cannot handle the food she eats. Someone must feed her unless she uses sharpened sticks as forks and eats that way.⁴ Among other natives where the woman is taboo after childbirth, she may not touch anything because it too becomes taboo. Thus if she cooked on a fire it would be taboo to everyone else, even for warming themselves. She too will use a long fork to pick up her food, but after she has picked it up, she is permitted to use her hands. When she wants a drink, a cloth is wrapped around the 'cup' she uses and she pours the drink into her mouth without it touching her lips.⁵ In other parts of New Guinea even a woman with child is taboo. She may not plant crops or go near them. If she did pigs would eat up the crop or it would fail.⁶

The taboos concerning family ties and the names one may or may not use often lead to severe language problems. Perhaps the best way to show this taboo and all its implications is to quote a short section of "The Golden Bough", viz. :

In German New Guinea⁷ near relations by marriage, particularly father-in-law and son-in-law, as well as brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, must see as little of each other as possible; they may not converse together and they may not mention each other's

⁴Ibid., p. 147-8.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Frazer, "The Magic Art," I, 141, op. cit.

⁷Now an Australian mandate and part of the Territory of New Guinea.

names, not even when these names have passed to younger members of the family. Thus if a child is called after its deceased paternal grandfather, the mother may not call her child by its name but must employ another name for the purpose. Among the Yabim, for example, . . . parents-in-law may neither be touched or named. Even when their names are borne by other people or are the ordinary names of common objects, they may not pass the lips of sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. Among the western tribes of British New Guinea the principal taboo . . . concerns the names of relatives by marriage. A man may not mention the name of his wife's father, mother, elder sister, or elder brother, nor the name of any male or female relative of her father or mother, so long as the relative in question is a member of the same tribe as the speaker. The names of his wife's younger brothers and sisters are not tabooced to him. The same law applies to a woman with reference to the names of her husband's relatives. As a general rule, this taboo does not extend outside the tribal boundaries . . . when members . . . are away from their own territory, they are no longer strictly bound to observe the prohibition. A breach of the taboo has to be atoned for by the offender paying a fine to the person whose name he has taken in vain. Until that has been done, neither of the parties concerned, if they are men, may enter into the men's clubhouse. In the old times the offended party might recover his social standing by cutting of somebody else's head.⁸

Thus we can see to what extreme the natives carry their taboo. In some places, in fact, the names of the dead are taboo because saying the name may call the spirit back. Even if the name is one of common usage it becomes taboo and a new one is made to take its place. Thus when a man died with the name "Hornbill", a new name, "The plasterer", was adopted for the bird.⁹ Because of this practice many words are lost and the language is in a constant state of flux making it difficult

⁸ Frazer, "Taboo and The Perils of The Soul," 342, *op. cit.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 361-2.

to learn and to put it down in writing.

Of all the taboos among the natives of New Guinea, those dealing with war, cannibalism and killing are the most interesting. In many parts of New Guinea a man is forbidden by taboo to eat the flesh of a person he has killed.¹⁰ Others can eat that flesh and any other as long as they perform certain rites. Among many of the tribes men who have killed an enemy are considered unclean and must shut themselves in their homes for about a week. They cannot have intercourse with their wives or friends and cannot handle food. They can only eat vegetables cooked in special pots, lest they smell blood and die. This continues until the new moon.¹¹ Other killers have even more elaborate rites to perform. Having killed a man, a native of these tribes must cleanse himself and his weapon and then take a special seat in town until a house is prepared for him. No one can go near him except a few small boys. He has a very light diet for a few days. On the third day he makes a new perineal band for his loins. Then dressed up in his best outfit and armed to the teeth he parades through the village. In the meantime a kangaroo has been hunted down and the spleen and liver rubbed over the man. After this he goes to the water and washes himself standing with his

¹⁰M. W. Stirling, The Native Peoples of New Guinea (Smithsonian Institution War Background Studies), Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1943), p. 20.

