

has been accepted, as indirectly shown in the visual arts from Melanesia, from its earliest beginnings till the present day. In addition, a contribution on "Art and Adaptation", pays special attention to the apparent misunderstandings of the Christian preaching which often times occurred in the course of this process of reception.

Finally, I have added a few essays about on one particular Christian mission which came to Papua New Guinea with French Marist Fathers, as early as 1845. The fact is that the ensuing Catholic Church well showed that, although its first concern, too, was "to save souls", the theme of integral human development was not far below the surface. This is illustrated by the Church's involvement in the economic field in just one diocese of Papua.

In addition, Catholics were not that loath to pass on responsibilities, as shown in their many, often fruitless attempts towards localizing its ministry. The final chapter of the present collection also shows some of the results of the Catholic Church's many decades long preaching and leaching, as attested through its kind of theological language used today in the most widely used language, Tok Pisin.

Most of the articles collected here were published in journals intended for various audiences. The research this required came about as a sideline to the teaching Sacred Scripture at the Bomana seminary. The results of this work basically aimed at "adapting" or "indigenizing" the often so foreign message of the Bible.

The present text has been revised for the collective publication - not really by updating the various studies and adding information which was not available at the time of first publication. Any changes made are rather minor, and mainly aimed at streamlining the collection, at cutting out duplications, and also at making some transpositions.

The nature of the studies which follow requires a rather long bibliography, most of which titles are used only once. Hence it was thought to be more convenient for the reader not to include a single consolidated list of books etc., but to add the special references immediately after each set of notes. The general bibliography in this volume contains only works of interest for more than one reason.

## MELANESIAN GODS

*"Papua New Guinea had not one or two, but hundreds of traditional religions, just as the nation today continues to have hundreds of tribes and hundreds of languages... It is reasonable to say that our traditional tribal gods served us very well" (M. Somare, IRLA Congress, Suva, June 1993).*

### INTRODUCTION

There are probably no people on earth who do not have something quite peculiar to themselves in their view of their god(s), and get critical of others - and also of themselves - as soon as they become aware of the differences and alternative views. Others then are judged from each one's own standpoint, and prejudices abound in what otherwise might seem detached scholarly investigations. Such flaws showed up already when early missionaries began to learn foreign languages and pressed them in, say, a classical mould. They likewise fell back on biblical and theological categories, known to them, to describe and judge what evidence they encountered in religious matters. In each case a particular society was pressed into their own ethnocentric, that is: a foreign framework.

Conversely, even today something similar happens when indigenous theologians emphasize that whatever the Bible - and Western theology - can tell us about God was said earlier, and better, by their own ancestors. In fact, one African scholar is quoted as having said of the Christian message: *"// n'y a rien, rien, rien de nouveau !"* ("There is absolutely nothing new in this") In both instances we witness apologetic tendencies at work, although in different directions.

What is needed, is an objective and non-apologetic approach which uses all the available resources: oral traditions, artistic representation, written