

longer has impulses to drink and wander aimlessly, the drunken, purposeless boys in *Yokwe Bartowe* continue in nearly the same fashion.

Lijimu is defeated at the end of *Ña Noniep*, but she becomes a force for good in *Yokwe Bartowe*. As a condition of her defeat, Kwolej is banished from the islands forever. Does this act suggest that calm and extended happiness will come at last to the Marshall Islands? No! Kaila, in the closing scene, suddenly finds her fingernails growing, and she wonders by what power this transformation has come to her. A look above shows Kwolej leaving the islands but appointing a replacement first. The people of the Marshall Islands will go about their daily lives while other forces—the spiritual, the rarely seen, the never seen—continue their struggle to expand or limit the levels of happiness and misery in the world. In this context, the forces of good—the Noniep and the reformed Lijimu—must stay vigilant in guiding the unwary in their search for a fulfilling life.

RICH CARR
University of Alaska,
Fairbanks

* * *

Towards a Theology of the Chamoru: Struggle and Liberation in Oceania, by Jonathan Blas Diaz. Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2010. ISBN 978-9-7105-1162-9; xxiv + 273 pages, maps, illustrations. Paper, US\$25.00. For ordering information, contact the author at jonadiaz@gmail.com

In the introduction to his book, Jonathan Blas Diaz tells us that his primary task, and that of all like-minded

people in Oceania, is “to identify a theology from below” (xv). By this he means a theology that will serve “those who are oppressed and the outcasts of Oceanic society” (xv). From the outset, then, Diaz identifies his dual purpose: to redress the wrongs of the history of his people, the Chamoru people of Guam (and by extension of the Northern Marianas), and to do this within a theological context.

This book is a passionate outcry from a Pacific Islander who is also a Catholic believer, one who has taken his faith seriously enough to earn a graduate degree in theology; this volume is the published thesis that he wrote for this degree. The work is presented not as a history of the Chamoru people or even as a political statement—although it contains elements of both—but rather as a theology that aspires to make sense of a people’s history while serving as a call to arms to challenge whatever might threaten to smother the cultural identity of the people of Guam and the Northern Marianas. There are a good many things that constitute such a threat, according to the author. Two issues, however, surface repeatedly in the book as Diaz seeks to rescue the identity of his people: what he describes as cultural loss and the absence of political self-determination.

On the cultural loss issue, Diaz cavils at the way his fellow Islanders have been presented (or, in many cases, present themselves) as First World people when they are not. Diaz seems to argue that colonization (and not so much missionization) has blinded Island people to their distinctive cultural identity. He attempts to retrieve this cultural identity, in part, through the use of folklore, representing as it

does the values of the local people. He looks for additional clues to the identity in some historical sources, even those authored by non-local people. The speech of the local chief-tain, Hurao, for instance, is quoted at length, even though the speech was actually the product of a French Jesuit, Father Charles Le Gobien, who, while drawing on some of the early Spanish material, embellishes his account of the early hostilities between Spaniards and Islanders with a stirring appeal to Chamoru nationalism.

In his assessment of the damages of colonization, Diaz is generous toward the early missionaries, especially the Jesuits and Capuchins, excusing them from many of the charges that have been echoed for years regarding missionary complicity in the early “wars” and the cultural damage that followed the conversion of the Islands to Catholicism. The author shows special regard for Diego Luis de San Vitores, the superior of the early Jesuit missionary band, for his pacifism even after the outbreak of early hostilities on Guam, for the cultural sensitivity he displayed in his attempts at conversion, and for his reliance on local people to propagate mission teaching.

The author’s criticism of Christianity, especially on Guam, is directed mostly at the present-day Church and its program. Diaz is critical of what he sees as the heavy-handed use of authority by Church leadership, the Church’s espousal of a conservative agenda, and the introduction of the Neo-Catechumenate, a new religious movement bringing dozens of foreign seminarians to the island. In Diaz’s eyes, this movement is a foreign imposition that rolls back any gains in inculturation that the local Church has

made, because of the alien spirituality that the movement embraces and the replacement of local clergy by foreign priests, which also introduces divisiveness in the Church community.

The author, along with others on Guam, seems to hold out hope for a cultural renaissance on the island. He sees the restoration of the old stories, folktales, and cultural forms as an initial step in regaining a basic respect for the Chamoru society that was undermined throughout the colonial period. In this, I feel, Diaz comes uncomfortably close to an antiquarian view of culture with its emphasis on the grinding stones for tortillas, the outdoor ovens, and anything else that evokes the old ways of his people. Diaz shares a tendency, all too common in the Pacific, to identify culture with its past forms, perhaps not sufficiently appreciating the ways in which culture—especially that set of values and attitudes that lie at its heart—survives despite considerable changes in its external features. This is especially surprising because the theological framework the author uses tends to depict the community as wayfarers or pilgrims, people moving through the course of history, forever changing as they do so, but maintaining their identity as a people. Any people must labor to keep their social identity alive even as they swim through a sea of change.

As a longtime resident of the Federated States of Micronesia and a frequent visitor to Guam, I find that I have no difficulty in distinguishing Guam from the continental United States. Even with the island’s three-hundred-year colonial history and the significant number of US mainlanders on the island (soon to be augmented

by the deployment of another US Marine division), Guam has its own distinctive character. All it takes is a visit to any government office where people pass around the pugua (betelnut) and engage in the type of lighthearted banter that I encounter all the time on Pohnpei, Yap, or Chuuk to alert one to the fact that the culture is alive and well, even if masked a bit by the two-car garages and the middle-class American clothing and shopping tastes. Visiting a home for a Saturday barbeque, where the women are grouped in the living room while the men cluster in the garage around a cooler filled with beer, or stopping by a house to pray the rosary following the death of a family member, one sees the Island culture on full display. All this suggests that not even centuries of colonization and a standard of living that seems well beyond the aspirations of most Island societies can uproot the basic set of Island attitudes and values.

The second wrong that Diaz would like to see redressed is the absence of full political self-determination throughout the long years of Guam's colonial status. We should note that this is a legitimate concern for Guam, but not for the Northern Mariana Islands, where a full plebiscite was held before the political status of US commonwealth was chosen in the mid-1970s. Still, the author's concern is legitimate inasmuch as Guam joins Hawai'i and New Zealand as places in which the aboriginal population never had the chance to express a political choice. Since the local "Islander" population is now a minority in its own land, it is unlikely that the local people of Guam will ever be able to formally express their political desires.

Even so, the author does not vilify Filipinos, who today constitute 30 percent of the population of Guam, or migrants from other parts of Micronesia, who compose another 12 percent. Indeed, his theological framework envisions a reconciliation between Chamoru and these other peoples. (Diaz himself is part Filipino.) It is encouraging to encounter a passionate defender of the rights of the local people who is as tolerant as Diaz is, for he resists the temptation to play one group against another. Not all Pacific authors are as forbearing as he.

The author's plea for recognition of the cultural identity of his people is a refrain that will resonate with many of the readers of this journal. His plea comes across sharply in this work, underpinned as it is by a faith-based theology of liberation adapted to the realities of the Pacific. Diaz's second lament—that the island has never been granted self-determination—is one that cannot be contested. Is it too late to remedy this, given the ethnic diversity of the island population and the fact that Chamorus are now a minority on their own island? The US court decisions to ban a plebiscite at which only ethnic Chamorus are allowed to vote suggests that it is. So, even if the prospects for the cultural survival of the Chamoru people may be understated in this book, the question of political self-determination remains unanswered.

FRANCIS X HEZEL, SJ
Micronesian Seminar, Pohnpei

* * *