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Earlier I made a plea for reports from the field, descriptions of experiences, hopes, endeavours, failures that have the smell of the earth about them rather than that pleasant but detached smell of paper and libraries.

Several have come in, one of which is in this present issue, Sr Colleen Kleinschaffer's description of innovative celebration of the rites of Christian initiation out near Lake Gregory. Later issues will carry a report of culturally sensitive evangelisation from Ringer's Soak, and an insightful discussion of belief in spirits from the Cherbourg area. I believe that such papers have great intrinsic value.

We are pleased to present also Dr Deborah Bird Rose's paper from last year's meeting in Canberra of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions. It is a good example of the modern anthropological endeavour to present religion as a value in its own right, free of the reductionism that distorted earlier approaches to Aboriginal religion. Her paper underscores the holistic quality and systematic integrity of Yarralin religious culture. How would evangelisation enhance the qualities? That's the question that the inclusion of such a paper in a missiological journal like this one forces upon us. We know the gospel is supposed to fulfil, not destroy, but it is not difficult to imagine how a certain style of evangelisation could blow it all apart.

We are honoured to be able to present the full text of Frank Brennan's address to the AICC: the Leader published part of it (13 January 1985). This issue ends with a review notice of a book he co-authored recently and also of a few other recent publications on Aboriginal religion.

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Martin J Wilson msc
Editor

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CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN AN
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL RELIGION

Dr Deborah Bird Rose

IN 1965 STANNER WROTE THAT the central task of the study of Australian religions was to break down 'the collocation of facts so that the components would be religiously intelligible' (1965: 224). He was referring to approximately two centuries of study during which Aboriginal religious life had either been denied, addressed as a primitive form of religion, or reduced to sociological or other frameworks of analysis. In contrast, Eliade's work (1973, in particular) is deeply insightful and soundly based on a sensitive hermeneutic. Yet because his aim is to synthesize the few sources relevant to Aboriginal religious life, his work cannot do justice to the beauty and complexity of religion as it is lived.

In this paper I examine one facet of Aboriginal religion in the Northern Territory. One of the points I will be making is that in Aboriginal society and culture religion is part of every aspect of life. Religion underlies all actions, expressions and interpretations, for women and for men, in daily and ceremonial life, both public and secret. First, I briefly examine Ngaringman and Ngaliwurru cosmology, focusing primarily on the principles according to which the cosmos is believed to work. Second, I turn to ideas about life and consciousness, particularly in relation to cosmic principles. Third, I examine concepts of responsibility toward self and cosmos. In conclusion I discuss some of the implications of these issues for the comparative study of religion.

In order to interpret religious understanding into western categories of knowledge and experience, one is faced with a problem of language, for Aboriginal languages implicitly define as unified many of those categories which westerners define as separate. Given the interpenetration of religion and all other categories of life, it is possible to approach the analysis of religion from any of several different directions. I have chosen to use terminologies which, in the west, are characteristic of ecology, cybernetics, and moral philosophy. My purpose however is not to reduce religion to these categories, but rather to use these categories as a means of producing a religious analysis.¹

¹ Paper delivered at the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Ninth Annual Conference, 24-28 August, Canberra, 1984. Dr Rose has kindly allowed us to publish her paper as delivered: another version might be published elsewhere later.
The data I present here derive from twenty-four months of anthropological research with Ngaringman and Ngaliwurru speaking people in the Northern Territory. I was studying cultural identity in an Aboriginal community called Yarralin on Victoria River Downs Station, (Maps 1 & 2). The people with whom I worked have a century-long history of contact with Europeans, primarily pastoralists and police. They all speak pastoral English, are well versed in the intricacies of the cattle business and are rapidly becoming skilled at dealing with Europeans outside the pastoral context. At the same time, they have never been forced into reserves or missions, and have never been consistently exposed to Christian teachings. In fact, Victoria River Downs was until recently closed to both missionaries and anthropologists (Arndt 1965: 243). Because Aboriginal labour was only required on cattle stations for about six months out of the year, people in this region spent the other half of the year very consciously teaching younger people the skills and knowledge necessary to all
facets of Aboriginal life. Thus while European domination has necessitated many changes in Aboriginal life, people have maintained a continuity of traditional knowledge and culture. Yarralin people are thoroughly Aboriginal in their fundamental orientation towards such central issues of human life, as the meaning and management of birth and death, life and the cosmos.
Cosmology

