
Few people have welcomed Christian missionaries as enthusiastically as Pacific Islanders. Surveying the Polynesian churches in 1925, which had been sending their own missionaries into Melanesia for more than a generation, churchman Joseph Bryant was understandably moved to elation: "The South Sea Islands present over and over again, the same Christian phenomena, demanding the same, and only possible explanation—'It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'" (Coral Reefs and Cannibals, page 21). Seventy years later, the descendants of island Christians are embracing Christianity yet again in response to the ministries of a bewildering array of fundamentalist, evangelical, pentecostal, and "sect-like" groups, most originating from the United States. The largely indigenous clergy in charge of the old mission churches observe their dwindling congregations with increasing alarm. Now the defenders of Pacific traditions, they do not see this latest wave of Christian enthusiasm as the Lord's work or as marvellous.

Winds of Change is the result of a three-year study commissioned by the Pacific Conference of Churches, the ecumenical vehicle of the older "mainline" churches. Its aim is to document and account for the growth of "new religious groups" across the Pacific, especially over the past two decades. Manfred Ernst qualifies this ambitious goal in two respects. First, some large new religious groups, notably the Mormons and the Seventh-Day Adventists, are not newcomers to Oceania; he includes them because of their theological conservatism, strongly American profile, and explosive growth in recent decades. Second, the survey excludes Australia, New Zealand, the Marianas and, most notably, Papua New Guinea.

Even with these limitations, Ernst arguably has produced the most comprehensive survey attempted of Pacific Islands sectarianism. There is a long tradition of such in-house surveys. The most recent efforts, by Charles Forman and John Garrett, attempt to understand Pacific Christianity from the perspectives of indigenous Christians. Despite the sociological methodology and theoretical framework, Ernst's survey beckons back to an older mode of missionary writing, in which denominations and mission fields provide the basis of organization, and membership statistics provide the key indicator of success or failure. Retrograde as this approach might at first appear, it is probably the most effective and perhaps the only way to provide a systematic portrait of the region. The report condenses an immense amount of data. Winds of Change draws on available studies and sectarian propaganda, a questionnaire probing attitudes of mainline clergy toward the newcomers, more than one hundred thirty interviews with clergy and converts,
and limited participant observation in six profiled countries. It is common knowledge that pentecostal and fundamentalist churches are growing rapidly across the Pacific. Apart from some pioneering articles by Garry Trompf and his students, however, almost no information is available on most sects involved in this "third wave" of missionization. Ernst meets a significant need by providing systematic background information on all but the tiniest groups. The first section of his report profiles the origins, theology, local history, organization, funding, and ecumenical attitude of 28 Christian organizations. These are broken down into the most widespread (5), recent arrivals (9), breakaways under indigenous leaders (6), and evangelical para-church organizations (8). The groups profiled range from small churches guided by single charismatic leaders to the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the second largest missionary organization in the United States.

The rest of the report addresses how the new religious groups are expanding and why. Ernst presents profiles for six countries: the Solomon Islands, French Polynesia, Tonga, Western Samoa, the Marshall Islands, and Fiji. Each profile begins with some background information on the country and comparative statistics on religious affiliation. Ernst then discusses each religious organization individually in terms of its recent history, local organization, and responses to local social and political developments. He provides important information on the mainline churches here, much of it unflattering. The final section is devoted to a more general discussion of the growing popularity of the new religious groups, with five profiles of individual converts providing some empirical flavoring.

Ernst is aware of the unevenness of his statistical data and the danger of relying too heavily on church leaders for information. Even taking these unavoidable problems into account, his report provides solid evidence for the growing popularity of the new religious groups at the expense of the mainline churches across the region. He also provides anecdotal evidence suggesting that fundamentalist and charismatic influences have increased dramatically within the older churches, and offers a variety of factors to account for this shift. The most important are circumstantial: Pacific Islanders find themselves beset with a wide range of problems, including the breakdown of older kin networks, increasing inequality and outright poverty, the depletion of local resources, violence against women and children, and isolation in the expanding urban areas. For many, the established churches are themselves the problem. Their leaders, often older men reared in the authoritarian environment of the mission church, resist change in church organization and guard their own privileges. Ernst provides much evidence of this, especially in the Solomon Islands, Western Samoa, Tonga, and Fiji where the main Protestant churches have been rocked by several scandals over misappropriated funds, sexual misconduct, and overly cosy relationships with ruling oligarchies. In this atmosphere, the new sects attract members by providing satisfactory (if theologi-
cally simplistic) answers to their problems, energetically involving members in church activities and outreach, running responsive organizations, and in several cases providing access to international organizations and schools. Ernst argues against the widespread notion that the newcomers "buy" converts. Almost all of the new religious groups require heavy commitments from their members, including tithing, labor, prosleyzing, and relatively high school fees.

Because so little information is available concerning these churches, *Winds of Change* inevitably raises more questions than it answers. Good questions. Take Ernst's conclusion, for instance. He treats the advent of the new religious groups as a new and largely unhealthy development, moving from a studied neutrality in the first two sections to a harsh condemnation in the third. The sins of the new groups include: an "oppressive and paternalistic" theology, American-style individualism, a gentle pervasive racism, and political passivity, which, in the context of expanding capitalism, provides support for economic and political oppression. This regionally informed assessment challenges a pervasive assumption among missiologists and anthropologists, working from local studies, that indigenous Christians adapt Christianity to their own cultural premises and political ends with great facility. Many anthropologists, I expect, would have the same initial reaction to Ernst's analysis as I did: I felt he paid far too little attention to the local scene, leaving the impression that indigenous people were merely pawns of forces much greater than themselves. But, on reflection, I realized that the greater lack is on the part of Pacific scholars: we know far too little about the regional and global organizations and forces that shape Pacific Christianity today. *Winds of Change* begins to fulfill a pressing need, but it also indicates that there is much important work to be done. *Winds of Change* is a welcome and impressive resource, brimming with facts difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. Ernst and the Pacific Conference of Churches deserve wide praise for this well-written, intelligent, and thorough report, made available to the public for an astonishingly low price.

**JOHN BARKER**  
*University of British Columbia*

***


An English translation of Schoorl's dissertation, originally written almost forty years ago, is most welcome. This volume is particularly important in this postcolonial era, when anthropologists, historians, and other researchers are reassessing the processes of colonialism and the effects of global systems on remote corners of the world. Here are firsthand observations and experiences of a midlevel colonial