
Perception of Religious Leaders on the Preamble and Section 45(1) of the Papua New Guinea Constitution

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Abstract: This study examines how Christians and non-Christians perceive the Constitution's Preamble and Section 45(1) regarding religious rights. It explores whether the Preamble contradicts or supports Section 45(1). Additionally, it identifies constitutional issues that might conflict with religious practices. The research employed an interpretivist paradigm and a mixed-methods approach to collect and interpret data. The researcher gathers insights from thirty-five religious leaders across three highland provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG): Jiwaka, Simbu, and Eastern Highlands. The findings indicated that the Preamble, which declares PNG a Christian country, conflicts with Section 45(1) of the PNG Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion along with rights related to race, color, sex, gender, and place of origin. The study recommends legislative and policy reforms concerning constitutional and religious affairs. Proposed constitutional reforms include revising the Preamble to promote inclusivity by emphasizing shared values such as love, forgiveness, righteousness, and peacemaking; implementing a guided democracy; enforcing accountability among politicians; and reviewing policies related to gender equality. The recommended reforms for religious affairs encompass developing a national policy, organizing inter-denominational forums, registering religious groups, and screening leaders to ensure adherence to moral standards, all aimed at promoting inclusivity and ethical integrity in PNG.

Keywords: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), National Goals and Directive Principles (NGDP), noble tradition, cultural context, religious context, religious principles, Christian principles, Judaism, Christianity, Islam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study took place in PNG, a diverse Pacific nation with over 800 tribal societies, each possessing unique languages, customs, and governance systems (Waiko, 1997; Kari, 2012). Historically, Great Britain and Germany

colonized PNG, which was later administered by Australia, gaining independence in 1975 (Solon, 1990; Onagi, 1998). It is culturally rich, with traditional education passed down through gender-specific institutions rooted in kinship systems and religion deeply integrated into daily life through over 750 belief systems that emphasize the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds (Aerts, 1998; Mantovani, 1984; Bazzynu, 2001). Politically, PNG has evolved from a kinship-based governance system to a constitutional democracy, influenced by Melanesian values and the Westminster system, although debates about its legal sovereignty persist (Kari, 2012). The study examines the potential conflict between the constitutional Preamble, which affirms PNG as a Christian nation, and Section 45(1), which guarantees religious freedom, in light of the country's growing religious diversity. It questions whether the Christian declaration conflicts with the right to religious liberty, seeks shared religious principles that align with both sections, and aims to inform policies for national unity and inclusive constitutional interpretation, addressing tensions in PNG's pluralistic society.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study, grounded in an interpretivist approach, examines how individuals construct meaning through symbols, language, and interactions within specific cultural and social contexts, highlighting that reality is intersubjective and context-dependent. It employs a mixed-methods design, combining surveys using Likert scales with semi-structured interviews to collect perception data from thirty-five religious leaders across various Christian and non-Christian faiths in the PNG Highlands (i.e., Jiwaka, Simbu, and Eastern Highlands provinces). Quantitative data were analyzed statistically using Excel, while qualitative insights from interviews and document reviews were content-analyzed for themes and patterns. Ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality, were rigorously upheld, with approvals obtained from relevant institutions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 35 participants—religious leaders from five Christian denominations (Catholic, EBC, Lutheran, Nazarene, SDA) and two non-Christian religions (Islam and Judaism)—across the three provinces of PNG's Highlands region, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants rated statements on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and strongly disagree), with responses later grouped into 'agreement' and 'disagreement,' along with individual 'Not Sure' responses. This study organizes its findings into three sections, aligning with the main research questions as shown in Figure 1 below. The first addresses PNG's cultural and religious contexts, the second explores perceptions of the Preamble and Section 45(1), and the third examines shared religious principles across faiths. Each section combines survey data and interview insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual landscape, as well as relevant legal and cultural issues.