Ngiringman/Ngaliwurru cosmology can only be understood by reference to the Dreaming. As Stanner (1979: 23-40) and many others state, this concept is the most central and yet the most elusive aspect of Aboriginal culture. According to Stanner (ibid: 24), this 'subtle conception' is many things in one: a narrative of the heroic past during which life came to be; a charter for the present; and a 'kind of logos or principle of order transcending everything.' It is this third concept, logos, that I focus on here.

Yarralin people speak frequently of Dreaming Law which they see as a set of unchanging moral principles through which life is assured. Dreaming Law was established in Dreaming Time — the heroic time which existed in the past and still exists today. The earth is thought of as a living female being who gave birth (out of caves) to all other living things, and who is still the ultimate source of life. The origins of all life thus derive from one mother, the earth. As such all life forms can be seen as kinsmen. This includes all humans, plants and animals, as well as other life forms which Yarralin people recognise, such as the sun, moon and rain, and several categories of human-like beings.

In the beginning living things frequently walked in the shape of humans; in their actions and interactions they produced the set of principles now known as Dreaming Law. The essence of Dreaming Law, expressed through myth, song cycles and so on, is that it shows how and why the cosmos constitutes a living system. Dreaming Law then is about life — about the principles by which life is maintained and enhanced in this system in which all parts are interrelated.

Intrinsic to Yarralin peoples' understanding of the cosmos is the idea that all parts of the cosmos are alive. All were alive in Dreaming Time and all are still alive. Each part is related to other parts, but in the beginning each part walked separately. It is on this basis that Dreaming Law is a law of autonomy: every life form that walked in the Dreaming time walked as an autonomous creative power, and every modern descendent of an original Dreaming is still autonomous. And while each part is autonomous, each is equally part of a total system. The goal of the system as a whole is to reproduce itself as a living system, while the goals of each part are: a) to reproduce itself as a part, and b) to maintain the relationships between itself and other parts, for it is through these relationships that the cosmos as a whole is maintained.

These relationships are crucial, for without them life cannot continue. Aboriginal morality has to do with maintaining the cosmos as a life enhancing system. Moral rules concern these critical relationships between parts of the system. These relationships are based upon four principles which I identify as those of response, balance, symmetry and autonomy. Each part is autonomous as a fundamental feature of the integrity of life. Each part balances and is balanced by other parts. In order for parts to be balanced they must be symmetrical, that is, of equal power (physical, social, intellectual etc.). And in order for balance to be maintained, parts must communicate. They do this by acting (being alive) and responding. In acting, parts assert their autonomy and strength; in responding, parts delimit the boundaries of other parts and thus implicitly their own boundaries. Each part of cosmos is thus seen as a moral agent and in behaving morally each part reproduces the
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relationships through which the whole system continues to enhance life.

This abstract delineation of cosmic principles can be more clearly understood by reference to a living example. The actions of the seasons illustrate these principles well. Sun and rain (Rainbow Snake) were walking in human form during the Dreaming. At that time they tested laws and ultimately they established the conditions of their present existence and of their relationship. The sun now lives in the sky, shines during the day, is hot and dry, and heats or 'cooks' the earth. Plants and animals grow to maturity through the strength of the sun's heat. Rain, characterised as the Rainbow Snake, lives in permanent waterholes, is wet and cool and washes the earth clean, thus renewing cycles of regeneration. Without sun the earth would be flooded, while without rain the earth would be burnt. In short, the sun has its own Law and rain has its own Law. The Law of their relatedness becomes more complex and is the topic of many myth segments. Put succinctly, as the sun dries and heats the country the flying foxes move from water to dry land, but as the sun becomes too hot they retreat to the waterholes. Flying foxes are said to be 'mates' with the Rainbow Snake; their presence 'tells' the Rainbow that it is time to move. It rises out of the water and spits, causing thunder, lightning and rain. Various other species join in calling up the Rainbow and urging it to create more rain. Eventually however, the rain becomes dangerous. Like the sun, what is necessary at one stage in the cycle becomes dangerous if allowed to become too powerful. At this point the wind intervenes, breaking the Rainbow's back, the sun burns it, and the Rainbow retreats to the rivers while the sun takes over the sky, initiating a cycle of growth.

