

EDITORIAL

A Time of Transition

To say that the newly-independent nations of the Pacific are in a stage of transition is to state the obvious. What is not so obvious are the implications this experience of transition has for cultural identity and theological reflection. The transition has both economic and religious dimensions, but these are usually studied separately. Several contributions to this issue of *Melanesian Journal of Theology* try to correlate them. An excerpt from the B.D. thesis of Erona Tarakabu gives a first-hand account of the pressures faced by his people from the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati), when nuclear testing forced them to emigrate to the Solomon Islands, with their more-economically active and religiously-plural society. Garry Trompf, in a stimulating paper, examines the subtle influences of the cash economy and consumer society on religious thinking. And a report on the Waigani Seminar, with the theme "The Ethics of Development", suggests that we have hardly begun to come to grips with the moral and religious dimensions of development.

The Executive of MATS has proposed that the Association's eighth Study Institute, to be held in Lae late September or early October, take as its theme either "Appropriate Theology of Liberation for Melanesia" or "Theology by the People: a Force for Justice, Development, and Peace?" Whichever topic is finally chosen, both express an underlying concern to bring the religious experience and Christian faith of Melanesians to bear on the problems of transition posed by independence and development.

Recalling the theme of our last issue on "The Melanesian Spirit in Theology", we are privileged to present a paper by the distinguished Taiwanese theologian Choan-Seng Song, and to review one of his recent books. We hope that both will be an inspiring example to Melanesian theologians who are searching for the "spirit", which will become their medium for expressing the work of the Spirit in Melanesia. They should receive further encouragement from a special

review of the MATS anthology of theological writing from Melanesia by Garry Trompf.

Another aspect of transition is the movement of Christian churches towards greater unity. A group of local churches has participated in this movement by producing a Melanesian response to the World Council of Churches' Lima Document on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, which is published here for the first time. Two recent books on BEM are reviewed as a further incentive to use this document as a basis for ecumenical dialogue.

We are pleased to welcome Fr Christopher Garland of Newton College, Popondetta, as the new Anglican representative on our editorial board. At the same time, we record with sorrow that Revd Roger Jordahl of Martin Luther Seminary has been forced to return to the United States by ill health, and Fr Theo Aerts has been recalled to Europe for the same reason. We wish them both a speedy recovery. As a final variation on the theme of transition, I have to announce that I will be relinquishing the editorship of *Melanesian Journal of Theology* later this year, as I have been appointed Director of the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, from September 1. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking my colleagues in MATS, and at the Melanesian Institute, for the help and encouragement they have given in launching *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, and to the printing department of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Ukarumpa, for consistently turning the finished journal into a quality product. Over and above all this, however, it is the ecumenical experience of working closely with Melanesian Christians of various confessional backgrounds for which I am most deeply grateful. May God continue to bless their collaboration in developing a truly indigenous and ecumenical theology for Melanesia.

John D'Arcy May
Executive Editor.