

BOOK REVIEWS

Brian Schwarz, ed., *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia, Point 7* (1985), 304 pp.

An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia is the third in a series of “Handbooks for Church Workers”, produced by The Melanesian Institute, following book one, *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, and book two, *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*.

The editor, Brian Schwarz, in his introduction, points out the transitional historical situation of the contemporary churches in Papua New Guinea (PNG): “the missionary era is over, the mission of God remains” (p. viii). Herein lies the challenge of ministry in Melanesia today. The aim of helping church workers to understand and meet this challenge is approached by identifying the holistic needs of the people, and by confronting the reality of ministry, as we find it today, with a vision of ministry for the future of God’s people in this country. The vision is described in partial and realistic goals, some closer at hand, others further down the road. The “road” itself is the subject of study, concrete ways, and means of attaining, or approaching, these goals.

This volume gathers 14 articles, written by 11 experienced “ministers” in their respective fields. Therefore, the book never loses touch with the historical reality of the church, even in its highly-reflective parts. It meets the standard of a handbook for church workers by being both comprehensive and clearly understandable.

1. “The Role of the Church in Society” (Gernot Fugmann)

It is shown how, in the religious, social, economic, and political dimensions of life, the church, on a local and national level, needs to assert its prophetic role to participate in determining the goals of change and development.

2. "The Acts of the Apostles in PNG and the Solomon Islands" (Rufus Pech)

This paper describes the complex historical processes of the "missionary era" of this region, with its decisive events, people, dates, concepts, and movements.

3. "Fundamental Issues for a Theology in Melanesia" (Gernot Fugmann)

This article invites Melanesians to a theological dialogue with their religious heritage. The major issues arising from the tension between traditional religious concepts and biblical positions are spelled out clearly, and referred to the pastoral level of the church worker.

4. "Contextualisation and the Church in Melanesia" (Brian Schwarz)

This chapter serves as an introduction to "contextualisation", which is the vital process of the gospel growing intimately into the cultural, social, political environment of a people. It illustrates ways in which this growth can be promoted.

5. "The Challenge of Christ to Traditional Marriage" (Ennio Mantovani)

The author here deals with "the interaction between Christianity and traditional values and ethics, especially as they are applied to marriage" (p. 122), the key question being whether this action is a witness for Christ, and an expression of love and care for others.

6. "Community and Ministry" (Mary MacDonald)

"This paper is concerned with the pastoral care, which the Christian communities offer to their members, and all those with whom they have contact" (p. 141). The author makes a strong plea for the ministry, which belongs to the whole community. Only in relation to all its members, including the ordained clergy, can they understand their partial ministry.

7. “Basic Christian Communities” (Lester Knoll)
The author subtitles his paper, “A strategy for facilitating the internalisation of faith convictions”. He does this by examining the approach of Basic Christian Communities, with examples of this model in the Southern Highlands, showing that Christian growth in faith must begin with personal responsibility and group conviction.
8. “Ministry in the Urban Context” (Brian Schwarz)
“This chapter aims at helping church workers develop a more-positive attitude towards ministry in urban Melanesia” (p. 166). Aspects of urban life, relevant to ministry, are shown. It is suggested that existing, or emerging, communities be used as a basis for urban ministry.
9. “Ministries in an Urban Settlement” (Henk Janssen)
An experienced urban parish priest presents a case study of the development of ministries in an urban settlement in Lae, Morobe Province. It is shown how various ministries may develop, through a process of learning, participation, and sharing of responsibilities on a basic community level.
10. “Faith, if it has not Works, is Dead” (Lynn Giddings)
The author makes a spirited and touching plea for integrated human development, through the light of the gospel gaining influence in the economic, social, political, and spiritual fields of life. The paper is highly critical of many aspects of the status quo, but can also point towards some convincing avenues of ministry, and, most of all, inspire church workers with a vision of a faith that has works.
11. “Serving through Education” (Michael Olsson)
This article demonstrates how the present school system in PNG, patterned after Western models, is in urgent need of reform, by redefining community-related needs, integrating formal and non-formal education, encouraging cultural

maintenance, and, generally, through increased community participation.