3.1 Section 1: PNG Cultural & Religious Contexts

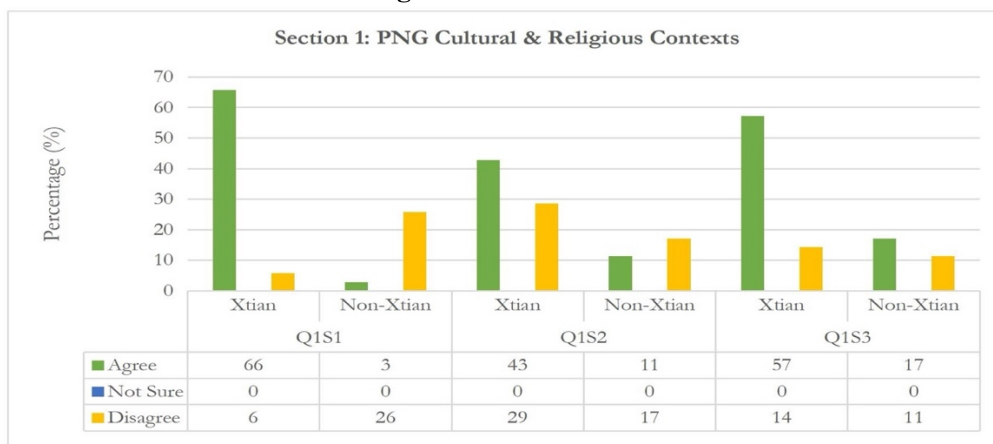


Figure 1: Vector graph illustrating the percentage of responses from section 1, indicating the proportions for three statements in response to Question 1.

3.1.1 Religious Principles that support PNG's Noble Traditions

The study revealed that 69% of both Christian and non-Christian participants believe that religious principles support PNG's noble traditions, such as respecting ancestors, loving neighbors, honoring elders, and making peace, with Christian teachings often reinforcing these values through biblical references. Christians emphasize the importance of respecting ancestors and heritage, promoting the honoring of forefathers while worshiping only God, as seen in Proverbs 13:22 and Fitzpatrick (2001). This respect is crucial for maintaining cultural identity in the face of modern challenges, such as globalization and technological advancements (Knauff, 2016). Christian teachings also emphasize love for neighbors (Mark 12:31) and communal support, which align with PNG's community lifestyle, where acts of service demonstrate divine love (Gibbs, 2005). Respect for elders, grounded in biblical commandments such as Exodus 20:12, strengthens PNG's cultural respect for wisdom. At the same time, peacemaking and reconciliation, as taught by Jesus (Matthew 5:9), mirror traditional conflict resolution methods supported by churches (Narokobi, 1980).

However, 31% disagreed, citing concerns that certain PNG traditions—such as ancestral worship, sacrifices to spirits, or retribution practices—conflict with their religious doctrines, including Judaism's emphasis on holiness, Islam's monotheism, and the focus on justice and fairness. The respondents believe certain spiritual principles, such as those emphasizing holiness (Judaism) or monotheism and rejection of ancestral worship (Islam), may conflict with PNG traditions. Judaism's focus on sacred separation and strict adherence to scriptural laws can limit integration with local customs. Islam's strong emphasis on *Tawhid* (the declaration of faith) rejects practices such as ancestral worship and sacrifices to spirits, which Fuad (2015) views as incompatible with monotheism.

3.1.2 The Right to Cultural Life

The study found that 54% of participants agree that they have the right to cultural life, supported by the PNG Constitution—particularly the Preamble (which declares a commitment to noble traditions), Section 45 (guaranteeing freedom of religious beliefs, including cultural and spiritual expressions), Section 46 (ensuring freedom of cultural, linguistic, and artistic expression), and NGDP Goal 5 (promoting development based on PNG's cultural values, including traditional knowledge and customs)—as well as the UDHR (Articles 22 on social security and 27 on participating in cultural life), these rights promote the preservation of cultural and ethnic diversity, fostering social harmony and unity in PNG's multicultural society (Kari, 2012; United Nations, 2015). Many participants value traditional practices such as land ownership, clan systems, healing rituals, storytelling, funeral customs, community celebrations, and dances, which enhance community cohesion, peace, and mutual support (Cao, 2025). These practices align with central religious teachings in PNG, emphasizing unity and stability.