Sun and rain exist independently of each other; they are autonomous beings. The sun, in acting as itself, begins to burn the earth. It thus tells the flying foxes to go to the river. They in turn tell the Rainbow Snake to rise up. Sun and rain are conceived of as two powerful and balancing forces, each one summarising and expressing a great range of phenomena — hot and cold, wet and dry, growth and obliteration. Each in its own way expresses the powers of birth, death and renewal. They thus balance each other. Neither allows the other to go out of control. They are alive and conscious, they communicate and respond. In behaving morally they enhance all life.

Human beings do much the same thing. Ngaringman/Ngaliewurru people are active participants in a number of different social groups, each of which balances, and is balanced by, other groups. As members of groups based on language, for instance, people oppose and balance one language group against another. These groups can be divided into smaller groups based on smaller units of country, each of which is autonomous and is balanced by other, symmetrically defined, groups. Likewise, language groups can be brought together on the basis of co-ownership of ceremony lines, each of which is balanced by other ceremony lines.

In similar fashion, human groups are located in country and have intense moral responsibilities of locality. Each group should, at least: burn the grass, use the country, perform increase ceremonies at local Dreaming sites, and protect dangerous Dreaming sites so that no harm comes from them. In return, country takes care of its people, providing them with food, water and all the other necessities of life.
This is a reflexive moral relationship of care through which the continuity of life for humans, for country and for plants and animals is assured.

In using country, humans also enter into relationships with other species. Women, for instance, hunt, fish and gather, taking care not to overuse any of the resources. They are resource managers with a deep knowledge of the ecological relationships on which moral actions must be based. Women also give birth to children. These human children belong to specific country, grow up with specific responsibilities to people, country and other species, and are gradually taught the knowledge of how to participate responsibly in these systemic relationships. Other categories of human identity define people in relation to other species. One set of categories is the matrilineal species identity (totem) termed 'Dreaming' in Aboriginal English and ngulu in Ngaringman. For example, people who are flying fox ngulu are said to be 'countrymen' (close kin) of flying foxes and 'mates' with rain. They share a special relationship to flying foxes which is particularly evident when a flying fox person dies. At that time all flying foxes become taboo as food and it is only with the passage of time and with the permission of flying fox people that flying foxes may again be hunted. In earlier days these relationships were given special attention after death when the bones of a dead person were used to invigorate the Dreaming sites of species with which the individual had been identified in life.

In sum, this brief examination of cosmology indicates that Yarralin people see the cosmos as a system which was designed during the Dreaming time with the goal of enhancing life. Each part of the system is seen to be a moral agent engaged in relationships which are nurturant and which are maintained according to a few principles: response, balance, symmetry and autonomy.

Species Intersubjectivity

I now turn to a finer examination of relationships between parts of the cosmic system. I use the term intersubjectivity to mean the ways in which one subject encounters another subject (Owen 1970: 1) and I expand the general usage to include all life forms, while focusing primarily on animal/human relationships.

Westerners have engaged in seemingly endless speculation about what distinguishes us from animals, be it the gift of language, of consciousness, of foreknowledge of death, of the ability to speculate, imagine, plan and execute plans. Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru people have an answer to this question and it is an answer which they find satisfying. For them shape is the key.

According to Yarralin people all animals have language. That ordinary people cannot understand the language of birds is not surprising — we cannot even understand the language of other people if they come from far away. Likewise, all animals have ceremony. Brolgas are a good example. With their grey bodies and bright red heads they look painted for ceremony and when they dance they move about and stamp their feet as people do.

Boundaries are thought to be immutable as a result of Dreaming action. But they are not impenetrable. Clever people and clever animals can change their shape, disguising themselves as other species and learning to communicate with them. The fact that there are
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clever people and clever animals introduces the necessity of interpretation into Yarralin peoples' environment: one cannot know with certainty what a thing is just by looking at it. One must also observe behaviour and events and deduce the quality of being in this light. Yarralin people consistently do this and in their view all parts of the cosmos are doing the same thing.

