

EDITORIAL

Once again, the articles in this issue deal with topics of current concern to the churches in Melanesia. It is hoped that they will also be of interest to our overseas readers, and of benefit to the wider study of theology.

Within many cultures, the transitions of life are important. Churches in the West often see these transition points (such as birth, marriage, and death) as opportunities for the presentation of the gospel. At such points, people are usually open to consider the larger realities of existence. In our first article, Russell Thorp asks the question: "Can primal funeral rites be used in some way to convey a Christian message?" He seeks to answer this question through an examination of one example from Melanesian culture.

Our second article is related to the topic of marriage, but not at the actual point of transition. Polygamy is an issue, with which many churches struggle within Melanesia. One pastor recently commented to me that the men in his church have been known to "backslide", in order to marry an extra wife. Once the marriage has been formalised, the man will make suitable acts of repentance and recommitment. Noki Pep introduces some of the issues that are still current, within the debates about polygamy, within the church. He also encourages the church to consider ways of ministering to those who are involved in polygamy, and related family problems.

Our third article deals with the topic of premillennialism. As Greg Schiller notes, this topic is quite popular within Papua New Guinea. In the past, there have been many groups within the country, who have emphasised, and often distorted, the Bible's teaching concerning the return of Jesus. Some of these groups have been short-lived; others have lasted longer. Some have attracted few followers; others have accumulated quite a gathering. With the approach of the year 2000, new groups and

new distortions are joining the ranks (and not only within Melanesia). It is appropriate that this topic be highlighted at this point in time.

Our final article concerns the topic of suffering. This is a topic that interests humanity, mainly because of our experience. Recently, the country of Papua New Guinea has suffered the disaster of a tidal wave at Aitape. While those in the region suffered directly, as a result of this earthquake-induced tidal wave, there are very few in the country, who are not touched, in some way, by this tragedy. The article by James O'Brien was not written with the Aitape calamity in mind. Yet, it is a timely reminder of some of the biblical principles that are involved in our thinking on this issue.

Once again, we would apologise that we are behind schedule in the production of the Journal. We thank you for your patience with us. This issue was almost ready in early February, but a series of circumstances has delayed its completion for another six months.

Rodney Macready.