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...to teach others also. The Bible Schools of the Christian Brethren Churches in Papua New Guinea

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The population of Papua New Guinea is more or less six millions. 20–25% are evangelical Christians. As is so often the case in such societies, some 10% are Seventh Day Adventists and another 9% are Pentecostals (I am not clear from the reference work that I am consulting whether the Seventh Day Adventists are counted as evangelical). Some 20,000 or so are Brethren, gathered in 460 congregations. The Brethren work began in 1950 but clearly did not begin to take off until the mid-1960s. It has always been the particular work of the Australian and New Zealand Brethren, especially the latter. Much of the work has been among highland tribes in the back country in the north-west and west central regions of Papua New Guinea.

Perhaps because it is a recent work of this provenance, there are features not typical of Brethren activity in many other places. For some time, for example, there has been a Christian Brethren Coordinating Committee with a permanent secretariat, at present headed up by Ossie Fountain, the husband of the writer of this book. Collectively the congregations are known as Christian Brethren Churches. Secondly, since the 1960s, at the original inspiration of missionaries, there has been a large, tiered network of Bible schools, teaching at the different levels in vernacular languages and in English and including women and a Girls Bible School. All rather un-Brethren, one might say, at least by traditional standards!

This book tells the story of the Bible Schools in much detail—it will be a considerable mine of information both on missionary activity and on nationals in leadership in the Brethren movement in Papua New Guinea. But those parts dealing with the 1980s and 1990s apparently have their origins in consultancy work to advise on the future development of the schools. The origin of the Bible schools is

identified as being in the missionaries' 'emphasis on empowering all Christians to have access to the Bible [which] is deeply rooted in their Brethren heritage.' Many of the schools intended initially to teach literacy in order to give access to the Scriptures; and were also intended to be internal subsistence economies, rather like early medieval monasteries—in that regard, it is interesting that the fluctuating fortunes of some of the schools can be traced in part to the natural oscillations of those economies. A further significant feature has been the efforts made to incorporate nationals into the teaching and management of the schools and yet the continuing need for expatriate input and even leadership. As might be expected, there is much information on personalities and curricula, but also on governance and finances. This is a source book as well as an analysis.

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