rectly emphasizes that the church is the dominant cultural force on Kos- rae, in the sense that most public activities center around church func- tions and much discourse concerns church affairs.

On the other hand, descriptions of various social problems are largely missing from the book, except for brief mentions. Like many other Micronesian youth, most young Kos- raean males are out of the church for years due to alcohol and/or tobacco use, to violent behavior connected to drinking, or to illicit sexual activities. Almost all eventually give up these sins and become members in good standing—even becoming deacons and pastors—but one wishes that Buck had devoted more attention to this pattern. Members of the Kos- raean church are also sometimes intolerant of those Kosraeans who adopt the faith of other Christian religions.

On reading the preface, those readers who are intolerant of writers with an avowedly religious slant may be tempted to find their histories of Pacific missionization and Christianization in other books that appear less slanted. That would be unwise, because Buck’s book is a wonderful resource for scholars interested in subjects like missionary history or the indigenization of Christian beliefs and practices. In addition to Kosraeans, other Micronesians and scholars of Micronesia will find Island of Angels informative even if they use it only as a reference source.

JAMES PEOPLES
Ohio Wesleyan University


This collection is a tribute to the scholarship of a prominent Pacific historian who was also a caring and well-loved mentor, now retired from the Australian National University. All thirteen contributors were at one stage students of Niel Gunson, and he would be justly proud of their scholar- ship. His notable contributions to the field of Pacific history are addressed in an excellent introductory essay by Michael Reilly and Phyllis Herda, who also offer concise overviews of the papers. The volume takes us on a long and varied journey, in both time and space: from consideration of indige- nous religious precepts, through ini- tial reactions to the Christians’ one god, to the consolidation of church institutions that remain integral to Islander lives. It then moves on to the dynamics of a missionary leadership long distrustful of Islander intellectual capacities, the impact of particular missionaries and divergent church philosophies of conversion, and to chapters on the Mormon and Baha’i faiths in the Pacific.

Individual Polynesians feature prominently as historical figures in the earlier chapters (by Herda, on the Hikule‘o myths of Tonga; Kieran Schmidt, on the gift of the gods in traditional Sāmoa; Hank Driessen, on the Raiatean priest, Tupa’ia; Andrew Hamilton on ideas of God and the
introduction of Catholicism in Sāmoa; and Reilly, on the role of dreams in the reception of Christianity on Mangai). All of these contributions share an impressive grasp of the ethnography, and most deal with aspects of traditional societies in the early post-European contact years. Then the focus shifts toward Melanesia and some prominent missionary figures involved in the consolidation of church power there in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Andrew Thornley offers a lively account of leadership issues that arose between 1850 and 1880 among Methodists in Fiji, where a strong paternalistic undercurrent ensured that the Fijian ministers “remained largely outside the controlling church structures” (149). This situation of external control persisted until after World War II, with deleterious consequences for Fijian needs and aspirations at a time when nationhood was on the horizon. Ross Mackay describes a similarly conservative situation among Methodists in Papua, where Pacific Islander missionaries were never accorded a status commensurate with their influence on village life—especially after the withdrawal of European missionaries during World War II—nor were they ever entrusted with positions of authority over their white counterparts. It is disappointing that these two contributors did not engage with each other’s papers, because the parallels cry out for some insightful discussion.

Diane Langmore’s engaging account of the life of Constance (later Paul) Fairhall brings an agreeable change of tone to the volume, first because women are largely absent from the foregoing accounts, and, secondly, because Fairhall’s was a life of selfless devotion to the betterment of those Melanesians among whom she labored so long. She was humble, undoctrinaire, ecumenically minded, and possessed of “an independence of mind and spirit that was to enable her to continue to grow intellectually and spiritually throughout her long missionary career” (177). At age fifty-five, after three decades of exemplary missionary service, she took on a new career as a social worker in and around Port Moresby. Her story is a timely antidote to the self-interest and racism that characterized so many of her male missionary counterparts, featured in earlier chapters. David Hilliard’s discussion of the God of the Melanesian Mission provides fascinating revelations about some very modern thinking about issues such as accommodation and syncretism on the part of certain nineteenth-century churchmen, notably John Coleridge Patteson, and later missionaries Robert Henry Codrington, Walter George Ivens, and Charles Elliot Fox, who sought to understand Melanesian religions from within.

Space limits preclude consideration of all the contributions to this volume, but I must mention David Wetherall’s piece on Anglicans in New Guinea, the Torres Straits, and parts of northern Australia because of the effective manner in which he uses the comparative method to broaden and deepen his analysis of two adjacent but very different dioceses. These were created around the end of the nineteenth century, one to minister to “pagans” in New Guinea and the other primar-
ily to settlers. Among the numerous contrasts with which Wetherall deals, attitudes toward government are considered in some detail; the interesting parallels are also addressed, including a notable sympathy for the cause of Christian Socialism and an associated enthusiasm for the workers’ cooperative.

The perennial problem of the Festschrift as a genre is its characteristic lack of a single, central unifying strand. This one does have a very broad theme of religious histories in a single but vast regional setting, but each paper does its own thing, without cross-referencing other contributions and without any final synthesis; readers are thus left to draw their own comparative and contrastive conclusions. The volume could have done with a rigorous copy edit—at the very least to catch the missing words and the repeated ones, but also to prune redundancy. I was expecting to see considerable reference to the work of the scholar being honored here, especially since Gunson’s writings on missionaries are quite relevant to many of the issues addressed in this volume. The strong sense of indigenous agency that also marks his work is alluded to in the introduction but disappears once the focus moves from the “traditional” and early-contact situations to the growth of the missions. The voices of missionary women (with the one exception noted above) and Islanders are at best muted here. This, of course, may be a function of reliance on written records from which the cultural-insider dimension of the contact situation is absent. In the case of indigenous clergy, however, one imagines that many of them would have put pen to paper in their numerous dealings with their church hierarchy.

It is regrettable that the editors have not required of their contributors a concluding synthesis that would comment directly on the theme implied in the volume’s title; namely, the issue of the gulf between the reality of the field situation and the normative or visionary element present in every church’s mission. What had these missionaries hoped for, and were the aspirations of their congregations being realized? Today, as the only abiding institution in much of rural and remote Melanesia, for example, the church stands alone in providing reassurance, structures and roles, moral oversight, and a sense of purpose to people whose governments, distant and seemingly uncaring, continue to fail them. Furthermore, it is in most cases an indigenized church, long accustomed to the absence of Europeans. One cannot help but wonder what, if they were around today, the missionaries of yesteryear would have made of this—a vision realized or a vision confounded? The reader of this book will, fortunately, find plenty of solid evidence for both possibilities.

ROBERT TONKINSON
The University of Western Australia

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