

BOOK REVIEWS

WRIGHT, Cliff, and FUGUI, Leslie, eds, *Christ in South Pacific Cultures: Articles by South Pacific Islanders about the Relationship of Traditional Culture to Christian Faith*, Suva Fiji: Lotu Pasifika Publications, 1985, iii + 117 pp., paperback.

This useful book has arisen out of a number of workshops throughout the Pacific during 1978-1983. These were funded by the Australian Council of Churches, with the support of the Pacific Council of Churches, and were facilitated by Cliff Wright, one of the book's co-editors. The result is a miscellany of practical theological statements, arresting poetry, and interspersed suggestions for local workshops, which might be held, with this book as a study guide.

The major contributors are almost all Melanesians. To this extent, the collection compares with *Living Theology in Melanesia: a Reader*, recently put together by John May (Goroka PNG: Melanesian Institute, 1985). One piece is shared in common between the two volumes, namely Bernard Narokobi's account of the death of his mother, but two obvious differences lie in the greater proportion of Solomonese input to the Wright-Fugui production (ca. 60 percent), with one Fijian article as well, and in the newer collection's less academic, more-obviously practical dress. Virtually all the contributions are limited to half a dozen pages or under, making it more useful for in-service workshops for ministers, for those seeking stimulation in the exercise of pastoral care, and all sorts of other local get-togetherness (p. 9).

Considering my own editorship of black theologies in the southwest Pacific (*The Gospel is Not Western*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987), I could lament that the book belies its own name by representing too limited a number of "South Pacific cultures" – with voices from only five national regions being ventilated. It is a pity we hear nothing from Micronesia (about which Wright has edited another book), and so little from Polynesia. Considering my own difficulties in obtaining contributors from the "hotbeds" of New Caledonia and West Papua, I can understand why writers from these places do not figure, yet perhaps more should be made in the book of the great diversity of human needs in the Pacific, and the sharp differences between certain socio-political contexts. We are also left with

too much of an impression, perhaps, that the development of South Pacific indigenous theology is limited to the “mainline churches”, when its existence in other quarters required some recognition. In the Solomons, for instance, one of the ablest up-and-coming theological writers, Michael Mailiau, belongs to the South Seas Evangelical church.

One strong and valuable point in the Wright/Fugui volume is that it is not just a collection for showing what indigenous theologies look like, but centres around a theme – that of “issues” arising “from traditional beliefs and practices that need attention in relation to Christian faith” (p. 6). As many as 51 fascinating issues were singled out for inspection, and most of them are touched on in some way or another in the articles. The tradition/Christianity interaction was a perfect binding principle, one which was also suggested to me by the (Anglican) Australian Board of Mission for the Coorparoo Conference in 1981, which laid the basis for *The Gospel is Not Western*. Wright and Fugui, however, working under a Council of Churches mandate, have felt it pressing on them to cultivate theologies which produce authentically indigenous Christianity and avoid syncretism (p. 8). I remember how, in contrast, the ABM representative to the Coorparoo Conference, Fr Fred Wandmaker, a man experienced in Aboriginal affairs, succeeded in convincing us that no such pre-imposed evaluation should in any sense colour what took place. Listening was to be paramount. To the extent that the Wright/Fugui volume has responded to the interests of a funding body, then, it is less “independent” in quality, and has less “maverick” material than some might like, but has the advantage of being structured to suit the rapidly-growing numbers who want the down-to-earth, straightforward, and stable mainstream Christian orientation that it offers.

Significant in the book are: the Solomonese Anglican priest, Leslie Fugui, to be honoured as the first co-editor of such a theological book, and as creator of four pieces within it, one crucial among them being on sacrifice; Sir John Guise, former Governor General of Papua New Guinea, who asks searching questions as to whether the Christian faith is so deep-rooted in his own nation; John Pratt, United church bishop of the Western Solomons, exploring the relationship between tradition and Christianity in any area where ecclesial separatism has occurred with The Christian Fellowship church of the Holy Mama; John Kadiba, the first Melanesian to be appointed to a teaching position in a tertiary institution outside his own

country (Nungalinga College, Northern Territory), handling the whole issue of healing in tradition and Jesus' ministry very sensitively; Sevati Tuwere, the energetic Fijian theologian, and Principal of the Pacific Theological College, with some colourful pages on his encounter with a sorcerer; as well as the inimitable Narokobi, and several others, including Foreword writer, the former United church Moderator, Leslie Boseto.

Boseto and Narokobi have already contributed to May's Reader; Kadiba, Tuwere, and Narokobi (again) also have articles in the Orbis volume. Thus we are beginning to see the preliminary blossoming of Melanesian theology with a veritable "set" of active thinkers and writers. I suspect they are more active than publishing opportunities allow for. Some of the pieces – those of Pratt and Tuwere, for example, and a poem by Kadiba – were in unpublished circulation before the Wright/Fugui volume appeared. One could understand, with the pressure to get their messages across, if these writers' individual creations appear in more than one place. That there are now three symposia of this kind, and the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* as well (!), is all to the good, to provide outlet for energies which do not look likely to suffer depletion in the future.

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LOELIGER, Carl, and TROMPF, Garry, eds, *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*, Suva Fiji: University of the South Pacific/Port Moresby PNG: University of Papua New Guinea, 1985, xvii + 188 pp.

This book is a welcome addition to the already extensive literature on religious movements in Melanesia. It is welcome for two main reasons: most of the contributors are Melanesians, who have observed the movements they describe at first hand, and, in some cases, provide original source material, to which the editors rightly ascribe documentary value; and most are not content with the stock image of the "cargo cult" as an explanatory category. The book is enhanced by including examples from New Guinea, Papua, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji, virtually the entire geographical area of Melanesia. It also contains finely-drawn maps and some photographs.