

There are many more implications, which reflect the oral background of the culture. The author lists, among others, the pride in verbal skills (p. 105), the reluctance to write simple English (p. 112), the inclination to indulge in personal praises (p. 114). One may add also the greater importance given to pictorial communication (cf. the number and size of images in local newspapers as compared with papers from overseas). But then, again, there is a growing interest in audio-visual aids all over the world. Even the sample given here of a vernacular text set out in a format to assure maximum readability (pp. 194-195) is not wholly unknown elsewhere (cf. recent Bibles; advertisements). In short, some of the insights proposed by the author have a much wider application, because even the most-advanced culture is partly oral, and possesses the specific advantages of this component.

The book ends with some conclusions and recommendations (pp. 179-188) addressed to mission and church groups: they should study more the needs of oral societies, who, by definition, do rely on oral means of communication. Let us add that the setting in which this communication occurs (say the liturgical gatherings, their places of worship, the seasons and times of the year, etc.) might have deserved a greater attention, and also that – once the need is recognised to add, at a certain level, the written means of communication – all the necessary means should be used to assure a smooth transition (e.g., by favouring casual reading, p. 16).

– **Theodoor Aerts**

BURROWS, William R., *New Ministries: The Global Context*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1980, ISBN 0883443295, 192 pp., paperback, US\$7.95.

The key experiences on which this book is based were had in Papua New Guinea, where the author was a missionary for five years. The Catholic viewpoint, from which the book is written, only serves to emphasise its ecumenical scope, while many Catholics can learn how

many of their problems are shared by other churches, in which things that Catholics still dream about are long since matters of experience.

qqBurrows tackles head-on a subject that most theologians – with exceptions such as Schillebeeckx in *Ministry: A Case for Change* (1981) – tend to skirt with a few equivocating phrases: the “sacerdotalisation” of ministry as “one of the most serious deformations that ever occurred in Christianity” (p. 66). He leaves nothing out: the Jewish and Roman origins of many aspects of ordination to a strictly male priesthood (93 ff.); feudal and Reformation influences (pp. 102ff.); the realism of reactivating deacons (pp. 131ff.), and ordaining women (pp. 134ff.); and, in various contexts, the ever-present problem of celibacy, especially where the need to reinforce it, against overwhelming cultural and civilisational odds, dominates the “spirituality” of pastoral training (pp. 120ff.).

The book’s main interest – and its intrinsic strength – lie in the “global context” in which Burrows develops his analysis of ministry, and his proposals for its survival in the church of the future, whose outlines are slowly becoming clearer. These parts of the book are of special value to Melanesian theologians. His observation that “To decontextualise anything is to rob it of what makes it either interesting or important” (p. 4) strikes just the right balance in the face of universalist and uniformist positions masquerading as ecumenism. However, his assertion that “Sin wears a contextual face that differs from one people and culture to another” (p. 4) would require a book of its own to justify it.

The same balanced judgment characterises Burrows’ position on the authority now granted to Catholic hierarchies and local bishops, but which they are still too hesitant to exercise (p. 13). He also recognises the potential of “popular religion”, which “has largely been passed over, or at most made into a series of footnotes to the ‘real’ history of theology” (p. 32). Here the convictions born of Burrows’ experience in Papua New Guinea shine through, in statements such as the following:

The inarticulateness of these people is often mistaken for a lack of intelligence. In reality, however, they know secrets too precious to tell, and their sullen silence is a very important, if often unrecognised, chapter in north-south dialogue (p. 16).

Christ will be successfully incarnated among such people only when He and His message become the stuff of dreams and visions, and enter into the dilemmas of decision-making in a manner difficult for most Westerners to appreciate. . . . Local theology arises out of such dialogues, and one should not expect it always to remain faithful to the fine dogmatic precisions of the early councils (p. 28).

Burrows confronts the “old wineskins” of traditional institutions, of which even the West is no longer sure, with the invigorating “new wine” of third church experiences in liberation and spirituality. His discussion of the political role of the churches with respect to their fundamental role as “sacramental” channels of grace, during which he acknowledges a debt to Fr John Momis and Mr Bernard Narokobi (p. 30), displays, once more, the good judgment that characterises the book as a whole:

There is no way to escape a profound tension at the heart of Jesus’ teaching: commitment to righteousness in society, and in one’s heart, is mandatory; but we are not thereby justified in judging people by their commitment to such righteousness (p. 44).

In determining, say, the prophetic role of the Melanesian Council of Churches, and its policy in the face of exclusive claims to righteousness by fundamentalist sects, it will be crucial to develop this theme.

The questions Burrows raises are not susceptible of neat text-book answers, so we look in vain for “solutions” in his final section; these will be the fruit of an ongoing and many-sided dialogue at a very deep level, for “The future of the Christian movement is being written in the villages and cities of the third world” (p. 130). Burrows goes beyond the

necessary, but insufficient, condemnations of economic dependency and theological imperialism to map out the new ecclesiological authority of regional bodies such as bishops' conferences (and councils of churches?), and the all-important local communities, which must always be balanced against the tempting, but misleading, ideal of a World Church (pp. 138ff.). Though it makes no concessions to those with insufficient background in the history of theology, Burrows' timely book could well clarify the vision, and strengthen the purpose of Melanesian theologians.

– **John D'Arcy May**