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## Book Review

*Breaking Spears & Mending Hearts:  
Peacemakers & Restorative Justice in Bougainville*  
by Patrick Howley FMS (2002), Federation Press, London.

As headteacher of St. Xavier's boys school on Kairiru Island in the East Sepik region of Papua New Guinea in the 1970s, Australian Marist brother Pat Howley saw that too many of his graduates wasted untold time in anti-social, alcohol-related behavior. Was there anything he could do? With the help of an English teacher and fellow Australian Ken Egan, he decided to 'democratize' the school. He established just three rules and two institutions: the boys must complete their manual labor, attend class and use common sense in all things; plus, in order to keep order, there would be an ombudsman and a student discipline committee.

It worked. There was a bit of confusion until students learned responsibility, commitment and the idea that, in order to get enough sleep to follow the three rules, they actually had to go to bed at night. But the initiative worked and was repeated later at Passam National High School and then Divine Word Institute.

In 1990, at age 65, Howley retired. And got bored. Ken Egan had another project for him. Would he like to transfer his high school democratizing skills to peace mediation in the settlement communities of Port Moresby? Howley said he would be there within a week. Inspired by Bernard Narokobi, whom Howley hails as the champion of custom law in PNG, Egan and Howley helped establish what was ultimately christened the PEACE Foundation Melanesia, a Non Governmental Organization dedicated to working for justice at the grass roots level. It took then only the invitation of Theo Miriung, newly elected Premier of Bougainville in 1995, to set the stage for what became really an amazing journey of mediation and restorative justice training in the post-war, post-crisis years of Bougainville.

Pat Howley has recounted his experience in Bougainville in his recent book *Breaking Spears & Mending Hearts*. In part one he gives the historical background of the crisis. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was as if the world viewed Bougainville as but another territory to be juggled by the international politics of European colonial powers. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, two events occurred which would change the lives of the people of these nineteen different language groups for decades to come. First, Bougainville became a part of a newly independent Papua New Guinea, and second, the massive mining projects of Conzinc Rio Tinto (CRA) and Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) set off a series events culminating in civil war and the *raskol* terrorizing of the crisis years of the 1990s. One of the fortes of

the book is the author's abundant use of written and oral reports of many involved in this violence, usually as victims, but at times as perpetrators as well. He gives testimony of massacres, the burning of hospitals, the violence associated with home brew and post traumatic stress disorder, as well as such early efforts at peace as a stations of the cross peace march (14 stations; 14 scenes of murder) and the heroic refusal of one group of mothers to obey the orders of a youth with gun in hand.

Having given the history and impact of the violent crisis in part one, Howley then turns in part two to study the subsequent forces of mediation, reconciliation and peace.

The crisis years had damaged the older authority structures of village life; the leadership needed retraining in negotiation and mediation. As well as the traditional village elders, PEACE targeted the natural leaders in organizations of youth, women, church workers and magistrates. Within the decade, it had built up a largely voluntary staff of some 13 district trainers, as well as over 170 trainers who would have great success in mediating such diverse cases as adultery, regulation of the making and drinking of home brew, fights in hamlets, domestic violence and even in stopping the execution of a man.

Mediation and reconciliation – not punishment— Howley claims, are the keys to the organization's success. So much of AusAID funding has gone up in smoke, for example, because reconciliation and restorative justice between warring factions never took place before the funds arrived.

Shame –an ancient method of social control - is another key factor. Even with the most violent of cases, such as rape and murder, jail sentences do not usually work as well as shame in changing behavior and bringing about reconciliation between victims, perpetrators, families, clans, and villages.

Once the processes and rituals of mediation, reconciliation and restorative justice are underway, the author contends, disputes begin to settle and communities to unite, then development projects can flow forth naturally. In a chapter dedicated to such projects, however, Howley relates that, as they discovered early on, PEACE mediators should not try to be development facilitators as well. Very often the uneducated follow the educated too readily into a project they neither need nor want – and thus the project fails. The mediators grasped through experience that they must stick to their training of total neutrality until the community decides upon and takes control of the project. Then, and only then, do development projects work.

Finally, part two concludes with an overview of other church movements and Non Government Organizations with many of the same aims as PEACE. Howley is not shy about giving credit to the large role women have played in the initiative, leadership, and success of all such endeavors.

The third, final, and shortest section of the book is the most theoretical, speculative and, to my thinking, most interesting as well. There seems to be no

doubt from Howley's historical and anthropological observations that the mediation process is much more in line with Melanesian tradition than the western court system based on evidence, trial, guilt, punishment and, often, jail. And there is also little doubt as to where the author's sympathies lie. Still, one cannot erase colonial history nor can a country isolate itself from the international scene. And certainly no one wants Bougainville to return to civil war. So Howley grapples with the question of how to combine in the most beneficial way the traditional with the western structures of law and justice.

Some have spoken of compromise: to send all violent crimes like murder, rape, serious bodily harm and incest to the district court and allow all lesser crimes to be handled at the village, mediation level. Others disagree. It is precisely with the most violent crimes that the perpetrator should face the victim, or the victim's family, so that all parties involved can speak their minds and express their feelings. In the western system, besides dragging on almost indefinitely, third parties represent both victim and perpetrator and often the victims are the ones who have their privacy invaded and their character questioned. Thus, they would argue, the village system can better deal with even the worst of crimes.

For this traditional village system of mediation and restorative justice to work, however, it must be 'institutionalized'. Effective, proven mediators should be identified, registered and provided with materials to keep records. Moreover, to maintain their independence, they should not be paid by the state but rather by a village tax or, perhaps, through a 'user pays' policy. In the end, there will still be the need for uniformed police to support the village. And although very costly and without any delusions of their ability to rehabilitate, even some jails will be needed to protect society from the most incorrigible.

The author perceives, in other words, an emerging paradigm of restorative justice in Bougainville that must, however, be accompanied by integrated programs of training and education in the schools, the villages and amongst leaders. Moreover, he sees little need to bring in more trainers from overseas. The trainers are there already; the process must merely grow.

Although at times the book reads with an almost staccato, even repetitious effect, one cannot help but admire the research of the author. This is real 'on the ground', prime material, retrieved from those who have survived years of violence and war in Bougainville. Moreover, it documents and gives reason for a possible historic change in the legal system of this nation.

Daniel J. Stollenwerk  
Divine Word University