

EDITORIAL

This volume offers a variety of topics, related to Christian theology in Melanesia: the true cost of bride price, indigenous church music, calling upon spirits of the dead, image-rich evangelism, the shifting of primary identity from clan to Christ, and Papua New Guinea's need for repentance. Each topic, in its own way, adds to the on-going discussion of applying God's Word in a Melanesian context.

In the first article, Henry Bre investigates the true cost of bride price, and concludes that Melanesians spend far more than is warranted on the act of marriage. The typical cost of a marriage is K33,000, when the cash, animals, and wedding expenses are totalled. The addition of Western-style wedding ceremonies to traditional wedding practices is partially to blame. Greed also plays a factor. However, Henry believes there is hope, and gives an example of one Christian wedding in Papua New Guinea that cost only K7,000. He argues against the historical belief that bride price ensures domestic tranquillity, showing that marital problems are often a source for tribal fights. Perhaps his strongest message is that only God can ensure a lasting marriage.

In both the Old and New Testaments, music and song are important aspects of worshipping God. Songs, found in scripture, are culturally relevant to the singers, and often acknowledge deep theological truths about God. In the second article, Melex Bosip writes to encourage the Melanesian church to use indigenous music, believing that Melanesian worship has been lost, due to the strong influence the West has had on church music. He recommends that churches use traditional Melanesian instruments, such as the bamboo pipe, kundu drum, garamut, and susap; that Christians write more songs in Pidgin and local languages; and that Bible colleges conduct seminars on church music. Melex obviously has a love for music, and wants to see meaningful expressions of music in Melanesian churches today. May the churches take the encouragement to heart, and truly worship God in music!

In scholarly writing today, one can find many interpretations of Saul's visit to the medium at Endor in 1 Sam 28:3-25. However, most authors do not consider the passage from an animistic perspective, which is what Kent Mundhenk does in his article on "Saul's Visit to the Medium at Endor: An Animistic Perspective". Kent sees animism, necromancy, and syncretism playing fundamental roles in Saul's entreaty to contact the deceased Samuel. In animism, the deceased normally either possesses the medium, or speaks through a trance-like state, into which the medium enters. In this case though, Kent argues that the medium actually saw the spirit of Samuel. Kent peppers his article with stories from his work among the Ningerum tribe of Papua New Guinea, giving evidence that Saul's visit to the medium at Endor is not simply a historical event, but a reality today in Melanesia. The article concludes with a challenge to every believer not to be like syncretistic Saul, rather, to exhibit true faith, by being obedient to Christ alone.

In the next article, Darren Cronshaw takes an exegetical look at the imagery used in John 1:29-34, and concludes that image-rich witnessing can be "a model for spicing our conversation with witness, and for using images that are rich in meaning for those we talk with". Darren offers several examples from the passage: Jesus as the Lamb of God, Jesus as the pre-existent one, Jesus as the baptiser in the Holy Spirit, and Jesus as the Son of God. The article is rich in theology, but also practical in application. After reading the article, you will be challenged to be more creative in sharing truths about Christ in any cultural context, Melanesian or otherwise.

Identity is an important part of human existence. Whereas Westerners seek to find identity as individuals, Melanesians find identity in their clan. Dan Seeland explores the ramifications of clan-based identity for Melanesian Christians. By explaining the principle of reciprocity, and the significance of family relations in the life of Melanesians, he builds the case that Melanesian Christians have tremendous challenges in identifying with the person of Jesus Christ. Based on Luke 14:26 and John 21:15, Dan shows that Christians are to identify with Christ. How can Melanesian Christians understand this? The article offers three solutions for the church: emphasise the cost of discipleship,

promote the idea of Christian community, and concentrate efforts towards interdenominational unity. Every church leader in Papua New Guinea must strive to make these suggestions a reality.

Kirine Yandit presents Hos 6:1-3, in light of current social, political, and moral problems in Papua New Guinea. He argues that, just as Baal worship was popular in Hosea's time, idol worship is popular in Papua New Guinea today. Therefore, Kirine challenges Papua New Guinea church leaders to "intercede and plead with God for our people, and lead them to a sincere repentance and faith in Christ Jesus". The article is a call from a Papua New Guinean for Papua New Guineans to return to God. God is ready, are Papua New Guineans?

Not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you grapple with the issues, the thoughts of the authors will help you grow in your understanding of what God's Word says to your life and culture.

Doug Hanson.

Furthermore, as editor of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, I would like to promote a new publication by the Melanesian Institute.

Point 29: Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, by Neville Bartle, ISBN 9980650036, 364 pp., \$US20.

Point 29: Death, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea explores the spiritual beliefs and practices of three cultures in Papua New Guinea. It goes further than a straight ethnography, however, because Bartle uses this information to reflect on contextualising theology, and the issues it raises. This is an exciting volume, dealing with contemporary Melanesian social and theological issues. For a review copy, please email: mi_books@online.net.pg

The Melanesian Institute has been publishing in the area of Melanesian culture for over 30 years. *Point* is a serial publication, produced annually by the Melanesian Institute. The series is devoted to current issues in Melanesia; each volume focuses on a specific topic. Further information is available online at: <http://www.mi.org.pg>. For ordering, or further information, email Publications at: mi_books@online.net.pg, or post to Melanesian Institute, PO Box 571, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.