

the lonely and satiated, and embraces the suffering and sacrifice demanded by a objective situation of injustice.

Christians in the Pacific will be shocked and bewildered by some aspects of this book, yet it is so profoundly ecumenical that I am sure it can be a means of communicating with their brothers and sisters in the much-harsher circumstances of Latin America. Our challenge is to prevent the kind of institutionalised injustice that prevails there from establishing itself here. Gutierrez's reminder that we drink from the same wells of theology and spirituality as his slum dwellers and peasants is timely and prophetic.

Dr John D'Arcy May,  
The Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

TROMPF, Garry W., ed.: *The Gospel is not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987), ix + pp. 213 paperback.

This book is a good collection of Melanesian writings, gathered primarily at a conference held in Australia in 1981. The collection was then enlarged by adding writings of other important indigenous persons from the South Pacific region.

It is difficult to critically review a book, which contains so many pearls from so many friends. There is so much here from so many great leaders from the South Pacific, that in any limited review, someone's contribution is bound to be left out, or overlooked. Thus, if articles appear to be overlooked, I apologise. It is impossible to critically review such a varied collection without writing another book of almost the same size. Better that readers, interested in the theology of the Pacific, read these authentic contributions from black theologians from our region.

And, I must say, that a review of this book would be doubly difficult if the Melanesian writers actually did set out to show what *The Gospel is not*. . . . At the risk of using a double negative, the lasting value of this book is not in showing what the gospel is not in the South Pacific, but rather in the many helpful articles that show the *unique way in which local people have planted and nurture the gospel of Jesus Christ in our region*.

Readers, therefore, ought to be encouraged to take much more seriously the secondary title of this book, which is, *Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific*.

The rather negative book title, *The Gospel is not Western*, does give fair warning that readers may not naively ignore the devastation caused by what Bernard Narokobi has called *the “tidal wave” from the West*. Garry Trompf, the editor, quotes Bernard in his introductory article, and the quote is worth repeating:

Our countries have been invaded by a huge tidal wave from the West, in the form of colonisation and Christianisation. Like any tidal wave, the West came mercilessly, with all the force and power, toppling over our earth, destroying our treasures, depositing some rich soil but also leaving behind much rubbish.

Some must rake through the rubbish, others must bury rubbish thrown up on the shore. But to read Bernard’s tidal wave image, as if it were past tense, suggests that, for most of the writers, the worst of the storm is over. This may be true for some who are still experiencing the first flush of newly-won independence. Yet, for many newly-independent Pacific nations, their struggle continues as a more-subtle, neo-colonial sorting through of the rubbish, and a need to gently clean up to see what trees and local vegetation have survived.

If we simply read Narokobi’s words and images in the past tense, they are inadequate for some of the contributions in this volume. Our region is so diverse, that to say that a colonial wave *has passed*, is simply not true for all. For Trwar Max Ireeuw, from West Papua – sometimes called Irian Jaya; and for Pierre Qaeze, of the Loyalty Islands, sometimes called New Caledonia; any deceptive peace they may experience may be best described as “the eye of the storm”.

And, as most Pacific Islanders know, the deceptive calm of the eye of the hurricane means we are still right at the centre of the storm, and the worse may be yet to come. “Gospel”, for these Pacific and Melanesian theologians, therefore, means day-to-day survival in a life-and-death struggle for a yet-to-be-experienced, liberation of their people.

This book brings together articles by Aruru Matiabe (Papua Highlands), Polonhou S. Pokawin (Manus Island New Guinea), Bernard Narokobi (Sepik New Guinea), Rose Kunoth-Monks (Central Australia), Dave Passi (Torres Strait Islands), Wellington Jojoga Opeba (Papua), Esau Tusa (Solomon Islands), Guboo Ted Thomas (South-East Australia), Mick Fazeldean (West Australia), Simeon (Namunu Papuan Island), Michael Maeliau (Solomon Islands), Rose Kara Ninkama (Highlands New Guinea), John Kadiba (Papua and North Australia), Sevati Tuwere (Fiji), John Momis (Solomons and New Guinea Islands), Utula Samana (Morobe New Guinea), Trwar Max Ireeuw (West Papua), Walter Lini (Vanuatu), Pierre Qaeze (Loyalty Islands New Caledonia), Suliana Siwatibau (Fiji).

It is a little tiresome to need to say, again and again, that black people in our region are rightfully dignified members of the human race. Pacific people may not be classified as sub-human, pre-Christian pagans. Aruru Matiabe encourages us to repeat a counter-affirmation again and again, with conviction, to counter the realities of subtle degradation, which are still very much alive and well in our colonial and neo-colonial world.

And Aruru is helped in this collection by the humour and down-to-earth stories of aboriginal healer, Mick Fazeldean, who tells of his struggles to heal whites. One can imagine the twinkle in Mike's eye as he says in the book,

“I found whites very, very hard to work on for a while, but since those early days it has become much easier. They find it hard to relax, their bodies are very tense, and it is hard to work through with my mind. But now, in time, and with much more prayer, they do relax and I can heal. . . . An important happening led me to heal more people: I had to raise a horse! I thought if I could heal a horse, I could heal a European person. And it happened.”

Women make an important contribution to this book. Rose Kunoth Monks gives an excellent, balanced, and concise account from Central Australia. In relation to the vicious payback killings, she says that the gospel was a God-send.

