

Charles W. Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982. Pp. xii, 285. Map, bibliography. \$17.50

The fullest body of writing on the history of the Pacific Islands deals with the expansion and impact of Christianity. Academic writers, mostly

associated with the Australian National University, have been scarcely less assiduous in contributing to it than were the missionary chroniclers, from whom they draw much of the material for their monographs. Such a sustained literary efflorescence is easily explained. The missionaries were more literate, and had readier access to printing presses and to an audience, than any other group of settlers in the Pacific. They thus constituted conspicuous targets for, and were munificent providers of data to, later researchers. Besides, given the extent to which religion, both traditional and introduced, has pervaded the islanders' lives, the development of Christianity has attracted writers not only on account of its inherent interest but also because it relates intimately to most other facets of Pacific history. From the Tahiti of the Pomares to the Vanuatu of Walter Lini, politics and economics cannot be properly understood apart from religion.

The increasing number of specialized, detailed, and localized studies of religion and its ramifications has, however, highlighted the need for works of another kind, namely, for surveys and syntheses, which facilitate the making of comparisons and generalizations (without which our understanding of human affairs is immeasurably impoverished). Nineteen eighty-two was, therefore, an *annus mirabilis* for Pacific studies, for it saw a successful meeting of that need with the publication of both John Garrett's *To Live Among the Stars* (an account of missionary activity from 1568 to the end of the nineteenth century) and of its fortuitous complement, the book under review. *The Island Churches of the South Pacific* deals with the transition from mission to church that has characterized the present century, paralleling the process of decolonization.

Charles Forman is Professor of Missions and Fellow of Calhoun College at Yale University Divinity School. Pan-Pacific and pan-denominational in its scope, his book is to be valued for the quality and amount of the data it contains and admired for the way in which he has assimilated and organized this mass of material. It is also to be respected for the comparative approach which is maintained throughout, and which inhibits any tendency to too-easy generalization about places or denominations. The first quarter of the book is taken up with a series of narratives covering mission-church developments in the Pacific, island group by island group, from 1906 to 1942. Forman then shifts to a discussion of themes, again drawing on material from all over the Pacific. The first set of thematic chapters focuses on the religious life of the island peoples: "The Village Church," "The Indigenous View of Christianity," "Christian Ethics in a South Seas Setting." Such matters have commonly been touched

on incidentally and anecdotally by historians. Forman, in contrast, treats them deliberately and comprehensively.

Turning from the people and their practices, he then offers four chapters on the (more familiar?) matter of change within the institutional structures of Pacific Christianity. Here the shift from *palagi*-controlled missions to independent churches is introduced with an account of events in Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji, where the transition was first achieved. The theme is continued with a discussion of the impact of the Second World War and of "adjustment movements," and is completed by an account of the indigenization occurring within each denomination established in the Pacific. The two concluding chapters have much to say about the churches' involvement in education and in nation-building.

Copiously informed, exhaustively documented and up-to-date, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific* is both an outstanding contribution to historical scholarship and a valuable aid to the understanding of current events. Its discussion of religious affairs illuminates the social and political context within which they occur.

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