12. “Take up your Bed and Walk” (Brian Schwarz)

The church is here defined as a healed and healing community. The challenge is that people, rather than being passive recipients of health care, learn to become responsible participants in caring for themselves and their sick, both medically and pastorally.

13. “Ministry for Development” (Reinhard Tietze)

Development is seen as a reflection of God’s ministry to His people. He cares for their total needs in life. The emphasis here is placed on rural development, where a vast majority of people live, and have their future. A Holistic Rural Development Programme is introduced, which attempts to meet people at their level of learning, and in their needs of whole-life development.

14. “Ministry in Politics” (Father John Momis)

This article is based on an interview of the editor with the priest and politician, the only indigenous author in this volume. He strongly affirms his personal conviction and vocation of putting a greater emphasis on the Christian ministry within the “political arena”. The author’s line of reasoning raises a number of questions, which would need clarification, in further defining the relationship between church and state in Melanesia.

15. “Summing up: The Church in Melanesia” (Ennio Mantovani)

This conclusion of the three-volume series focuses on the identity of the church worker, who is seen as having the role of an animator, or enabler, within the community, so that, ultimately, all believers may share in Christ’s ministry. Independence and full authority is attributed to the local church, which must grow towards maturity. The process of “enculturation” of the gospel requires an open, anxiety-free dialogue with deeply-ingrained Melanesian traditions.

I find the topics and sequence of articles well chosen. In a wide spectrum of actually-practised ministries, all church workers should be able to find their place, and their challenge, within this volume. I would have liked to add two areas of ministry, which, I feel, are in need of special attention in our present situation:

1. In a grossly, male-dominated church, a topic on the ministry of *women* and *to women* might have been an act of courage, and of encouragement, for many sisters.
2. The ministry of training for *ministries* is crucial in any church, for the formation of its workers and their service. Perhaps this topic is a major project in itself: to survey, and critically evaluate, the field of church training institutions and programmes.

There is a *common underlying philosophy in the concept of ministry*, as it is represented in the whole variety of topics and authors:

1. The enterprise of this series of volumes is, in itself, a genuinely *ecumenical* feat. Therefore, these articles breathe an ecumenical spirit of mutual respect, a willingness to dialogue, and to cooperate.
2. Ministry is seen as being essentially *community-oriented*, it is a God-given responsibility, which belongs to the whole community, aiming at a broadly-based participation of all individual charismas.
3. All ministry is necessarily holistic in nature, including and integrating the social, economic, political, and spiritual aspects of life, both of the individual person, and the whole community.
4. The churches' ministry has a *prophetic* dimension, wherein it critically, and responsibly, accompanies the secular powers and authorities in charting and implementing the course of development.

Again, I would like to point out two aspects of ministry, which are definitely included in this concept of ministry, and, yet, I feel, are in need of a special focus of attention in an introduction to ministry in Melanesia:

1. The justifiably strong and repeated emphasis on the community, and the whole body of members, must not lose sight of the single, unique member, and the dimension of a very personal ministry of *pastoral care to the individual's needs*. Many case studies could show how ministry to community needs is intimately tied to key individuals, and the success of a ministry to the whole body is dependent on a parallel ministry to the individual member.
2. My second concern has to do with the well-known fact that many a program, which looks fine on paper, simply does not work in reality, because of failure through isolation. Where there is no functioning *process of on-going accompaniment, consultation, supervision*, offering regular support and confrontation, facilitating continuous correction, learning, and growth, "things" will deteriorate. It seems to be a law of nature, and we need to take heed of this in our ministry, that isolation means stagnation and deterioration, for this fate may befall us all, the village aid, or motivator, as well as the missionary, pastor, teacher, principal, bishop; it can be found in well-financed and staffed programmes, even in defensive, confessionally-sectarian churches.

