OLD CULTURES, RENEWED RELIGIONS:
THE SEARCH FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY
IN A CHANGING WORLD
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The book is a collection of eight articles written by S.V.D. missionaries working in three Asia-Pacific countries, namely, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Japan. Of the four articles on Papua New Guinea, one gives an overview of the phenomenon of cargo cult and three discuss particular case studies; one of the two articles on the Philippines looks at the militant religious revolts during the Spanish and American colonial periods, and the other describes a contemporary charismatic movement, El Shaddai; the two on Japan evaluate how several contemporary religious movements—like Mahikari and Agonshō, among others—employ Japanese mythology and Nostradamus’ prophecies in the effort to establish a national identity connected to a vision of a new world order.

Drawing from their different personal experiences and pastoral endeavors, the authors present a rich tapestry of studies about popular religious movements in varied cultural contexts. The book provides a particularly enlightening insight into what makes these movements powerfully appealing to their followers—they suit the psyche of the people by providing magnetic visions of a new order which, actually, is a new interpretation of old, forgotten ways.

Because the articles are critical reflections on pastoral realities encountered personally by missionaries, they afford the reader a vicarious acquaintance with popular religious movements and, in this way, prepare the reader to understand how such movements gain persuasive sway over their adherents. More importantly, by evaluating the current trends in contemporary religious movements, the articles point the way for those who would like to engage in the forma-
tion of emerging religious consciousness. A particular point, which deserves serious consideration, is the observation that these new religious movements share a pronounced dissatisfaction with or disregard for traditional, organized religion and know how to respond to the needs of their followers. There is much here that the Church and her missionaries could consider.

The articles are quite informative: four even use tables and figures. All articles are interesting to read, although the reader's interest level dips at times because of the numerous typographical errors. However, this does not detract from the important contribution the book makes to the study and practice of inculturation. The authors demonstrate how somebody, working in another culture or in one's own culture, could be pastorally receptive to and productively evaluative of popular religious movements which could be easily dismissed as New Age or disingenuous hype. As the articles demonstrate, these popular movements meet the people where they are—they are responding to certain needs and aspirations which traditional, organized religion appears to be failing to meet.