

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE FOR A CARGO CULT SOCIETY
IN IRIAN JAYA INDONESIA

by

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PREFACE

THE ISLANDS OF BIAK AND NUMFOR

The Geographical Setting

Biak is the largest of the Schouten Islands, and is located in the northern part of Geelvink Bay in Indonesia approximately two degrees south of the Equator. Numfor is a separate island from the Schouten group, seventy-five miles southeast of Biak.

The two islands are situated on part of an extensive coral reef in that part of the Pacific Ocean. Portions of the coral meet the mountainous regions of northeast Biak where these mountains rise to heights of twenty-five hundred feet. The land is not very good for farming on either island except in locations along inland rivers. Fish and locally grown tubers form the main diet of the people. Rainfall averages between 100-150 inches per year. Because of the porous nature of the ground, the tropical rains drain off quickly.

The climate reflects their equatorial location. Temperature ranges between 85-90 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade during the day. Heat reflected from the coral surface of the ground can raise the thermometer to over 100 degrees during daylight hours. Also, the humidity is consistently high.

There are two monsoon seasons on the islands. A west wind prevails from December to March of each year, and a southeast wind blows from July to September.

The People

The inhabitants of these two islands number between fifty and sixty thousand, and comprise the major portion of the population of a tribal group. There are nine different dialects among the Biak and Numfor people, but the dialects do not present a barrier in communication among the people. The cultural and social structure together with the religious myth are common between the two islands. Although separated by distance, inhabitants of each of the two islands have clan and family members on the other island, and so consider themselves as being one major group.

Their physical features are a mixture of Melanesian and Papuan traits. The people are generally short in stature, and have dark skin and thick lips. They have frizzy hair except where intermarriage with outsiders has occurred.

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