There is a deeply spiritual and practical truth in the symbol of the body, which encompasses all our ministry, a living organism with the continuous circulation of life-giving blood, enabling and necessitating communication and coordination among individual parts, all bound together, and linked to one ultimate centre. In our language of faith, this is Christ, "who is the Head" (Eph 4:15, 16). Ministry may be understood within this symbol of the living body of Christ, which is His church. Its practical consequences are as real as the

whole body's need for a well-functioning circulation of blood. This is the true meaning of ecumenism, or catholicity, a very real need at the local Melanesian level, and the universal level of Christ's church.

I would like to conclude this review, and whole-hearted recommendation, with two distinct personal feelings I had while reading this book. At one point, it felt frightening to realise that a future lack of development, or wrong development, in this country could, in part, be the responsibility of the churches, because of their unique insights, resources, and influence on a broad basis. And, as I closed the last page of this book, I had the feeling, which I often have when pondering many of the burning issues of our times: the facts have all been laid before us, no one can say, I had no way of hearing the call. The only question is, to what extent we have the personal will, and the structural freedom, to follow the call.

“The call to serve is clear. The needs are urgent. The question now is how we will respond.” (Michael Olsson, p. 242)

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Tony Swain, *Interpreting Aboriginal Religion: An Historical Account*, Special Studies in Religions No. 5, Adelaide SA: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1985, pp. 156 + x.

The book is a helpful, compact account of the historical evolution of anthropological theory on religion, in relation to the study of Aborigines, and their culture, by European and white Australian scholars. In fact, as is pointed out in chapter two (on the period 1925-1970), the line of English ethnological and anthropological societies and institutes that sprang from the Aborigines Protection Society, which, itself, resulted, in 1838, from a Parliamentary Select Committee, inquiring into the treatment of native inhabitants of British settlements, after Quaker and Evangelical philanthropists had succeeded in securing the abolition of slavery in 1833.

The book's main value is that it provides a compact, reasoned account of attitudes towards Aboriginal religion, from the time of first contact up to the present. For instance, by relating the early writers in this field to the rationalist European cultural and philosophic fashion of their time, he makes intelligible that extraordinary early denial, even by church ministers, of the very existence of "religion" among the Aborigines.

The book does a good job in covering so vast and complex a field in little over a 150 pages. It is pretty obvious that the last pages (pp. 123-134), covering scholars of recent times (Levi Strauss, Stanner, Elkin, and Eliade), were tacked on to a dissertation, so as to give it a contemporary relevance as a published book. While one could wish for a more careful presentation of the thought of a rich thinker like Stanner, in view of the limitations of space, and the usefulness of the book, it would be churlish of me to complain about specific points.

I would, however, like to make two remarks. I would have thought Kenelm Burridge's *Encountering Aborigines: a Case Study, Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal*, New York NY: Pergamon Press, 1973, could have been more acknowledged (cf. p. ix). I would see the two books as complementary: Swain's is more a chronicle of scholars, Burridge's an essay in intellectual interpretation (so, in fact, closer to the meaning of Swain's somewhat misleading title!).

Secondly, it is a pity Swain has paid no attention to Ernest Ailred Worms' major essay, with Helmut Petri, *Australische Eingeborenen-Religionen*, Nelen Yubu Missiological Series, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1968. Certainly, Swain had to restrict his coverage for practical reasons. On p. 102, he explains that he has selected only the theories that link the earlier chapters of his book with "present-day thinking on aboriginal religion". Worms' essay certainly does this. The lack of an English translation has resulted in its almost total neglect. Nelen Yubu hopes to remedy this defect in the near future.

Finally, Swain's book carries a useful bibliography of main works (pp. 141-156) – though I wonder why William Edward Hanley Stanner's *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays, 1938-1973*, Canberra ACT: Australian National University Press, 1979, was omitted, and, of course, E. A. Worms' 1968 essay (and French translation, 1972).