To be the same, then, minimally, is to share a shape and hence the potential to share a culture. To be different is, initially, to have a different shape, a different physical being. Out of that shape emerge other differences — animals of one shape, one species, share a language, a set of ceremonies, certain kinds of food, a way of life. In Aboriginal English this specific way of life is termed 'culture'. According to this usage, culture is not specific to human beings. All animals have their own culture. We are not different from others by having culture which they lack; we are different in that our culture, like our shape, is different from theirs.

This analysis of species difference brings us to the crux of the matter. Each species has its own culture which in part defines those actions which the species must take to reproduce itself, its Law, and its relationships with other species. Brolgas do not imitate human culture; in their dancing they are manifesting their own culture.

Life then in Ngoringman/Ngaliwurru thinking is the cosmos. And to be alive is to be conscious — to know and follow one's own Law, to recognise that other consciousnesses exist and to interact responsibly with others. Yarralin peoples' environment is alive, conscious and paying attention. Human actions are noted, just as humans note the actions of other living beings. This cosmic awareness is only possible because all 'cultures' are subject to the same moral principles of response, balance, symmetry and autonomy.

It is not necessary for humans to know brolga culture in detail; it is sufficient to know that brolgas have their own culture. Human beings know this in several ways. First, it is known because myths from the Dreaming show brolgas to have been autonomous actors then. It follows logically that since there are still brolgas, they are autonomous. Second, brolga culture is known to exist because, like humans and all other species, brolgas can be seen to behave in ways that are regular, predictable and unique. Uniqueness indicates their autonomy — 'they have their own Law'. Regularity and predictability show that they follow their Law, their actions are not chaotic. Third, clever people can communicate with brolgas. Fourth, the fact that there are brolgas now indicates that they have been behaving as responsible moral agents — reproducing themselves, their Law, and their relationships. Their very existence thus proves their participation in a moral cosmos.

Modes of knowing the other thus become circular: myths tell that others exist according to law, while the fact that others can be seen to exist proves that they have their own Law and have been following it. Relationships are good because they are real and real because they are good. Ultimately, however, they can be defined as moral if the continued result is enhanced life. Once the continued life of any group becomes threatened, then it is clear that someone has been acting immorally. The wrong that is done is a wrong inflicted on the cosmos as a whole and the results affect everyone, including the wrong doer (see Rose 1984b).
Responsibility

Responsibility in this system consists in acting according to a few moral principles which were laid out in the Dreaming time and which, as Law and exegesis, constitute a vast portion of Aboriginal knowledge.

Yarralin people spend a great deal of their time maintaining their own portion of the system — arranging marriages, growing people from childhood to maturity, teaching younger people, managing birth and death, feeding themselves, taking care of their country and performing all those ceremonies through which cosmic life is regenerated. These are all moral activities aimed at reproducing human life, the relationships among humans and those between humans and other life forms. Ultimately then, they aim at nurturing the cosmos.

The point I would make here is that Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru people believe that all other species are doing much the same sorts of things (see Rose 1984a: 456-473). When the brolgas dance, they too are performing ceremonies which regenerate the cosmos. When flying foxes tell the Rainbow Snake to bring rain they are helping to keep the sun in balance and thus to nurture life. If human beings bear a burden of responsibility for all life, so too do all living things. The ultimate goals of life — to nurture and enhance life — are goals which are shared by all living things.

Since all relationships involve mutual nurturance, it follows that the state of being of any portion of the cosmic system is evidence of the care exercised by relevant portions of the system. The state of country, for instance, offers concrete evidence of the responsibility which the owners have been exercising. Responsibility is grave; there is no hiding in a conscious universe.

Each part of the cosmos assumes responsibility as an act of will and in accordance with its own Law as set out in the Dreaming. We find here no heaven or hell, no punishment or reward. C S Lewis' (1964) concept of the Great Divorce is not applicable, nor are we talking about a marriage of heaven and hell. Rather we are talking about the exercise of will in a situation where the choice to deny moral action is to turn one's back on the cosmos and ultimately on one's self. The choice to assume responsibility is a multivalent one involving self-interest, reverence, morality and mysticism.