¹¹Frazer, op. cit., p. 167-70.

legs spread. All the young warriors swim between his legs to get some of his strength. The purification is almost over now and so after a few small rites and poundings the killer can return to a normal life.¹² Basically this describes the taboo over against a man who has killed. There are minor differences from tribe to tribe; but the concept of it is the same, the main purpose of the murder taboo being to protect the killer from the spirit of the one who died.¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

BECOMING A MAN

The initiation into manhood is probably the most frightening and at the same time the most anxiously awaited happening in the life of a New Guinea boy. People may think the initiations of our college students are 'rough', but they are nothing in comparison with these. Aside from all other differences the initiation of the New Guinea youth is a religious ceremony. This chapter will briefly describe what happens to a boy at this time of his life. For this information the writer is deeply indebted to Robert Lowie whose book, "Primitive Religion", was his main source.

The name given to the festival is "Balum", so called after the horrible demon which is reported to devour the boys at this time. It seems like a trick the men play on the women, for they inform mothers their son has been eaten and only for the price of a pig will he be given back. Naturally the mother uses her best pig to buy back her son. Circumcision is also an integral part of this ceremony and the scars of the operation are explained by the 'demon-eating-them' story. If a boy should happen to die because of infection, the death is also passed off in this way.¹

¹ Robert Lowie, Primitive Religion (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1948), p. 66.

During the entire "Balum," which lasts from three to five months, the boys are not allowed to see their mothers or families. They live in large houses which are set aside for that purpose. These are usually in a walled off area of the jungle. All during the ceremony not only the boys, but all the men taking part, live by a very strict set of rules. There are many things they do not eat or drink, and above all they are continent in sexual matters.² Also while they are secluded the boys are instructed in all the legends and practices of the tribe. They are given lessons in hunting and warfare and above all are taught endurance.³ Some of the tests they are put through are a cause of much pain and discomfort, such as receiving beatings and being drenched with urine. The idea is to give them self-control along with everything else.⁴

When the circumcision and the big feast that follows has been completed the boys rest for a month or two in the ceremonial houses. During this time they are instructed further and above all are sworn to secrecy. If the truth should ever get to the women a most enjoyable 'racket' would be lost.⁵

This in general sums up the initiation into manhood. There is no like ceremony for girls, they just become women naturally.

²Ibid., p. 67.

³E. W. Pearson Chinnery, Anthropological Reports Nos. 4 and 5 (Canberra, Australia: Government Printer, 1924), p. 60-2.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Lowie, op. cit., p. 70.

Bullroarers and other instruments of noise are used for effect, but outside of that they have no special significance.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 67.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Lest anyone get the idea that the natives of New Guinea are unimaginative and incapable of developing new religious thought, this chapter shall relate a few of the world's very latest cults which have their origin in New Guinea. Since the coming of missionaries and the word of God, Satan could not depend on the old beliefs to damn men. He therefore gave impetus to several new sects which could better lead the natives away from the true God.

Already in 1911 a native in New Guinea founded a cult known as "Baigona". He claimed to have met a snake on the top of Mt. Victory. It told him the facts of life and gave him the rules of conduct which led to the forming of the "Baigona" cult.¹ (The reader will notice that a snake is still being used by the Deceiver.) In this cult all snakes are named "Baigona" and are to be respected and loved. A native must welcome all snakes and not kill or eat any of them. From the snake the taboo was passed on to all animals which might house a human soul. The founder instructed others who became the priests of the cult. They practiced healing and sorcery and forced payments out of the other natives who were afraid

¹Wilson Wallis, Religion In Primitive Society (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., c. 1939), p. 305.

of them and their leader. Because of the horrible paroxysms they produced in their patients, the cult was suppressed by the government. These fits seem to be caused by emotional upset, though the healers may have a knowledge of things which they use to produce these seizures. The cult did not stop completely, however, but still practiced some in secret.²

After the "Baigona" cult, another one of a less radical nature appeared. In about 1917 the so-called Taro cult began. This cult was begun by a man who claimed to have the spirit of the Taro. He received instructions from these spirits concerning rites which would insure good crops. Since the rites were easy and agreeable and also played on the materialistic nature of the people, the cult was a success. As it became popular, however, it changed a bit. From the worship of the Taro it passed on to worship of the dead, this is considered as an influence of the "Baigona" cult. The cult is now one of fertility and of the dead. The Taro men also do some healing. It is supposed to work the same for raising sick people as for raising crops.³

Perhaps the most interesting of all these cults began in about 1940 and is known as the "Cargo" cult.⁴ One might

²Ibid.