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(Reprinted with permission from Nelen Yubu 23, p. 33).

Theodor Ahrens, *Unterwegs nach der verlorenen Heimat. Studien zur Identitätsproblematik in Melanesien*, Erlanger Monographien aus Mission und Oekumene, Bd. 4, Erlangen: Verlag der Evang. Luth. Mission, 1986, 280 pp.

It is not usual for the Melanesian Journal of Theology to review books in languages other than English or Tok Pisin, but, in view of Dr Theo Ahrens' long association with Papua New Guinea as a Lutheran missionary, then as the first non-Catholic staff member of the Melanesian Institute, and, for a number of years, as the Melanesia Secretary of the North Elbian Mission Centre, Hamburg, we thought there were grounds for making an exception, especially as the substance of Part II of his book appeared as " 'The Flower Fair as Thorns as Well': Nativistic Millennialism in Melanesia as a Pastoral and Missiological Issue", in Missiology XIII-1 (January 1985), pp. 61-80, and his discussion with Andrew Strathern on Pentecostalism was reproduced in the previous issue of the Melanesian Journal of Theology 2-1 (April 1986), pp. 8-12.

One often hears the suspicion, sometimes voiced as an assertion, that indigenous Melanesian ways of thinking are still operative under the surface of Christian forms and phrases. One of the strengths of Ahrens' book is that, by adducing case studies, and developing what he calls a "hermeneutic key" or "religious decoder" (p. 141) to analyse

them, he shows how Melanesian thought forms continue to operate, as Melanesian Christians struggle towards a new identity. With all due respect, he also unmask some of the misunderstandings, which arose when the missionaries of former times, even the redoubtable Christian Keysser, tried to interpret the reactions of their Melanesian converts.

His sketch of the social and theological background of the 19th-century missionaries (pp. 94ff), is particularly helpful in throwing light on these misunderstandings, while, on the side of the Melanesians, a statement, he attributes to Peter Lawrence, provides the key to understanding many of the problems still faced by the churches today: Melanesians ascribed to religion, in the world of the whites, the same function their own rituals had in theirs, namely, to provide the basis for social and political success (p. 101). It was not so much the content of the gospel, as the spectacle of the whites' way of life, which, for them, was the true kago ("cargo"), the symbol of salvation (p. 45), and the advent of the whites confronted them for the first time with the real possibility that tomorrow could be fundamentally different from today, with the concept of the future (p. 100).

One of Ahrens' main aims is to further push our understanding of cargo cults. He insists on their religious significance, disagreeing with Peter Worsley and Bryan Wilson, who tend to reduce them to proto-political protest movements (p. 40). He also disagrees with John Barr, that the Holy Spirit movements of recent years have introduced a qualitatively new era in indigenous Melanesian Christianity (p. 139). Rather, he sees "nativistic millennialism" and "thaumaturgical Holy Spirit movements" (i.e., cargoist expectations, with roots in Melanesian culture, and Pentecostal groups, which emphasise faith healing and speaking in tongues) as interacting in the single basic context of Melanesian religiosity. It is in this same context that he concludes his book by examining case studies of a wide range of Melanesian intellectuals, as they search for a new/old Melanesian identity (Ignatius Kilage, Turo Raapoto, Malama Meleisea, Peter Kenilorea, Bernard Narokobi, pp. 193ff). What impresses about these analyses is Ahrens' many-sidedness: ever wary of simplifications, he suggests that even the Pentecostalism and biblical fundamentalism, introduced by expatriate evangelists, has a role as "catalyst and

innovator” in the formation of Melanesian identity (pp. 46, 191, and the interview with Andrew Strathern in the Appendix), and that there may be unexpected variations in Melanesians’ experiences and statements, of their own identity.