Self-interest lies in the fact that in enhancing cosmic life one assures one's own life. Thus when Yarralin people burn the grass at the end of the wet season they are performing an act from which they later reap the benefit of fat kangaroos and wallabies. Their own diet is improved through the care they put into country. At the same time, care requires an intelligent reading of what the system needs or does not need. Fertility is enhanced in some contexts but may need to be controlled in other contexts. Yarralin people protect a death adder site for instance, trying to assure that it not be damaged because any disturbance would result in an overpopulation of death adders.

The control of fertility is far more complex than this example suggests. Every Dreaming site is an 'increase' site, including those sites which contain potential human beings. Effective management involves knowing when to stimulate a given species and when to leave it alone. Much of what I know about this control is secret and cannot be discussed publicly.
Reverence for life is a quality which is fundamentally characteristic of Aboriginal life, pervading every aspect of daily and ceremonial life. Yet this quality seems frequently to have been overlooked by many Europeans. Generalised reverence is given form and expression in the relationship between people and the earth, for earth is the original mother of all life and a living, conscious being in and of herself. To harm or neglect 'the mother' is to be both rootless and witless — ignorant of one's origins, of the meaning of one's life and of one's place in the cosmos.

At the same time reverence is not just for the earth, but for all life. Death adders, for instance, are controlled but not obliterated. They have their own Law, their autonomy and their own right to be.

Many people of the world have identified reverence for life with abstention from killing and eating meat. For Aboriginal people, of course, this is not the case. Yarralin people see their predations on other species as part of their knowledgeable management of relationships between species. As I have said, there are times when foods become taboo; there are also times when people refrain from predation because they feel that a given species in a given area needs a chance to grow. But they also see that predation is part of maintaining a balance between parts of the cosmos. Overabundance is as much a problem as underabundance.

Yarralin people believe that they themselves are preyed upon by other species, such as a class of beings known as Kaiya (custodians of death). They regard these predations as terrifying and they try to avoid being captured by Kaiya, but they do not regard these predations as morally wrong any more than they regard their own hunting as morally wrong.

Morality thus lies in those actions which enhance life, given an intelligent assessment of the state of the system at any given point. For Yarralin people this is self-evident. They do not justify their sense of morality other than to point to facts of self-interest. Principles were determined in the Dreaming time and these principles can be demonstrated to work for the system as a whole.

In the complex web of relationships which, in its totality, nurtures life, morality lies in enhancing all life. This moral code poses a problem when there is a difference between what is life enhancing for an individual and what is life enhancing for a group. The principle of response assures that others will enforce a balance even though it might be repugnant to an individual.

In the Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru view of morality however, 'right' is self-evident at the most general level. They know that some people appear not to understand that continued life on earth is a 'good' to be desired and that actions which enhance life are morally right. In their view such people (many Europeans, for example) are mad. To be 'good' is to be intelligent, knowledgeable and sane. It is also to be at one with the cosmos.

Finally, mysticism too is part of the Aboriginal sense of responsibility. James (1902: 410) defines the mystical experience as the 'overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute'. While this is the most simple and expressive definition of mysticism that I have found, it poses a certain difficulty in the Aboriginal context, for Yarralin people do not see barriers between themselves and the Absolute. The Absolute, in Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru cosmology, is the oneness of the whole.
cosmos. Yarralin people are born and educated to this sense of oneness, regarding it as their rightful heritage as living, conscious beings. All responsible acts are acts which place the individual in a state of harmony with the cosmos. Both daily and ceremonial life are expressive of this sense of oneness. In daily life people exercise the care and management of nurturant relationships between parts of the system. In ceremonial life they exercise management of time in such a way that the cycles of life are allowed to begin again. It is precisely through living in this world that Yarralin people achieve a oneness with the cosmos.

In sum, responsibility is an act of will, taken by conscious beings, deriving from and producing self-interest, reverence, morality and mysticism.