³Ibid., pp. 306-7.

⁴Friedrich Walter, in Evangelical Mission on the Admiralty Islands (Schooley's Mt., New Jersey: The Mission Home Eben-ezer, Inc., 1951), p. 13.

claim this cult as being the very latest thing in the religious world. Early in the last world war (II) a native named Baliau was found in the jungle half starved and nearly dead. When he got back to civilization he began to tell of the vision he had from the spirits. The people were to destroy all the old things they owned and the spirits would supply them with new possessions. Thus motorboats would be had instead of canoes, steel tools instead of stone and fine houses instead of grass huts. Naturally the people were drawn to this new teaching. In 1944 when the Americans built a base near these natives and they saw all the goods pour in they were sure their ship had come in. When they did not receive the goods, they blamed "the cunning white man" and therefore they hated him.⁵ In 1946 this cult attracted many more natives because of the materialistic promises. They planned to get the paradise the missionaries spoke of, not after death, but in this life.⁶ Many of the natives destroyed their goods, but no reward came. Baliau is an able man, however, and his promises keep up the hopes of the natives.⁷

The cult had some trouble in 1948 when a young man had his brother kill him to make the "Cargo" come quicker. The Australian officials did not see eye to eye with the natives and the brother went to prison.⁸ Since that time Baliau has

⁵Ibid., p. 14.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 13.

⁸Ibid.

not promised as much and has not set a definite time for the "Cargo" to come. He claims, that when all the people join, the promise will be fulfilled. At present there are about 3000 adherents.⁹ Baliau's word is law to them and he does rule them well. The people now live in organized villages in which they all do the same thing at the same time. A guard is set over them to see that they obey all the rules and to punish them if they do not.¹⁰ Some of the natives believe so strongly in the coming "Cargo", that they have built a huge pier to receive it.¹¹ This cult is spreading because of its great appeal of a promised life of luxury. The natives want what the white man has and now they believe it does really belong to them. Satan has done his job well.

⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid.,

¹¹Ibid., p. 17.

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CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY

In this brief paper a vast topic has been covered from the most primitive and animistic of beliefs to the very latest practices stressing materialism. One must realize that much has been left out as far as detail is concerned, but the entire field has been discussed sufficiently to give a good overview of the religious practices of the New Guinea natives. The classifications as found in this paper are the writer's own and are only meant to be a help in studying the problem connected with the religious life of these people. In the life of a native there is no sharp line dividing one belief or practice from another, and even many of the reports which the men who have been to New Guinea have brought or sent back have no set order for classifying the religious matters of the natives. If anyone has a different order of classification therefore, the writer has no quarrel with him. The field is broad and there is much room for speculation. Some may even include cannibalism as a religious practice, but to the writer there are not sufficient religious implications in this custom to include it in this classification. The writer used the above order merely because it seemed the most obvious to him.

The belief in and the fear of ghosts and spirits, superstitions, taboos, black magic and cultism have the natives of

New Guinea in their grip. These people can hardly make a move without one of the above mentioned religious practices being a definite part of their action. At every turn of their life, they are confronted with these fears and terrors. They cannot free themselves from this web. It draws them ever tighter until at last they are destroyed by their own practices or become destroyers through them. On every hand in New Guinea these religious practices are life. One cannot escape them. Therefore they are very important for the correct understanding of the natives.

In looking back over this brief survey of the religions and religious practices found among peoples of New Guinea, then, one thing becomes evident, namely, that a satanic power has them in its grip. These people know no real hope or joy, and even their modern cults point to nothing more than materialism and selfishness. They have fallen into the same error that is found in all false religions, viz., dependence on man and what man can do for himself. The natives of New Guinea practice this in a crass form, but all who are not followers of the Lord Jesus have made the same mistake.

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