

EDITORIAL

The papers contained in this issue were given at the 1987 Melanesian Association of Theological Schools Study Institute on “Theology by the People, a Resource for Justice, Development, and Peace”. The Study Institute demonstrated the extent to which Melanesian theologians are assuming responsibility, both for MATS, and for particular Melanesian Theological Schools. This sense of Melanesian responsibility gave urgency to the discussions, and to some of the contributions. Another factor, which stimulated discussion, was the readiness of evangelical participants to both listen and respond when they raised the issue of the relation of biblical revelation to personal experience.

Several speakers stressed the need to ask questions related to real life in the present, rather than to accept answers already worked out in someone else’s past. Rejection of answers imposed from outside was not seen as a way of remaining in one’s own “indigenous” past, of being content with doubt, or of denying the possibility of progress. Rather, it was seen as a way of being open to rediscovering the answers afresh, in terms of the present context, and so providing a realistic vision of the future. The way of transcendence was seen to lie through immanence. Contributions by expatriates were not rejected but were assessed by how far they addressed genuine Melanesian concerns. The correlation between theology and engagement with the struggles of the people of Melanesia is expressed in a sentence from the paper by the new President of MATS, Revd Dick Avi: “Christ is resurrected in the hope of the people who are struggling to overcome the barriers or constraints in their lives.” This statement need not reduce the belief in the resurrection to a gloss on secular politics. Rather, it may be seen as a way of saying that the effectiveness of a present experience of the risen Christ may be tested by how far it enables people to transcend their present context from within.

The Study Institute attempted to make a start in the task of relating theology to current Melanesian affairs. An example of this was the work of the group which studied the issue of “land” as a Melanesian value. How can “land” be seen as a priceless absolute possession? What contribution could a proper attitude to “land” make to the resolution of the conflicts in

Fiji, New Caledonia, and Irian Jaya, and to the impact of “modern” exploitive intervention in the whole region?

Revd Christopher J. Garland (Editor).

A paper from the Study Institute, by the Editor, has been held over for the next issue.

The Editor welcomes correspondence on questions raised in the Journal for inclusion in later issues.