

John Garrett, *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II*. Suva and Geneva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, in association with the World Council of Churches, 1997. Pp. 499, illus., maps, index. US\$13 paperback.

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Where Nets Were Cast is the last of a three-volume work on the history of Christianity in Oceania. The first volume, *To Live Among the Stars* (1982), chronicled missionary efforts across the region from the earliest Spanish contacts to around 1900. Although Garrett compiled some new information, particularly on smaller denominations and island groups, much of this history was already familiar from innumerable mission and secular accounts. The second and longest volume, *Footsteps in the Sea* (1992), ventured into less-explored territory, the colonial period between the 1890s and the outbreak of the Second World War, when the basic pattern of denominational distribution was established across the region. The present book brings the story up to 1996. The publishers to their credit have kept all three studies available at a reasonable price. Together they form an indispensable source for students of Pacific history.

Garrett divides his history into three phases, corresponding with three general themes. The first section covers the traumas suffered by missions

and their adherents during World War II. The fighting forced missionaries across the region to confront the contradictions between their own nationalist and political convictions and their responsibilities towards their congregations. As the Japanese invasion spread, Catholics (Roman and high-church Anglican) tended to remain at their posts (at the cost of considerable personal suffering and death) while Protestants withdrew. In all denominations, however, there were many outstanding cases of personal heroism and sacrifice. Islanders learned that their colonial masters were neither invincible nor inevitable. Missionaries returned to their posts to deal with depleted and destroyed resources and, often, newly independent and sometimes defiant congregations. In places like Malaita and the Madang area of New Guinea, the rift that opened between local Christians and the foreign missionary leadership in some churches took years to heal.

In most places, however, the transition from foreign mission to local church came much more gradually and with less pain. Garrett's second phase deals with the period between 1946 and 1961, when the churches (along with colonial governments) began to tentatively grapple with the task of preparing Islanders for eventual independence. While Christian Islanders in general became more assertive and made real gains within the ranks of the clergy, the question of "who leads"—which Garrett sets as the central theme for this period—tended still to be resolved in favor of the missionaries. Indeed, the most contentious struggles tended to occur within the ranks of the missionaries themselves and between the missions and colonial governments over issues such as education, the compatibility between Christian theologies and local custom, and growing sectarianism as missions expanded into unevangelized areas and began to compete more vigorously among Christianized populations.

During the third period defined by Garrett, 1961–1996, most of the older Protestant and Anglo-Catholic missions in the region became national churches, paralleling the transition towards political independence. The Roman Catholic Church, the largest single denomination in the region, remains the more foreign in complexion, largely because of the international structure of the church and impediments to joining the priesthood, notably the celibacy rule. Even the Roman Catholic Church, however, has gone a great distance in devolving authority (and liturgical expression) to national and local levels. Arguably these changes have occurred in response to international shifts in mainstream Christian denominations as much as local agitation for control. The profound reformations to Catholic practice that followed Vatican II as well as the ecumenical movement all promoted a localization of church control virtually everywhere.

Ironically, the increasing presence of Islanders in the clergy and adminis-

trations of the island churches has not necessarily translated into more “Pacific” expressions of Christianity. Christianity in the Pacific Islands continues to be shaped by global trends. In particular the last forty years have seen a marked growth in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), a vast variety of evangelical and Pentecostal sects, and a host of well-endowed and general conservative para-church organizations such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Pacific Missionary Aviation. Even within the older mission churches, worship styles and understandings of Christianity seem to be becoming increasingly individual, outwardly oriented, and enthusiastic in response to these global trends.

Where Nets Were Cast provides an abundance of information showing how these general trends have worked out in different denominations in different areas. For the most part, however, it is up to the reader to tease them out. Garrett does not provide a unified history of Christianity in the region. This book, like the others in the series, is instead a collection of short narratives chronicling the activities of specific church and mission leaders in the different island groups. Each section of the book is divided into regional chapters: on Papua New Guinea, eastern Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia. Within each chapter, Garrett takes on one denomination at a time. The approach is quite exhaustive: even tiny Niue and the smaller churches in New Zealand are covered in each of the three sections of the book. Needless to say, some regions and some denominations receive considerably more attention than others. In particular, one would have wished for more attention to independent religious movements and churches and the rapidly expanding evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal churches in the last section. All the same, researchers from across the region will find useful information here that is available nowhere else.

Despite the blurb on the back cover, which suggests a general audience, this is a very narrowly focused book that will be of most interest and use to specialists. Garrett’s minihistories often include fascinating thumbnail sketches of the endeavors of specific mission and church leaders, both Islander and European. The lack of overview or comparative sections or chapters, however, greatly limits the accessibility of the book for most readers. It helps if one ignores Garrett’s scheme and reads the three accounts of each local sect in sequence, but even so one inevitably bogs down in an ocean of specifics. Garrett’s resolute focus upon leaders also greatly constricts his narrative. While he is sensitive to the need to include Islanders in their own religious history, the strategy of constructing the narrative around church leaders inevitably elevates European missionaries and issues identified by church elites while relegating most Islander Christians to the sidelines. Garrett has virtually nothing to say about cultural or social influences upon

Pacific Christianity, let alone indigenous understandings, appropriations, and adaptations of the different denominational traditions. The book includes few references to the extensive and growing missiological and anthropological literature on indigenous Christianity.

Fortunately there are several excellent and far more accessible books available for readers interested in the spread of Christianity across the Pacific as perceived by committed Christians. One thinks here in particular of Charles Forman's *The Island Churches of the South Pacific* (1982) and Manfred Ernst's comprehensive sociological study of recent trends, *Winds of Change* (1994). Garrett's book performs the more specific but still critical function of opening windows into the inner workings of mission leaders and elites over the past fifty years. As such it provides an indispensable resource towards the creation of more finely detailed and nuanced studies of Pacific Christianity.