Another strength of the book is that, although he is engaged in constructing a systematic framework for theology in Melanesia, Ahrens takes village people’s religion very seriously in that framework. This is evident in his concern to understand how myths function in Melanesian societies (pp. 29ff), in his analysis of the tension between *lo* (social harmony) and *kros* (social disruption, pp. 34ff), and in his recognition that the inevitable syncretism of religion at this level, if it is faced up to and worked through, will pave the way for the ecumenical relevance of Melanesian theology (p. 46). Investigating the polarity between village and town, in the search for Melanesian identity, he makes the useful clarification that, whereas in “modern” societies, with their Reformation and Enlightenment heritage, an identity is sought, which transcends the network of prescribed social roles, in “traditional” societies, identity is inseparably bound up with participating in these roles (pp. 62, 180-181).

It is not surprising, given the incomplete understanding of Melanesia, on the part of Westerners, and the Melanesians’ difficulty in articulating their own understanding of themselves in Western terms, that ambiguities remain in Ahrens’ analysis of what he well calls “the implicit, almost unconscious, dialogue with tradition, carried on by the individual Christian, in the conduct of his or her daily life” (p. 47). On the one hand, he sheds light on the “hidden agenda” of Melanesians, as they feel their way into the Christian context, and he is fully aware that this agenda will form the basis of any genuinely Melanesian theology. On the other hand, however, he insists that it was not just a tactical, but a theological, error to present Christ as a new “culture hero”, exemplifying a new “life style”, replacing *Kilibob* and *Manub* in the framework of the biblical story of creation. Christ is the Saviour, the New Adam, the initiator of faith, and He should be presented as no less than this (pp 58ff, 128ff). Can Melanesian identity survive such a challenge? What is the function of imported Pentecostalism, and indigenous Holy Spirit movement, in this

encounter between Christ and culture? Are they able to absorb the enormous tension implicit in Ahrens' approach, or are they merely a temporary respite in the continuing search for a resolution?

For the present reviewer's Roman Catholic sensibility, it is the undercurrent of fundamentalism, which tends to accompany Pentecostalist phenomena – though not by any theological necessity – and which may have functional equivalents in aspects of Melanesian culture, that presents the real impediment to the emergence of a social identity, both Melanesian and Christian. Though Ahrens gently takes this reviewer to task for overemphasising this danger (p. 192), his thoughtful and stimulating book opens up new areas of research, to which a number of lines of approach are possible. His theological standpoint will doubtless be confronted by those of others with different confessional backgrounds, or different evaluations of Melanesian culture as a medium of revelation, but his methodological insights will be of value to all investigators in the field.

One bibliographical slip will need to be corrected in future editions: Bernard Narokobi's recent book *Life and Leadership in Melanesia* is not a new edition of his well-known *The Melanesian Way* – though such an edition exists in the same format – but an entirely new collection of essays, which, we hope, will be followed by many more.

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David Thomson, *Bora is Like Church: Aboriginal Initiation Ceremonies and the Christian Church at Lockhart River, Queensland*, Sydney NSW: Australian Board of Missions, 1985) 2nd revd edn, 48 pp. A\$4.00

Bora is like Church, 1982 (revised and reset edition, 1985), is an anthropological and theological study of Aboriginal initiation ceremonies and the Christian church at Lockhart River in Queensland.

This book has been published by the Australian Board of Missions, 91 Bathurst Street, Sydney 2000. The book has 29 black-and-white photographs. David Thomson is on the staff of Nungalinga College, Darwin.

This book is interesting, informative, and gives very helpful anthropological background on the Lockhart people, and their ceremonies. It also provides enlightening theological insights. The book should be read by people from outside, who work in the Aboriginal churches, and those who are engaged in doing and teaching theology in the Aboriginal context. The writer, in fact, states in the Foreword to the revised edition that the original impetus for writing the book “came from the need to provide a basic explanation of the Bora to ‘outsiders’ living at Lockhart River, who can too easily judge their limited view of *Bora* practices by the standards of their own cultural assumptions”. Although the book deals with one Aboriginal society, there are useful anthropological and theological insights, which can be applied to other Aboriginal communities.