There were, of course, conflicts, and, on the one hand, she outlines points at which Aboriginal and Christian beliefs are diametrically opposed

and mutually exclusive. She gives examples where Aboriginal elders and missionaries agreed that a choice between the old ways and the new was necessary.

On the other hand, she also cites examples of Aboriginal customs, which missionaries wanted the people to abandon, and the people wanted to retain. Rose clearly shows where this missionary push to jettison certain cultural values was not shared by Aboriginal Christians, and she asks that her people be able to choose. Her conclusions are as follows:

“In short, innovations, that do not offer the possibility of rejection by Aboriginals, are destructive of Aboriginal society. I believe that when there has been no real choice, tensions and chaos have resulted. Some blacks blame the whites; the whites blame those who stir things up, and, in the midst of this, the disease that is racism, breeds. . . ”

**Positively:**

“When religious innovation was offered at Hermannsburg, people did have a genuine choice. They chose those aspects they found to be meaningful, and rejected those they could not accommodate to their system. This occurred without conflict, simply because choice was actually possible.”

When we come to the field of theological education, this book contains two excellent articles by practising Pacific educators.

John Kadiba is interested in developing a Melanesian Systematic Theology, which is “home grown” and “rooted in our own soil”. In a very sensitive way, Kadiba exposes the “foreignness” of imported theologies. These foreign theologies, impose religious symbols that are always exotic for Melanesians. In addition, they are very often alienating, destroying the very Christian values they purport to bring. Kadiba’s strong call is for a theology that is the creation of Melanesian Christians, rather than one that is expatriate-external-“Western”, a theology written, perhaps, as a legitimate response to a crisis overseas, but one which will always be foreign in Melanesia.

Kadiba calls for Theological Colleges in Melanesia to be flexible and innovative, and, above all, responsive to the local people. His quote, using the words of Dr Sione Havea, is also worth noting,

“When I say “Pacific”, it means, to me, a *focus on people*. People who are human and not puppets. They have tears, blood, and sweat. When they are young and need care, when they are sick and need treatment, and when they are “itchy”, they want to be scratched (where it is itchy). They are people born to be free; they want to make their own decisions, and list their top priorities.”

Together with some clear comments about the Melanesian context, John Kadiba has the courage to record that 80 to 90 percent of the people in Melanesia are still rural dwellers. And he reminds us that our theological focus must not neglect that datum! From this point, he goes on to give an interesting outline of some of the tasks before theologians in Melanesia. . . .

As readers, we might, ourselves, notice that, in the tertiary world, Kadiba mentions in his conclusion experiences, which reflect something of the same colonial bondage, that other Melanesian Christians struggle with in the political arena. Kadiba concludes,

“The time is ripe for a systematic Melanesian theology to develop. But it will be a slow and long process, so long as foreign theologies, and foreign Christian traditions are maintained in and through the theological institutions and the churches. The churches must be open and sensitive to God’s work among God’s people, seeking to look through Melanesian eyes, and not to be bound by present traditions and foreign theologies.”

This also is a cry for different priorities regarding funding. In a neo-colonial Melanesia, the application of overseas funding in educational institutions often determines whether or not educators have freedom to do local research and to be innovative.

Sevati Tuwera takes these concerns further in his article. He, too, avoids the temptation to neglect traditional village and community life. He says,

“A current problem results from an all-too-heavy emphasis on the past and on what we have lost, with the future being almost entirely out of sight. A new community life is needed that embraces the dynamic dialectical relationship between past and future. This is important now, because some people, particularly young people, are overtly caught up in things modern. Many find themselves rootless, and become frustrated by today’s changes. We must educate our young people, not only with formal education, but also in ways to combine modernity with the skills of our forebears, and the wisdom of our elders. . . .

“A real soul searching is going on in Fijian villages today, because most people desire, above all, a sound community life. They do not necessarily want an alternative-type community, but only one that is adaptable to the changes occurring all around. Many models in indigenous culture already find endorsement in the Christian faith’s commission to carry the gospel.

“Fiji is all about the dynamo of reciprocity, of creatively passing things on, and receiving, in return. . . .”

Sevati, it appears, would be very much at home with Bernard’s article entitled “Broken pearls and new-born shells”.

In summary, there appears in this collection a wide variety of home-grown theological pearls from the South Pacific region.

I have some questions, myself, about the way the collection is organised editorially, and would wonder whether more Pacific categories might not have been chosen from the writers’ own images and thinking. In some ways, the organisational categories of “tradition” and “Christianity” seem inadequate and “Western”. Some of the sub-sections do not invite us into the fascinating world of the south-western Pacific theological reflection, in the way that the material merits.

In addition, perhaps the articles raising community and justice issues might have come earlier. There are writers here who are giving us their risky and dangerous response to colonial history. If their articles had appeared first, they might have led us into the more-subtle neo-colonial

struggles, where political independence is nominally in place, and where local churches appear to be in control of their own affairs, but are still experiencing a more-subtle bondage, as wave after wave of modernisation washes over them.

Nevertheless, Fr Martin Wilson is right, when he says, on the jacket of the book, that the resources in this book “will feature in many a footnote and reference for years to come”. This will certainly be the case in the academic world, while, at the same time, the writers, themselves, will be actively and creatively giving leadership to the churches, and the region, as a whole.

Garry Trompf is to be congratulated on the five years of work that has gone into making this book available to scholars in our region.

Revd Dr Don Carrington, Director,  
Uniting Church Institute for Mission.