

To date numerous descriptions and analyses of curing rituals have been published in other studies on Sri Lanka, but to my limited knowledge there is none that offers detail in such a degree as this book.

The author describes the cosmic position of demons and their role in the human world with much detail, but if I were allowed to be a bit demanding, I think we would have less difficulty in understanding the Sinhalese attitude towards sickness and ritual, had the author told us what kind of reaction the frightfulness of the 'devouring demons' provoked in the Sinhalese and had he given examples which would show something of the 'atmosphere of fear' noticeable in their everyday life. He also refers repeatedly to 'power' as e.g., when he speaks of Buddha's power, a demon's power or the power of a ritual. However, while he defines other terms rigidly, it is unfortunate that he never defines the often used term 'power.' This is the more regrettable since any ritual can be conceived as being based on a belief that there is some kind of power which eventually will bring about the expected result.

The author points out ambiguity as being one of the fundamentals in Sinhalese cosmology, but it seems to me that the ambiguous factors which appear in his examples can similarly be discerned in the structure of the Japanese pantheon and in Japanese religious behavior. Granted the difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, there is a necessity for comparative research into this problem, because both countries belong to an area of Buddhist culture.

Victor Turner's influence looms great in the author's approach. He applies Turner's insights in trying to grasp the religion, culture, and society of the people of Sri Lanka as a totality, using the Mahasona exorcism as a vantage point. But, as a result, he greatly contributes also to a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA

GESCH, PATRICK F. *Initiative and Initiation. A Cargo Cult-type Movement in the Sepik Against its Background in Traditional Village Religion.* Studia Instituti Anthropos 33. St. Augustin / Germany: Anthropos-Institut, 1985. Xvi+347 pages. Appendices of interviews, bibliography, maps, figures, tables and plates. Paper DM 68.000, ISBN 3-921389-96-8.

This is a description of a Cargo Cult in New Guinea known as the Mt. Rurun Movement, which reached its peak of fervor on July 7, 1971, when crowds of people went to the top of Mt. Rurun to remove survey markers which had been put there as part of a navigation-communications network. The center of the movement was in the East Sepik Province but the preliminaries to the removal of the markers and the aftermath involved many people from a widespread area.

P. Gesch was once a missionary in the area of the movement, but did this study for his Ph.D. in Religious Studies. In the first instance, and correctly so, I think, he considers this movement basically a religious movement, and tries to explain it as such. He does not look at it primarily as an economic effort to get white man's cargo (hence the common name for this type of endeavor, Cargo Cult), nor as an incipient political effort at unification, as others have done. These movements, common in New Guinea,

have economic and political overtones, but they are primarily religious attempts to discover the "secret to bring the world together coherently" (72).

In the first half of the book, therefore, the author describes the Mt. Rurun Movement (1-142). This took sixteen various forms, ranging from the very religious to the secular, from the unrealistic and magical, to the realistic, technologically feasible. All of these forms were attempts to become part of the modern world (128). Gesch implies that all of these different efforts were variations on the religious theme, as far as the participants themselves were concerned.

This Cargo Cult comes out of a village religion, a vital, living part of the people's culture, and it is this living village religion, the author feels, which helps explain the Mt. Rurun Movement. The second half of the book, therefore, is a description of the village religion (143-306).

Something becomes religious when an event, object, transition, novelty, or anything, is the result of or leads to something beyond one's own power and control. Anytime there is an "attributed discontinuity in powers" (p. 5, and *passim*), one has religion in the village. This notion comes close to Durkheim's definition of religion as "the Sacred." In New Guinea, however, one can bridge this discontinuity by taking some initiative, hence the title. In the case of a Cargo Cult this often means trying to "gain admission to the secret" (68), in this case, the secret of the Western world, which, in turn, leads to control. The religious dimension remains. Special knowledge, after all, implies a discontinuity in power.

The whole effort and concern is to move into the modern world, to handle this change, this social transition, to develop a new status vis-à-vis the West, to be initiated into a new life-style. Such transitions are typically handled in village religion as rites of initiation, which leads the author to do the same for the Mt. Rurun Movement.

Another aspect of village religion has to do with the constant efforts on the part of the villagers to discern, to test, "to find the meaning of what has happened, and the course of further action then indicated" (144). This is also part of what is meant by the "initiative" of the book's title.

All of this occurs in a social context. Leaders or elders in the village or people in certain kinship positions stand up to take this initiative, to begin the process of discernment, to direct the efforts to get at the secret through some program or activity. So, too, the Mt. Rurun Movement had its leaders in the persons of Matias Yaliwan and Daniel Hawina.

Given these characteristics of village religion, described in detail in the context of initiation, and given the conditions of Western intrusion, one has all the makings of a Cargo Cult. As long as the village religion and religious thinking remain vital, one also has all the ingredients for a recurrence of a Cargo Cult movement, in spite of, or perhaps, because of the failure of previous attempts to get "the secret." And Cargo Cults do recur, as is well-known. Gesch has identified eight predecessors of the Mt. Rurun Movement since World War I.

Scattered throughout this book are myths, magical formulae, spells, etc., which serve to describe village religion, validate certain magico-religious procedures, and explain situations as they exist in the village, be they features of the landscape, relations between individuals or groups, rights to land, plus many things besides. Throughout we see how various types of folklore function in a real-life situation. The story of the two brothers (56-57), for example, which is widespread throughout New Guinea, gives much of the ideology behind Cargo Cult movements.

For those interested in New Guinea, and especially in Cargo Cults, or any movements resembling them anywhere else in the world, this is a book worth reading. It

goes a long way towards explaining many dimensions of Cargo Cults in New Guinea. In the process it describes village religion in New Guinea in an interesting way as well. Sometimes the style of writing is too convoluted (e.g. on p. 6 where the author describes the discernment process at work in all dimensions of village life, or again in a similar context on p. 300). He takes too long to tell us that the Peli Association was both a continuation of the Mt. Rurun Movement as well as another name given to it (79). He does the same with Michael Somare. He mentions him six times without telling us who he is. The seventh time we get a hint, and only on the eighth reference do we learn that he was the first prime minister of Papua New Guinea. When he describes the initiation ceremonies, he uses the term "uretheter" for "urethra," unless we are dealing here with an Australian-ism.

These are minor points. The book is well-produced, the tables and figures generally clear and appropriate, and the description of village religious life convincing. He does not cover every aspect of social life, only enough to make his religious description more intelligible. All in all, this is a contribution to the ethnography both of Cargo Cults and of this area of New Guinea as well, and joins a long list of distinguished descriptions of this part of New Guinea.

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