

EDITORIAL

I must apologise that the fourth essay, promised in the last issue of the journal, has not materialised in this issue. Unfortunately, the hard disk drive of the computer, on which it was stored, decided that it no longer wanted to work. We hope to have it available for the next issue of the journal, but there was insufficient time to do the recovery and editorial work necessary before the publication of this issue.

The first three articles have been provided by the Lutheran Highlands Seminary at Ogelbeng, one of the member colleges of MATS. Two articles are by graduates of the college; the third is by one of the faculty members. Each deals with a different aspect of Melanesian life:

Penga Nimbo explores the fact of suffering, from a background of his own tribe. He considers the traditional understanding of suffering among his people, and asks how that compares with the teaching of the scriptures. He then addresses the issue of how a Christian pastor should encourage those who are suffering.

Sakaria Malelak discusses the nature of youth work in the Lutheran church of Papua New Guinea. In this emerging nation, young people have faced, and continue to face, many difficulties. They have been educated, but many of them are unsure of what to do with that education. Some of these difficulties have flowed over into youth groups. Sakaria considers the traditional way in which young people were incorporated into the tribe. He compares that with the approach of the church to youth work. He suggests some ways in which the youth work of the church may be improved, by paying attention to some of the traditional ways of training.

Greg Schiller wrestles with the nature of theological education in this country. Many, if not all, of the theological colleges in Papua New Guinea use Western formats and styles of teaching. He asks whether this is appropriate within the Melanesian setting, and summarises the findings of various cultural anthropologists in relation to the learning styles of “field-sensitive” learners. He reviews his own teaching

methods in the light of this research from cultural anthropologists, and makes some suggestions as to ways of improving the theological education situation.

The final article comes from Theo Aerts. Feasts form a significant part of traditional Melanesian culture. They are an important expression of friendship between people. Father Aerts briefly explores the various ways in which the different denominations of the South Pacific celebrate the eucharist. He gives consideration to the biblical background for these variations. He then suggests some possibilities for finding a way forward, to enable the Melanesian churches to come together for the celebration of a “Pacific love meal”.

So, the four articles are quite varied. Two are written by Melanesians, and two by expatriates. The thing they share in common is that they seek to apply Christian principles within a Melanesian context. All cultures of the world are challenged by the truth of God’s word. What does the Bible say about the things that we do within our cultures? Some things, within culture, the Bible praises; some things, it condemns, and some appear to be neutral. We struggle to work out which cultural practices fall into which category.

Melanesian culture is no exception. Each of these four articles touches on an aspect of Melanesian culture. Each of the authors wrestles with what the Bible has to say about that aspect of culture. Each suggests some conclusions in the area discussed. Sometimes, it is suggested that the cultural understandings need to be corrected, sometimes, that they be given further consideration; and, sometimes, that they be endorsed.

As is usual, not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you wrestle through these issues, that the thoughts of the authors will help you to grow in your understanding of God’s word, and what it may say to your culture.

Rodney Macready.