

## INTRODUCTION

The present volume on "Traditional Religion in Melanesia" and its companion volume on "Christianity in Melanesia" were written for various occasions. In the first collection of essays we do suggest that the question, whether Melanesians were traditionally religious or not, definitely deserves a positive answer. Instead of merely concentrating on the old search for monotheism, I would think that there were many religious models at hand. In fact, some of these configurations (such as that of the self sacrificing *dema*-figure) show most interesting contact points with the Christian beliefs introduced, say, a century ago (1).

As a side concern - or by way of supplement - I searched the anthropological literature for traditional prayers, as signs of this old religion. As a matter of fact there are in the existing prayer collections only very rare texts quoted for the whole of Melanesia. Herewith, I want to submit some 120 "pagan prayers" in English translation. What more is needed to prove this second point (2).

At times people have wondered how it was possible that Christianity caught on so well in Melanesia, so that - according to the latest census in Papua New Guinea - over 96 percent of the people profess now to be Christians, and that this fact is even enshrined in the state's national constitution. We have, therefore, given in a third essay not so much the many cultural equivalents between the Bible and Melanesian religiosity, but rather indicated how the missionaries' coming suited local expectations. As a consequence, we believe, even the New Testament can be better understood when seen against the backdrop of traditional religion - as perceived in particular in the well known "Cargo cults" or 'new religious movements" which occurred in the last decennia (3).

The companion volume of essays consider rather the coming of a foreign culture, Christianity, in Melanesia, and the effects it has brought. In a chapter on "The Old Testament through Melanesian eyes" I checked the often made statement that the indigenous people feel so at home in the Bible. I listed, therefore, several problems regarding the concepts of place and time and societal structures, of oral traditions and literary expressions (including 15 Melanesian myths), and even of certain matters of belief and morality which all show definite affinities with the missionary message.

As to the people's reception of Christianity, I thought it worth while to give in an other volume an overview of how the missionaries' message