However, 46% of participants expressed concerns that certain cultural practices—such as sorcery, witchcraft, bride price, polygamy, ancestral worship, and traditional medicine—oppose biblical teachings (Deuteronomy 32:8; Tomlinson, 2012). From a Christian biblical perspective, such practices contradict God's commands and hinder spiritual growth (Romans 12:2; James 5:14-16; Galatians 3:28). Christianity encourages believers to evaluate cultural customs through scripture, rejecting harmful practices that deviate from biblical principles and promotes transformation through the Holy Spirit to uphold love, peace, and holiness (Exodus 20:3-5; Ephesians 5:25-33).

3.1.3 Religious Principles that support Christian Principles

The study shows that 75% of respondents believe various religious principles support Christian values, with three main perspectives. First, many view PNG traditional beliefs as aligning with Christian morals, recognizing that these beliefs honor a creator spirit and attribute spiritual significance to nature, a concept similar to animism (Tylor, 2010). Biblical examples, such as God revealing himself through natural phenomena (Exodus 3:2; Exodus 13:21-22), suggest that animism can reflect divine interaction within PNG (Ninkama, 2023). Traditional practices, such as land ownership and communal rituals, promote morals and social harmony, paralleling biblical values like love

and respect (Trompf, 1989). Second, some respondents acknowledge that core Christian principles, such as faith in one God, the Bible, the Ten Commandments, love, forgiveness, righteousness, and peacemaking (1 Corinthians 13; Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 12:18), are shared across denominations, fostering social cohesion. Third, non-Christians acknowledge shared monotheistic beliefs, including belief in one God, holy scriptures, angels, prophets, judgment, God's law, sin, and forgiveness, which influence their religious practices (Fisher, 2009).

However, 25% of respondents disagreed, emphasizing the differences between Christianity and other religions. Islam and Christianity, for instance, hold distinct views on the nature of God (Tawhid vs. Trinity), prophets, scripture, and salvation, underscoring the unique theological frameworks they each uphold (Mosher & Marshall, 2018). Judaism, though closely related historically to Christianity, emphasizes adherence to Torah laws and the covenant with God, with little overlap in principles that directly support Christian beliefs, as they focus on different central figures and teachings (Revera, 2000). Figure 2 shows the responses to question 2 from section 2.

3.2 Section 2: Preamble & Section 45(1)

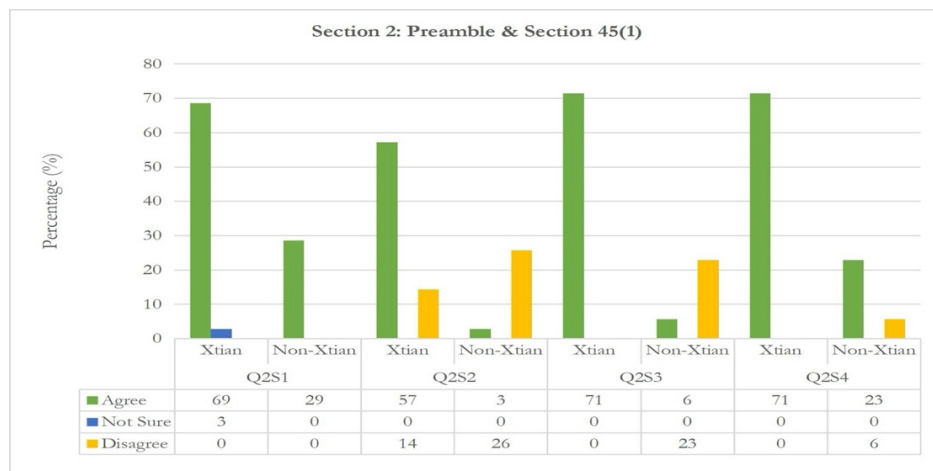


Figure 2: Vector graph illustrating the percentage of responses from section 2, indicating the proportions for three statements in response to Question 2.

