

Carl Loeliger and Garry Trompf, eds., *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific and University of Papua New Guinea, 1985. Pp. 186. US\$7.00 (F\$5.00 in Pacific Islands).

Reviewed by John Barker, University of Washington

This volume is composed of sixteen studies of various "new religious movements" across Melanesia. Most of the articles were written by students attending the University of Papua New Guinea and some are missionary reports. The studies are grouped into three sections: New Guinea; Papua; and the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji.

This is not a scholarly book, although the editors are professional academics. Many of the chapters lack the sort of orienting material one finds in conventional ethnographic collections: locations and sizes of local populations, social and historical backgrounds of the subjects under study, research methods, and so on. Very few of the authors draw upon the extensive theoretical and comparative literature dealing with religious movements. The authors differ greatly in their research and writing abilities. The best chapters convey a sensitivity for the nuances of the occasions and localities in which people have embraced new religious understandings. But there are also chapters that are so roughly

written and that treat their subjects so superficially that one wonders what purpose is served in publishing them. Given the very diverse nature and circumstances of the different religious movements reviewed in this book, the eclectic approaches and uneven quality of the writing and analysis in each chapter makes for especially difficult reading.

Loeliger and Trompf say that the purpose of the collection is to correct the popular conception of Melanesia as the home of the "curious" and "bizarre" cargo cult: to show both the range of variation within cargo cults and the wider range of religious forms in Melanesia within which cargoism is embedded. This aim, and the aim of providing some sort of framework for the case studies, would certainly have been advanced by a review of the historical and cultural background of new religious movements in the region, but none is attempted. Instead, in the introduction, the editors concentrate on a rather uninteresting discussion of typology. They fail to even mention the most pervasive and understudied of the "new religious movements" in Melanesia--Christianity in its various orthodox guises. This lack of an overview, in combination with the eclectic nature of the collection as a whole, renders the book almost inaccessible to those who do not possess a good knowledge of a wide portion of the Melanesian literature. And this is a shame. For the editors are right: we do need to pay more attention to the variations in religious innovation in Melanesia, especially where cargoism is not involved.

With these limitations in mind, those readers who come to the book with a knowledge of what has previously been written will find much of interest in the collection. The most valuable essays, and best written, concern agitations and reform movements within Christian communities, which have on occasions led to the formation of small, independent sects. Bedero Geno Noga and Timo Ani Kila present studies of two visionaries in the Rigo and Hula areas on the southern coast of Papua who stirred the religious imaginations and passions of factions within their communities, if only for short periods. Meshach Maetoloa examines the careers of two religious innovators on Malaita who were more successful in forming a coherent theology and organization and in attracting followers, eventually forming the Remnant Church. The fate of this sect, like that of many millenarian movements, seems to have rested on the well-being of its leaders. Singoleo Hanson Matas-Kalkot describes an interesting reform movement that began within the Anglican congregations of Pentecost Island in Vanuatu in the 1920s and that thrived long after its founder's death. While reflecting indigenous cultural orientations, the Sila Dan movement called for a much more radi-

cal break with tradition than did the Anglican mission, and built its strength upon intensive bible study sessions in local villages.

Joan Kale's study of a wave of religious excitement that swept through Baptist communities of Kyaka Enga in the New Guinea highlands in the early 1970s is one of the most interesting and carefully considered chapters in the collection. The movement, which involved uncontrolled shaking and visions, was begun and spread by women. It initially received the encouragement of Solomon Islander instructors at the mission's training college, who saw it as a revival similar to one they had experienced in their own country. Kale reviews the origins, spread, and local meaning of the movement in terms of the indigenous culture and the pressures and opportunities of the postcontact situation. She sympathetically portrays it, quite convincingly, as a product of the Kyaka Enga people's attempt to reconcile Christianity with their received moral and cosmological ideas.

Finally, Paula Rokotuiviwa's well-balanced study of the Congregation of the Poor in Suva, Fiji, is of much interest. She chronicles the life and basic teachings of Sekaia T. Loaniceva, a mechanic who, following a series of visions, gave up his property and entered a career of faith healing. At the time of study in the mid-1970s, Loaniceva's church was made up of members of several races in a number of countries who had forsaken their worldly goods upon their conversion. It is hard to imagine a sharper contrast to cargoism! I was reminded, too, as I read this piece, of how little research has been done on religion in Melanesian towns and cities where an increasing proportion of the population now lives.

The remaining eight chapters deal with cargo cults, millenarian movements, and cooperative organizations in the Sepik region, Manam Island, New Hanover, Bougainville Island, and inland southeastern Papua. These present information about several previously undocumented and two documented movements (Irakau of Manam and the "Johnson Cult" of New Hanover). Although these chapters add to the ethnography, they offer few new insights into Melanesian religious movements.

One of the special qualities of this book is that it was written primarily by people who are members of the societies they are investigating and, in some cases, participants in these religious activities. While I doubt that *New Religious Movements in Melanesia* will find its way to many scholars' bookshelves, it should be appreciated as an indication that a new generation of Melanesian scholars is completing its apprenticeship at national universities in the Pacific. These scholars are taking

the study of religious innovation into the somewhat less “exotic” areas of the changes sweeping through Melanesian society that were previously ignored or understudied by expatriate researchers. Their innovative research promises to add much to the discourse on Melanesian realities in the future.