Religious Life

We are now in a position to return to questions relating to the category which westerners have called 'religion'. Unfortunately it is far easier to discuss Aboriginal religion in terms of what it is not than to effectively communicate what it is. The following discussion adopts a bit of both approaches. For purposes of comparison I want to show that some western notions of religion are not applicable in the Aboriginal context, yet at the same time I want to communicate that we are indeed talking about a profoundly moving representation of humanity's search for religious meaning. In particular, I will examine concepts of a supreme deity, of sacred and profane and of participation in religious life.

1. Stanner (1979: 31) has stated that 'the Aborigines have no gods, just or unjust, to adjudicate the world.' In spite of many attempts to identify one or more 'high gods' in Aboriginal cosmologies (see Eliade 1973: 1-42 for a thorough discussion), I am convinced that the people with whom I worked do not have, and do not wish to have a supreme deity. One of the most important moral principles of the whole cosmos is that the parts are autonomous. The monotheistic concept of an all-powerful deity would seem to deny this principle. Aboriginal concepts of consciousness and responsibility demand that each part of the cosmos take upon itself the responsibility for its own actions, as well as the responsibility for managing its relationships to other parts of the system. The cosmos 'works' not because a supreme deity regulates it, but because all of the parts regulate each other. Neither is there hierarchical ordering of parts of the cosmos. Rank is not an issue here, nor is it possible to suppose that the cosmos is human-centred. Rather each part of the cosmos must be seen as an independent moral agent. These parts share a commitment to life and assent to a set of principles through which life is nurtured. The cosmos is maintained and made through the actions of all its parts.

2. Eliade (1973: 62) stated that for Australian Aborigines 'living as a human being is in itself a religious act.' He bases his statement on the understanding that 'men assume the responsibility of preserving the world...through rituals, and especially through the "increase ceremonies"' (ibid). While I thoroughly agree with the contention that the process of living is a religious act, I have shown that it is not only through rituals that human beings maintain contact with Laws and principles of creation.
I believe that for westerners religious acts are commonly
determined to be different from other acts through reference to the
sacred. Western concepts of religion thus depend on a contrast
between the sacred and the profane. Many analysts have applied this
distinction to Aboriginal life (Durkheim 1915, Kaberry 1939, and
Warner 1937 offer exceptionally elegant analyses based on this dis-
tinction).

My argument is simple. I contend that as life is seen to be
sacred, in the sense of having ultimate value and being an ineffable
miracle, and as everything is seen to be alive, then there is no basis
by which to distinguish between sacred and profane. Likewise,
seemingly commonplace actions have a sacred significance, not
because they reproduce the past as Eliade (1973: 47) suggests, but
because they nurture life, create balance and promote the future.5

For example, the process of burning the grass is, I believe, a
religious act invested with ranges of symbolic meaning which
incorporate many deep ideas about life and death. It is thus part of a
cosmic cycle in which the balance between sun and rain is restored.
It is equally part of a regenerative process in which the debris of past
experience is cleared away to make place for new life. Through
human action, cosmic forces of fertility and renewal are combined to
produce continued life on earth. When Yarralin people burn at the
right time of year a new crop of green grass appears, animals eat the
fresh grass and grow strong on it, and humans eat some of the
animals, making themselves strong. As I stated earlier self-interest,
reverence, morality and mysticism combine. Burning provides food,
nurture the earth, recreates the Dreaming Law of balance and places
people in harmony with the cosmos. It is an economic, ecological,
political and mystical act.

3. I stated in the introduction that the analysis of Aboriginal
religions poses a language difficulty. My reworking of conventional
notions of sacred and profane is a case in point. A further difficulty
arises when we turn to concepts of mysticism, for the paradox of the
unity of sacred and profane is frequently taken to be a distinguishing
characteristic of mystical experience (Eliade 1958: 29; Stace 1960:
253).

I have suggested that there is a difference between Aboriginal
and other forms of mysticism. I think that this difference lies in the
concept of barriers between the individual and the Absolute, a barrier
which may also be expressed as the distinction between the sacred and
the profane. And I have suggested that Yarralin people do not see a
barrier between themselves and the cosmos. Where mysticism in the
religions of the great traditions leads people out of this world and
toward a transcendent experience of unity beyond, Aboriginal religion
leads people into this world and toward an immanent experience of
unity in the here and now. This is a unity of time, life and place in
which human beings are responsible conduits for life and at the same
time are pivotal actors in cosmic processes.