3.2.1 The Right to Freedom of Religion

The study's key findings reveal that 97% of participants believe the PNG Preamble conflicts with Section 45(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom (Constitution of Papua New Guinea, 2020), with many advocating for constitutional amendments to promote inclusivity based on principles such as love, peace, and righteousness. It also highlights that historical divisions within Christianity, often caused by influential church leaders and differing doctrines (Dowley, 1977), require government regulation of street preaching to promote peace and social order. Traditional spiritual practices, such as healing and protection rooted in a worldview where God communicates through natural symbols, are valued as culturally valid and complementary to Christianity, echoing biblical theophanies (Exodus 3:2; Ninkama, 2023). Ultimately, the study highlights that the primary purpose of religion is moral and social transformation—enlightening individuals' minds and hearts—which is crucial for addressing societal decay in PNG. It urges collective efforts with religious groups to promote values aligned with scripture, such as those found in Romans 12:1-2 (Ninkama, 2023).

However, about 3% of participants emphasized love and respect as central religious duties, summarized by the Ten Commandments, which instruct us to love God and love one's neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31). The practice of unconditional agape love cultivates virtues such as forgiveness, honesty, and justice, forming the moral foundation essential for societal harmony and spiritual growth (Raffagnino & Puddu, 2018).

3.2.2 The Right to Freedom of Race and Color

The study reveals that 60% of participants view a conflict between their rights to freedom of race and color under Section 45(1) of the PNG Constitution and the Preamble's declaration of PNG as a Christian country, as this

emphasis on Christianity and traditional culture can threaten constitutional and Article 18 rights to thought, conscience, and religion (PNG Constitution, 2020). Foreigners' poor integration into PNG's culturally rooted society contributes to this tension and leads to animosity and discrimination, especially when they disrespect local customs. Factors such as dependency fostered by the education system, church teachings focused on prosperity, reliance on family and clan support, and social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse hinder national progress (Urame, 2007; Ninkama, 2023). Additionally, intermarriage and discrimination against mixed-race children—often stemming from foreigners abandoning PNG spouses—pose social and legal challenges, with enforcement of family laws like the Marriage Act 1963 and Family Protection Act 2013 hampered by geographic, cultural, and financial barriers, thus impeding development and social cohesion (United Nations, 2015).

Conversely, 40% of respondents assert that the Preamble does not conflict with the Constitution. They maintain that the government should uphold human rights outlined in Section 45(1), such as freedom of movement (UDHR Article 13 & Section 52), religion (UDHR Article 18 & Section 45), marriage (UDHR Article 16 & Sections 37, 55), and citizenship (UDHR Article 15 & Sections 46–70). They emphasize the importance of valuing the contributions of foreigners, including skilled workers and researchers, who are vital to economic and social development (Article 13 of the UDHR; United Nations, 2015). Racial discrimination, they argue, hampers national progress and should be discouraged to foster an inclusive and progressive society.

3.2.3 The Right to Political Opinion

The study indicates that 77% of participants view a conflict between their right to political freedom and the Preamble's declaration of PNG as a Christian nation, with both the PNG Constitution (Section 45(1)) and UDHR (Article 21) affirming political rights (PNG Constitution, 2020; United Nations, 2015). These conflicts stem from perceptions that political corruption and leadership issues are rooted in spiritual decay, as biblical teachings suggest (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12), with proposals to address this including stricter politician screening and integrating biblical principles like Galatians 5:22-23, Matthew 5:3-12, and Matthew 6:33 into the Constitution to promote integrity. Additionally, some pastors blend prosperity teachings with politics, which weakens the church's moral authority and shifts focus from faith to wealth (Ninkama, 2023). Furthermore, unethical practices such as vote bribery and the influence of wealth undermine democracy, prompting calls for constitutional reforms that emphasize accountability, severe penalties for corruption, and governance rooted in moral righteousness.

Conversely, 23% of participants believe that the Preamble does not contradict Section 45(1), arguing that divine authority guides government systems (Romans 13:1-2) and emphasizing that societal order and peace depend on democratic processes. They underline that voting rights belong to citizens, not spiritual entities, thereby reinforcing accountability through electoral participation.

