America to construct his three-volume history of Christianity in Oceania. It is a well-documented, descriptive account that anyone interested in the religious history of the region will want to read and keep as a reference work.

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When I was living on Tahiti and neighboring Mai’ao in the early sixties, my Tahitian hosts talked with reverential sadness about their exiled leader, an aging Tahitian called Pouvana’a a O’opa. He was their Metua, their “Father,” who had been framed and then unjustly imprisoned and banished from his native land by the French and their Demi (part-Tahitian) allies. Then, when in 1963 France announced that its nuclear testing center would be moved from the Sahara to French Polynesia, it became clear to them that Pouvana’a was a prophet whose voice had been stilled to clear the way for this ultimate desecration of their islands.

Pouvana’a was born in 1895, seven years after France had taken over his natal island of Huahine in the Society Islands of French Polynesia. During World War One he volunteered to fight in the trenches for France, and after being repatriated following the armistice he settled in Tahiti’s port town of Pape’ete, where for the next two decades he worked as a carpenter. At the outbreak of World War Two Pouvana’a rallied to the cause of Free France, but his subsequent protests to the local administration over war profiteering and the unequal distribution of foodstuffs and other scarce goods to the Tahitians resulted in his exile. First he was sent to Huahine and then, after he paddled (or sailed?) to neighboring Porapora in order to ask the American forces stationed there to relay his complaints directly to De Gaulle, to the remote atoll of Motu One (Bellingshausen). When electoral politics were opened to indigenous participation after the war, Pouvana’a emerged as the leading politician championing Tahitian rights. He and his party dominated the local legislative assembly, and he represented French Polynesia as its Député in the national parliament. However, in 1958, Pouvana’a once again found himself in hot water with French authorities. After campaigning for a Non vote on a referendum over whether French Polynesia should stay in the French community, and then losing that vote, he was arrested, tried, and convicted of attempting to burn down Pape’ete. For this Pouvana’a was sentenced to eight years imprisonment in France and fifteen years of exile there, a virtual banishment for life as he was then sixty-four years old and in declining health.

Such an outline of Pouvana’a’s life can be found in a number of sources other than Bruno Saura’s biography of the Tahitian leader. Where Saura’s
work really shines is in contextualizing Pouvana’a within rural Tahitian society, and in analyzing the moral, religious character of his leadership. Like most Tahitians of his generation, Pouvana’a grew up in a rural setting in which the evangelical Protestant sect implanted there early in the nineteenth century by the London Missionary Society provided the moral compass and social framework. Although Pouvana’a did not become a minister, he thought and spoke in biblical terms. To him, Tahitians should look neither to their “pagan” past nor to the models offered by atheistic foreigners, but rather to the chosen people of Israel who had struggled so hard and endured so many hardships to follow their god and his stern commands. To Saura, such rhetoric indicates that Pouvana’a in effect placed himself in the line of biblical prophets and heroes. As a “maker of laws” he saw that his role was to lead the struggle of his people for justice and equality.

In 1968, by which time nuclear testing was well under way in French Polynesia, De Gaulle pardoned the aging Tahitian and allowed him to return to the islands. A few years later, Pouvana’a won full exoneration and restoration of his civil rights, after which he was elected to represent French Polynesia as its Senateur in Paris. However, by then his health was failing, and he never regained his former effectiveness. Nonetheless, the fiery speech with which he opened the 1972 Territorial Assembly caused a sensation in a society split between those who embraced the bomb and the prosperity it brought, and those who like Pouvana’a remained morally opposed to the testing program and its disrupting impact. Speaking provocatively in Tahitian to the uncomprehending French governor, Pouvana’a called for immediate autonomy and the recognition of Tahitian as the official language, both of which were eventually granted, though not before their prophet’s death in 1977. At the unveiling of a monument to Pouvana’a, his political heir, John Teariki, eulogized the Metua’s virtues, recalling how he had been “the only Maohi [Mā’ōhi, indigenous Tahitian] to have sacrificed himself to protect his people against the persecution of certain powers,” and proclaiming that “he never capitulated—think of him.”

Pouvana’a’s struggles may now seem dated, especially since Gaston Flosse, the wealthy Demi who today serves as French Polynesia’s president (a new office with the granting of internal autonomy) seems primarily occupied with securing from France a continuing subsidy to replace the massive cash inflows of the nuclear testing era. Yet, as Saura points out, a new moral leader has emerged to challenge continued French rule and the spread of godless consumerism: Oscar Temaru, a passionate advocate for independence whose party, Tavini Huira’atira, gained a quarter of the Tahitian votes in the last election. Although Temaru is Catholic (and a former seminarian as well), and therefore out of step with the Protestant Tahitian majority, Saura sees him as continuing Pouvana’a’s religiously based leadership. For example, he has chosen the cross to symbolize his party, and “The Lord is my Master” as its motto. To Saura, Temaru echoes
Pouvana’a in his “simplicity, closeness to the poor, sense of family, and rejection of the values of money, alcohol and corrupting morals.”

However, Saura also cites surveys that indicate that most young Tahitian students are unsure of exactly who Pouvana’a was. If they can be pried away from their television sets and compact disks, as well as from surfing and canoe racing, long enough to read this book, Saura’s effort would certainly help bridge the generation gap. To reach older Tahitians steeped in reading the Bible in their own language, Saura enlisted Valérie Gobrait to make a Tahitian translation. This appears on pages facing the French text, thereby transforming this work into a significant bilingual text. Saura, who teaches Polynesian civilization at the Tahiti campus of the French University of the Pacific, is to be congratulated for this fine biography, and particularly for analyzing the religious context of Pouvana’a’s leadership, thereby providing one of the primary keys for understanding political evolution at a crucial point in the emergence of modern French Polynesia. Along with the works of Louise Pelzer, Serge Dunis, Bernard Poirine, and other scholars teaching at the Tahiti campus of the French University of the Pacific, Saura’s biography of Pouvana’a reflects well on this new institution, which, however, is slated to fission into independent universities at Tahiti and New Caledonia.

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John Connell sets out to develop a “post-horticultural” geography of Papua New Guinea, taking account of the major social and economic changes since independence and, in particular, of the imputed role of mining as “the critical engine” of economic growth. This is an ambitious and timely endeavor, although readers would benefit from a clearer road map at the outset. Connell is well qualified for the task, having begun research in Papua New Guinea in 1974 and authored numerous articles and monographs. The end product is a solid and well-written work that ranges over many different facets of postindependence development. It is to be regretted that the exorbitant price—US$85—will severely restrict its readership.

The early part of the book charts Papua New Guinea’s progressive integration into the international economy, with emphasis on the constraints of late development—the lack of a sense of national unity, the weakness of the state, difficult terrain, and the poorly educated, dispersed, and culturally diverse population. In Connell’s view, late development has ensured continuity with the colonial past rather than giving rise to a distinctive postcolonial economic and political order. The constraints of late development have been compounded by administrative
Pouvanaa a Oopa (May 10, 1895 – January 10, 1977) was a French politician and Tahitian nationalist, who led a Tahitian separatist movement against French rule, before being exiled to France in the late 1950s. Tahitians and other French Polynesians refer to Pouvanaa as metua, which means "spiritual father." He remains an important symbol for the French Polynesian independence or autonomy movements.