The statements I have made about human participants in life
processes are equally true for other life forms. Human beings act as
moral agents to nurture and enhance their own life, the life of others,
and the relationships between themselves and others. Other life forms
are doing the same thing, creating themselves and others through
participation in religious life.

Life is sacred and in the Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru cosmology, as I
have said, everything is alive. For this reason I contend that it is not only human beings who are participants in the religious life. All parts of the cosmos act responsibly and engage in mystical union with the cosmic whole.

Notes

1. For purposes of my discussion in this paper, I think the best definition is that proposed by Madariago: 'the relatively modest dogma that God is not mad' (quoted in Geertz 1973: 99).

2. Research funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the National Science Foundation (USA) and Bryn Mawr College, Department of Anthropology.

3. Yarralin people possess a vast body of myth relating these actions. Each myth or myth segment discusses relationships between life forms and physical, ecological, social and cultural facts. The analysis of these relationships yields a rich exegesis of human life in particular, and of the life of the cosmos in general. In order to become adept at understanding myths, one must become adept at much of Ngaringman/Ngaliwurru culture in general, for myths make constant reference to social facts and are incomprehensible without an understanding of these referents. The analysis of myth is a complex and detailed study which is most rewarding. However, when my purpose here is to elucidate fundamental principles, I bypass the complex area of myth and draw on Yarralin peoples' understanding of the major portions of the cosmos: seasons, humans, plants and animals.

4. When the Christian God is discussed in terms of Aboriginal cosmology, Yarralin place him in the category of ancestral human being. They say that the Lord Jesus was a man so his father, God, must also have been a man. They both belong to the Dingo-Human branch of life forms.

5. I have implied that the language and categories of religious studies may not be the best for analysing Aboriginal religion. Here I think that this contention can be seen clearly, for the analysis of myth and ritual has led to a focus on the past which can indicate a rather mechanical approach to life. Stanner (1979: 40), for instance, states that Aborigines 'follow the Dreaming only because their fathers did' (see also Eliade 1973: 47). In contrast, I contend that Yarralin people use principles derived from the past as guides to action in the present, in order to produce a certain kind of future. The future to be produced is, of course, one in which the same principles will still be applicable, and thus in which life will continue.

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FRESH SHOOTS ON THE MULAN TREE

Sr Colleen Kleinschaffer

THE MULAN COMMUNITY at Lake Gregory represents a fresh missionary response by the Church to Aborigines, and one alive with potential. In contrast to the classic mode of mission establishment, whereby the Church moved into an area unbidden, setting up a complete community structure, here the Church presence is indeed a response to Aboriginal request and a sensitive accommodation to a new development. The out-station movement is a relatively recent Aboriginal initiative, which has seen small groups of people move out of the large reserves back to traditional areas, attempting to make a new start as communities living on their own land, and largely self-supporting.

Seven years ago the Mulan Community from Balgo chose to return to their traditional (Walmatjari) land near the outbuildings of an old pastoral station at Lake Gregory, WA. They could have had provided a Government school, but requested instead a Catholic school staffed by Religious. The Sisters of Mercy accepted the invitation and two nuns were housed in caravans, with a third serving as a 'Jesus House' (chapel). The school building completed the camp, which is modest by comparison with the usual run of mission compounds, rather austere, but already rich in results. The Sisters serve the educational and spiritual needs of the community, as far as they can, with priestly ministration being provided on Sundays from Balgo. Most of the adults are now Catholics as a result of two baptismal ceremonies which will be presently described in more detail.

Visitors to Mulan are immediately impressed by the atmosphere of peace, dignity and relaxed happiness. It is noticeable that the people speak easily and unselfconsciously about Jesus, prayer and spiritual experiences. Expressions of Faith seemed to be well internalised, serious (but not without lighter moments) and natural. The wearing of rosary and crucifix (not cross) was practically universal. With the material concerns of the community in the hands of the people, the Sisters are able to concentrate more of their time on religious instruction (over and above the routine teaching). In school catechetical methods involve the use of modern audio visual aids

This article is a combined effort on the part of Sister Kleinschaffer and Fr Eugene Stockton.
imaginatively adapted to the children's experience, mixing English and Walmatjari. Outside of school, much of the instruction is on an informal, one to one peer level, as spouse teaches spouse, and friend instructs friend. With minimal resources of personnel and equipment, together with a much lower Church profile, the results in pure evangelisation are remarkably high.