3.2.4 The Right to Freedom of Sex and Gender roles

The study reveals that 94% of participants believe the PNG Preamble conflicts with Section 45(1) regarding sex and gender roles, citing three main reasons. First, they emphasize that traditional gender roles are vital for societal stability, beginning within the family, with religious teachings across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam highlighting distinct yet complementary roles aligned with divine principles (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 31; Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:28; Quran 4:34). Judaism assigns men the responsibilities of provision and religious study, Christianity advocates mutual respect with men as leaders and women as nurturers (Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Timothy 5:8), while Islam recognizes both genders as equal yet assigns men as protectors and providers (Qur'an 4:34). Second, some non-Christians argue that the government's Gender Equality Policy disrupts traditional roles, leading to social issues like domestic violence and divorce, as it challenges cultural and biblical roles that primarily designated men as heads of families. The researcher warns that excessive promotion of gender equality could undermine divine authority, referencing Genesis 3:5 to suggest that surpassing biblical boundaries may lead to societal decline (Ninkama, 2023).

However, about 6% of participants believe that religious teachings in churches can help reduce domestic violence by reinforcing clear roles—an approach more observed in Islamic communities. They advocate for stronger church-based education on gender roles to strengthen families, viewing these as the foundation of societal stability (Genesis 1:27; Ephesians 5:25; Qur'an 4:34). Figure 3 shows the responses to question 3 from section 3.

3.3 Section 3: Common Religious Faiths/Principles

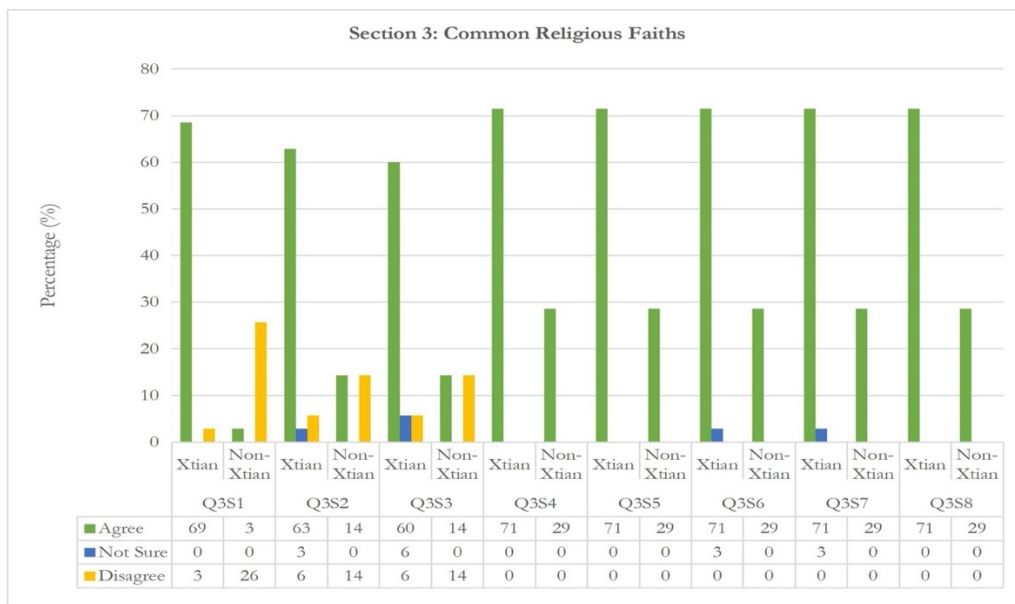


Figure 3: Vector graph illustrating the percentage of responses from section 3, indicating the proportions for three statements in response to Question 3.

3.3.1 Faith in the Triune God

About 71% of participants believe in the concept of the Triune God, supported by biblical references such as Matthew 28:19-20, Genesis 1:26, and Matthew 3:13-17. Christian respondents cite scriptural evidence for the Trinity, while some non-Christians, like Jewish participants, interpret God's presence in different times as a single God working in multiple forms. The study highlights that the deity is central to all three major religions, with a shared belief in one God. Christians predominantly believe in a Triune God—comprising God the Father, Jesus Christ (the Son), and the Holy Spirit—supported by their articles of faith across various denominations, including Catholic, Lutheran, SDA, EBC, and Nazarene. Scriptural evidence for this includes Genesis 1:26 ('Let us create'), Matthew 3:13-17 (Jesus' baptism), and Matthew 28:19-20 (The Great Commission), which articulate the concept of the Trinity (Cunningham, 2009).

