



Reluctant mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea, 1891-1942

David Wetherell

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A 'noble race', 'courteous gentlemen', 'fuzzy wuzzy angels', 'shining examples of the power of faith' -- these were some of the exalted phrases used by Christian missionaries in their attempt to fashion the Papuan people into morally superior beings enjoying spiritual immunity from Western corruption and wealth. But the descriptions also revealed an attempt to gloss over the white man's sense of guilt and shame for his treatment of the black races.

For fifty years before World War 11, most Europeans along the 400 kilometres of coast in north-eastern Papua were Anglican missionaries. This book is the compelling story of the meeting between the Papuan people and the Christian missionaries who came to convert them.

The Anglican church had always been lukewarm about setting up missions and the Australian branch of the church in the 1890s was no exception. The 186 European and 46 Melanesians who worked as missionaries in north-eastern Papua were never to overcome the inertia of the home church; they were 'mainstreamed' rather than actively supported, with little encouragement or enthusiasm.

David Wetherell portrays the struggle of the Anglican men and women to set up the early mission stations. He examines the hardships and deprivations they had to face, discusses their attitudes to traditional cultures, and examines the Papuan response to the social and political changes which began sweeping across the Pacific with the intrusion of the Western world.

Reluctant Mission draws on a wide range of hitherto unpublished sources -- private letters, diaries, and journals kept by the early missionaries and their families. These are supplemented by Papuan oral narratives, travellers' tales, and government reports. In tracing the response of Papuan villagers to the missionary intrusion, this book brings to light a fascinating aspect of the colonial period in the history of Papua New Guinea

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