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Dear Co-worker:



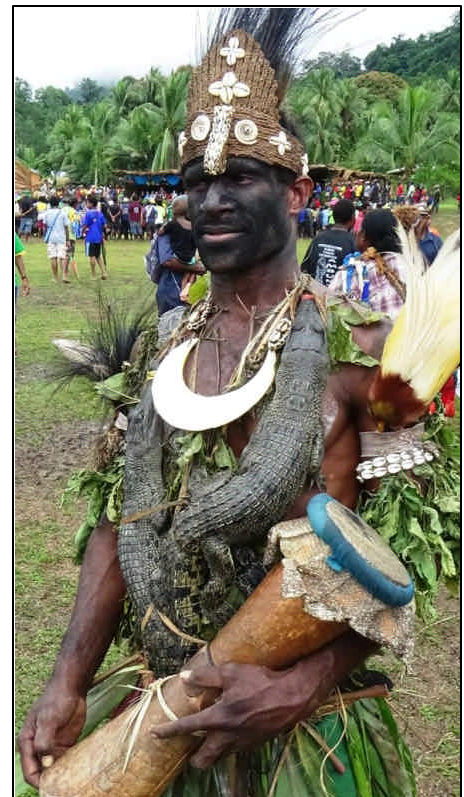
Getting a ride on the
lawnmower

We've mentioned before that it falls to PIM to be involved to some extent in worldly affairs (though not being of them) while trying to fulfill its mission. Through the years we've found it's well to be aware of local customs, beliefs, pursuits, cults, and their activities. Knowledge has its place, according to the book of Proverbs, which enable the faithful to avoid the pitfalls of living. Doug relates some of the worldly activities he observed in the Sepik region recently that speak to the need of a constant and faithful witness to the truth.

Last week Ambunti presented considerable singing and dancing. Catholic believers carried a wooden cross between villages. [The Catholics came to the Sepik before World War II.] The cross was supposedly able to travel in water by itself and pull people along. One bystander, however, saw and said that it only moved along by some swimmers. On land, it was carried by four running men. People on the road scrambled to get out of the way as it was carried. Purportedly, the men were being spurred by the spirit of the cross. Near PIM's compound, a large crowd followed trying to get out of the way when the men abruptly changed or reversed course due to what the spirit was telling them. Many of the people were singing Christian songs largely known by most of the local churches. The crowd went around the airstrip and other parts of town and then abruptly dispersed when the cross left.

One of the government workers was asked what he thought about what was going on. His reply, "This activity had come about from a proclamation by the Pope. It was not to be questioned." One wonders, did it actually come from Rome or was it something others invented? In any case, such speculation was not welcomed.

Others had their own opinions. One pastor was maligned when he stated publicly that this type of activity looks similar to sorcery activity in some of the villages. In his particular tribe men would take a section of bamboo and put cowrie shells inside and use the device to determine the secrets of others and make havoc with this kind of sorcery. Another person upriver had a similar argument about the cross business. When he was young his father used sorcery which he claimed could make his canoe move faster than others through the water. He claimed his canoe could point out a person in a nearby village who had special items hidden in his house that resulted in some deaths in the village.



Live crocodile necklace

The annual three day Crocodile Festival, sponsored by the government to promote the cultural heritage

and increase tourism, began on Friday. Thirty two village groups participated by displaying their traditional “singsings,” customary songs and dances. I noticed about 25 tourists and many locals from other parts of the province in Ambunti viewing the goings-on. Booths made of bush materials by local women and others at the town market were selling their variety of home-made clothes. Then the rains came on Saturday dampening the mood and muddying the five dancing fields.

Sharply striking my sensitive ears the rhythmic musical chants rose and fell in modulating pitches. The rhythm was accompanied by the beating on several kundus. These are drums made with lizard skins stretched and tightened over hollowed out bits of log. Sea shells rattling on anklets made their input to the noise of the dance along with the output from blowing into conch shells. Others had produced a rack of bamboo tubes cut to various lengths to produce different tones. Of course, all the participants were costumed and painted with feathers, grass skirts, leaves, woven shell mats, pig tusks, and/or various types of seeds for necklaces or other attachments. One enterprising fellow had two small crocodiles wrapped around his neck with mouths kept shut by rubber bands. I suspect that though all was traditional, the dressing up is more modest than what was done in the past.

In earlier times the ancestors expressed the culture through their songs and dance, now called singsings. They were sung to supplicate the spirits to win a fight, have bountiful gardens or success in hunting, getting the consent of a woman or protection from spiritual powers, or simply to celebrate for success in some venture. The attitude apparently was if they sing the right songs, do the right things, then blessings came from the spirits.

Whether these animistic rituals contribute toward opening the doors for the reception of the gospel or close them, one can only speculate. Surely, trying to live in obedience to Scripture leads to prosperous living, materially and spiritually. In any case, New Guineans who turn to Jesus reject the rituals and tend to wholly accept the whole counsel of God. They never participate in the *singsings* because they do not wish to be affected by the error and fruit that accompany the singing and dancing.

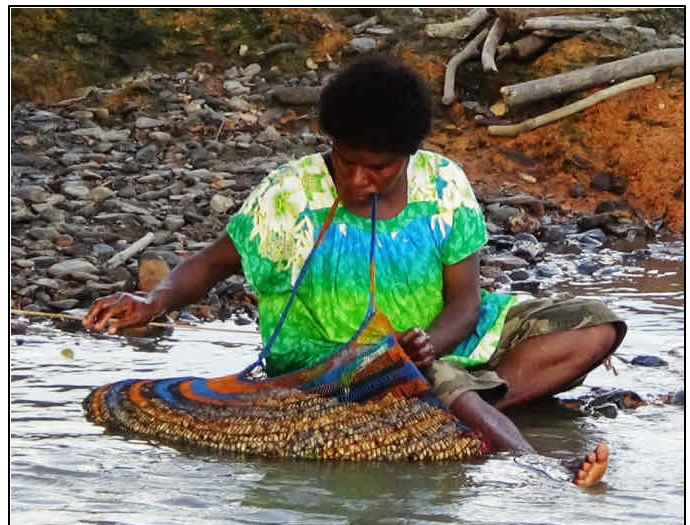
Animism is not a national religion like Shintoism of the Japanese and other cults which ensnare those caught up in it nationwide. Animism takes on many different forms and varies from tribe to tribe and village to village and for this very fact would tend to eliminate barriers to the truth.

Many thanks to you who work with us to promote obedience to God’s Word. We are most grateful for your prayers and support.

In His grace,

Orneal Kooyers

Photos by Doug Heidema
Format by Michelle Hawkins



Washing peanuts