Conversely, 29% of non-Christians, including Muslims and Jews, believe in one true God but reject the Trinity. Muslims believe in Allah, a singular God, and regard Jesus as a prophet (Fisher, 2009; Qur'an 50:16). Judaism also emphasizes belief in Yahweh, adhering to the Ten Commandments and the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:14), highlighting the belief in one God and accusing Christianity of polytheism but does not recognize Jesus or the Holy Spirit (Patridge, 2005).

3.3.2 Day of Worship

The study indicates that 77% of participants observe specific days of worship, which vary among religions: Muslims on Friday (Jumu'ah), Jews and Adventists on Saturday (Sabbath), and Catholics, Lutherans, EBC, and Nazarenes on Sunday, reflecting their theological doctrines (Qur'an 62:9; Genesis 2:2-3). Muslims believe Friday is significant because it marks the completion of creation and the day Adam and Eve exited Paradise, serving as a day for spiritual reflection and social unity (Esposito, 2005). Judaism and Seventh-day Adventism (SDA) observe Saturday as the Sabbath, honoring God's rest on the seventh day, as described in the Bible, particularly in Genesis and Exodus (Heschel, 2005). Christian denominations primarily worship on Sunday in celebration of Jesus' Resurrection, considered the first day of new creation.

Conversely, 23% of Christian participants believe in daily worship, citing scriptures like Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16-17, which emphasize personal conviction and refraining from judgment regarding Sabbath

observance. These believers focus on daily spiritual discipline rather than a specific day. Participants recommend a national policy on worship days and believe churches or pastors involved in disputes should face legal action to prevent divisions and unrest.

3.3.3 Belief in Baptism

The study shows that 74% of Christian participants believe in both water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism, practices rooted in biblical teachings that symbolize following Jesus and facilitating spiritual transformation and empowerment. Water baptism, typically by immersion or sprinkling (pouring), reflects Jesus' example, while Holy Spirit baptism signifies a profound spiritual transformation and unity among believers. Non-Christian religions like Judaism and Islam also emphasize spiritual immersion—through scripture or faith—as transformative. However, Christianity uniquely teaches that Holy Spirit baptism provides a profound, life-changing experience beyond mere symbolism, establishing a direct relationship with God. About 26% of participants view baptism as a ritual symbolizing commitment rather than a pathway to salvation.

3.3.4 Faith in the Ten Commandments

The findings reveal that all participants (100%) recognize the Ten Commandments as divine revelations from God (Allah or Yahweh) and foundational to their faith, guiding moral, ethical, and community life (Neusner, 2011). Christians regard the commandments as a moral compass, emphasizing love for God and others, with scriptures such as Matthew 22:37-40 and Mark 12:30-31 highlighting these principles. Judaism sees the commandments as central to the covenant, shaping the 613 *mitzvot* and promoting social cohesion (Neusner, 2011). Similarly, Islam emphasizes monotheism and laws against idolatry, theft, adultery, and unjust killing, supported by Qur'anic verses (Qur'an 6:151-153; 4:48). Historically, these commandments have influenced societal morals, laws, and traditional values, although modern education has seen a decline in their moral transmission, contributing to social disorder (Moran, 1983). Overall, they serve as guiding principles promoting love, righteousness, forgiveness, and societal harmony.

3.3.5 Faith in the teaching of love

All participants agree on the importance of love, particularly Christians who distinguish between *philia* [brotherly love], *Eros* [romantic love], and *agape* [selfless love] (Lee, 1988), with the latter epitomized by God's love through Jesus (John 3:16). *Agape*, characterized by unconditional love and forgiveness, is regarded as the universal language essential for societal unity and moral integrity (1 Peter 4:8; Matthew 22:37-40). Non-Christians also emphasize the positive societal impact of love; fostering *agape* is vital for overcoming self-centeredness, promoting reconciliation, and ensuring peace that transcends religious boundaries. Despite the challenges of practicing selfless love, cultivating *agape* is essential for fostering community harmony and moral development across faiths.

