

## **EDITORIAL: CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY IN AN INDEPENDENT NATION**

The tenth anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence on September 16, 1985, has come and gone. But this is no reason to cease reflecting on the lessons to be learned from the achievements and failures of this period for the even more difficult years which would seem to lie ahead. The Evangelical Alliance of the South Pacific Islands (commonly known as EA) chose as the theme of its 1984 General Meeting "What is God Saying to Us as a Church and Nation Today?", and the papers given by Joshua Daimoi and Ossie Fountain, in their attempts to answer this crucial question in the light of scripture, are perhaps even more relevant now that the din of the independence celebrations has died down.

Running through both papers is a vein of criticism directed at those Christian groups and churches, which self-righteously lay claim to exclusive truth, thus causing dissension, and disrupting the work of evangelism. Criticism from a slightly different angle, this time of the major churches, for their lack of commitment to the ecumenical movement, is evident in a paper read by John May at another Annual General Meeting, that of the Melanesian Council of Churches in February, 1985. In a report prepared for the same meeting, Fr Robert Lak gives a very personal statement of the reasons why the Roman Catholic church should take ecumenism seriously. The Catholic Bishops' Conference, for its part, made a valuable contribution to ecumenical understanding in Melanesia with its official statement on the charismatic renewal movement, which should be of interest to other churches as well.

In this, the second issue of our journal, we introduce a new section called "Discussion". In it we hope to present short contributions which will stimulate further reflection in areas that are on the "cutting edge" of theology in Melanesia. We are familiar with themes, such as the churches' role in development, and the need for ecumenical cooperation, but have we yet faced the challenge of liberation theology, or thought through the full implications of dialogue, not just among churches, but between religions

and ideologies? A comment on the Vatican's response to liberation theology by Laurenti Magesa, an African priest, and a working paper presented by Archbishop Albert Bundervoet of Rabaul to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, explore the possible relevance of this theology from Latin America for Africa and Melanesia. The widely-known "Dialogue Decalogue" of Leonard Swidler, editor of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, will provide those who are either over-enthusiastic or over-suspicious about "dialogue" with food for thought.

Most of these issues belong to the "public forum" of church policy and decision-making. But these remain up in the air if the equally difficult task of truly indigenous theological reflection is not pursued. We are glad to be able to present a further example of this. The work of Bishop Leslie Boseto of the United Church in the Solomon Islands shows that "base ecclesial communities" and "theology by the people" are not just slogans from Latin America, but have been realities in Melanesia for quite some time. His address, in the conversational style of oral delivery, shows how care of the environment is part of pastoral concern, and thus of theology in Melanesia.

Reports from Northern Australia and Tanzania, book reviews, and two very welcome letters to the editor round off this issue of *Melanesian Journal of Theology*. Discerning readers will notice some changes of format as we try to "get it right". In these, I have been helped by the new editor of Melanesian Institute publications, Paul Roche, and our indefatigable typesetter, Jerry He bale. The patience and professionalism of both are much appreciated.

"Christian responsibility": the articles and other contributions collected here would seem to suggest that we are only just beginning to discover what this might mean in the newly-independent nations of Melanesia. Some of our churches have grown complacent as they have become established in the decades since first missionary contact; others, more recently arrived, seem to be cocksure to the point of offensiveness in their evangelistic zeal. Both groups need to learn to understand one another, and work together in tackling the real problems of these nations –

not imagined ones, imported from outside! It is our hope that the theology represented in these pages will be both ecumenical and indigenous enough to help bring this about.

Our next issue will contain papers from the VIIth MATS Study Institute, held at Malmaluan near Rabaul in October, 1985, on the theme "Towards a Theology of Religious Experience for Melanesia".

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Executive Editor