The book is in two parts. The first part outlines important features of Aboriginal society at Lockhart River, and of the initiation ceremonies called *Bora*, which still take place today. The author describes the different aspects of the initiation ceremonies, and their effects on the individual initiates, and on the life of the group. The *Bora* ceremonies are seen as “sacramental”; with the “inner effects of strengthening and stabilising community life in the present”. Through the ceremonies, the strength of the society, which is established by human ancestry, is transmitted. These initiation ceremonies have continued at irregular intervals through the period of contact with Europeans. There is fresh concern among the Lockhart people that these ceremonies should not be lost. The writer states that the renewal of the ceremonies “is not an attempt to return to the past, but to value their roots in the past, as a source of confidence and direction in meeting the present, and what the future may bring”. The *Bora* initiation ceremonies are seen as expressions of the Lockhart River people’s past roots, which endorse their life and humanity today, and which counteract the destructive effects of social change.

In the second part of the book, the writer discusses the link between the *Bora* ceremonies and the Christian church, as they have existed and interacted side-by-side. The author writes to show, and this is his main thesis in this part, that the initiation ceremonies do not conflict with the Christian faith. The two should be able to exist in parallel, and “interact in meaningful ways”, without merging or syncretising. *Bora is Like Church* is a common way in which the parallels are expressed. The Lockhart River people have readily understood “much of the sacramental life of the church, because of its functional similarity to what they have experienced in their ceremonies”. Noting that church ceremonies have been presented with “a predominantly European mould”, the writer suggests ways in which the church ceremonies can become more in line with Aboriginal-style ceremonies. There is also need for church ceremonies and activities to become more flexible and informal, and for them to centre on where people are – “at home, under a tree, on the beach, at the stock camp, out camping, etc.”. This part of the book also examines the ways in which Aboriginal theology has emerged at Lockhart River, and ways to encourage this theology to develop. “Fundamental to this theology is the valid place of Aboriginal culture and ceremony in their lives, and the common affirmation, by both *Bora* and church, of Aboriginal identity and consciousness.”

Like Melanesians, Aboriginals have diverse languages, with different social organisations and customs. The writer rightly points out that Aboriginal society differs considerably from place to place, and that his study does not necessarily apply to other Aboriginal communities. He also draws attention to the complex nature of Aboriginal cultures, and states that “patient listening and learning from Aborigines is needed, rather than preconceived plans and solutions”. This is an important and necessary qualification for those of us who come from outside to work with the Aborigines.

The writer is aware that, like Aboriginal cosmology, in the traditional Melanesian worldview, there is no great distinction between the secular and sacred: life is viewed and lived out holistically. But the author has noted that the inner view of nature, contained in the Lockhart *Boras* is not Melanesian, although there are similarities. It

should also be noted that traditional Melanesian religions are complex, and involved more than animistic beliefs, as the author perhaps seems to imply. However, the writer has made this distinction, having in mind a small group of Melanesian Brothers (Anglicans, who have come to work at Lockhart River. It is possible for these religious Melanesians, coming from a background “where nature is seen to be imbued with spiritual powers”, to quickly conclude that *Bora* worship is animistic and is anti-Christian.

David Thompson’s book is a timely work. I make this observation for four reasons. Firstly, as I have already noted, it should be read by people coming to work from outside with the Aboriginal churches. Secondly, Aboriginal Christians are working and searching to develop their own theology, and Aboriginal Christianity, and the insights the book provides are valuable for the Aboriginal Christians. Thirdly, there are Christians from outside who have said that Aboriginal Christians should regard their culture as evil. It is heartening that the book affirms the positive side of Aboriginal culture and ceremonies. Finally, this book should give help and guidance to those Aboriginal Christians who are seeking to distinguish any negative elements of their ceremonies from the positive ones, in the light of their Christian faith.

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