3.3.6 Faith in the teaching of forgiveness

The study finds universal consensus (100%) that forgiveness is a vital religious principle, with divine forgiveness rooted in God's mercy through Jesus' sacrifice, symbolized in scriptures like 1 John 1:9 and Psalms 103:12, and accessible through repentance (Hebrews 9:22; Colossians 1:14). Human forgiveness involves releasing resentment, emulating divine mercy, and fostering peace in relationships (Luke 6:37; Matthew 6:15). Many social issues such as conflicts and violence stem from unforgiveness, highlighting its importance for societal stability and individual healing. Christianity views forgiveness as a manifestation of divine mercy, while societal peace hinges on humans' willingness to forgive, thereby preventing retaliation and conflict (Exodus 14:14; Luke 23:34). The study emphasizes that practicing forgiveness is vital for maintaining societal harmony and personal well-being.

3.3.7 Faith in the teaching of righteousness

All participants (100%) affirm righteousness as a core religious principle, representing divine character and moral integrity essential for eternal life (Matthew 5:8; 2 Timothy 3:16). Christians see righteousness as a divine

transformation through the Holy Spirit that restores the believer's relationship with God and unlocks blessings (Matthew 6:33; Psalms 89:14). Non-Christians, including Jews and Muslims, equally associate righteousness with devotion to God, ethical conduct, and social prosperity—linked to love for God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Qur'an 2:177; 92:17-20). Both perspectives emphasize the importance of obedience to divine law for spiritual growth, societal harmony, and material well-being. Righteousness fosters moral integrity, spiritual prosperity, and societal stability, emphasizing divine guidance and ethical living as pathways to a righteous life.

3.3.8 Faith in the teaching of peacemaking

Participants universally (100%) uphold peacemaking as a fundamental religious value, with Christianity and Judaism affirming God as the Prince of Peace and emphasizing faith, prayer, and harmonious relationships (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 5:9; John 14:27). Islam similarly underscores submission to Allah and justice as essential for peace, encouraging forgiveness and ethical conduct (Surah Al-Anfal 8:61). In PNG, peace is fostered through traditional and Christian conflict resolution methods, emphasizing respect and cooperation, supported by socialization within families and communities under elders' guidance. The UDHR also emphasizes peace, equality, and security as universal rights (Articles 1 and 3). Overall, all faiths and societal frameworks promote peace as integral to spiritual fulfillment, social stability, and justice, advocating divine guidance, mutual respect, and social cohesion.

4. CONCLUSION

The study examines the complex and conflicting perspectives surrounding the PNG Constitution's Preamble, which emphasizes maintaining the nation's 'noble tradition' and 'Christian principles,' affecting diverse groups, including devout citizens, Christian believers, followers of non-Christian traditions, and non-resident non-Christians, highlighting the intricate interplay of religious and cultural identity within the country. It finds that traditional values, such as respect for ancestors and elders, love, sharing, and reconciliation, align with PNG's core principles despite external skepticism towards practices like animism and materialism, highlighting the importance of respecting traditional beliefs alongside Christianity. The research reveals tensions between the Preamble's declaration of PNG as a Christian nation and the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, which, coupled with societal issues such as race, politics, and gender roles, complicates national cohesion. Despite doctrinal differences, shared principles like love, forgiveness, righteousness, and peacemaking can foster unity. The study's limitations, including restricted funding and a small sample essentially comprising religious leaders from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, may mean that its findings do not fully represent broader perspectives. Nonetheless, it highlights the importance of constitutional reform, anti-corruption measures, and interfaith dialogue in promoting social harmony. Future research should advocate for policies that align cultural and religious values, regulate religious organizations, and encourage community initiatives to foster greater understanding and cohesion.

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