An important aspect of evangelisation has been the free adaptation of the rites of Christian initiation with Aboriginal innovations in symbolism and decoration. Two group baptisms and a confirmation are described here as examples of the kind of thing which might be tried elsewhere.

The first ceremony took place in 1983 on the feast of the Sacred Heart, when Father Roy Hevern baptised 17 adults and two children. They had been instructed by their peers as described above, with Sister completing the instructions as necessary for each individual. As in traditional initiations, preparations were painstaking. Special candles were made by the younger children for each candidate, by pouring molten wax into holes dug into moistened sand, so that the resulting candle evoked the desert with its sunrise colours and sandy crust. A couple of artists produced traditionally designed 'certificates' since the people like having such concrete reminders. The women decorated their heads with crowns of wattle blooms, inserted in headbands of bark. Baptismal water was drawn from the rockhole where the Pollottines had first set up camp 45 years before. From the Mulan tree (which also produces the seed beads) one woman made a water dish for the baptism and another a food bowl for the Offertory procession. The congregational parts of the Mass had been translated by the people into Walmatjari, and also taped so as to augment the actual voices at Mass. Expectations were high: 'Sister, the people can hardly wait for their baptism'.

The Mass and baptismal ceremony took place near the school around a campfire, the godparents sitting behind the candidates for baptism. For the benefit of the old people, one of the women repeated the priest's questions in language. As the water was poured over each person and the lighted candle presented, the rest were singing 'We stand up for candle your light of Jesus' (an idea purely their own). The Offertory procession took the form of a dance, bearing the food bowl of damper, beads and bush tucker. After the ceremony all returned to the camp and, sitting around the various campfires, they shared a roasted bullock, celebrating as the family of God. A typical comment: 'Sister, that was really good ceremony — now nearly all in Mulan are baptised, we will tell others about Jesus.'

The next group baptism was held the following year for a dozen adults, and further innovations were tried. Bishop Jobst officiated. This time a large backdrop painting had been prepared by the women and a chalice and ciborium carved out of wood. White headbands had been made bearing the words Ngarpu Wiki Kurrin Yara (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Children made clay medallions supported by human hair string and painted with Aboriginal symbols. As well as the sand-encrusted candles for each candidate, a paschal candle was similarly moulded, but with three wicks (for the Three-in-One symbolism). One man had carved a story stick about his tracking Jesus up to his baptism and this was stood upright before the cross (itself locally made from desert oak).

For the ceremony the people followed the traditional seating in
three groups: men, women and candidates. Those who were already baptised, including the Bishop, wore headbands. A special clay medallion replaced the Bishop's pectoral cross. Fires had been lit to drive away evil spirits as an adaptation of the exorcism rite. The Mass and baptismal ceremony had been translated, except for the parts spoken by the Bishop, and simplified. The homily was delivered by one of the men in language. The litany included Dreamtime ancestors and gave prominence to the patron saint they had chosen for the community, John the Baptist, John Pujajangra Pirnin (the desert / bush man). As the water was being poured the people sang 'Bring us out of dark into light', and at the giving of the candles 'We stand up with your light'. Instead of the clothing with a white garment, the Bishop tied on the white headband, with a white cocky feather sticking up, signifying that each candidate had now joined the rest of the community in the family of God.

October 20, 1984 saw the confirmation of 33 adults. Instruction had lasted six months (longer for some) emphasising the gift of the Spirit to build a stronger community life, as an extension of their baptism. Concurrently, regular camp meetings throughout the year had followed the theme 'Tracking Jesus' (i.e. christian living), which neatly dovetailed with the purposes of the ceremony.

Material preparation again involved most of the community. The men prepared a special mitre for the Bishop, consisting of cardboard decorated with ochre painting, human hair and flowers. A staff topped by a spirit bird and a clay pectoral cross hung by human hair string completed the Episcopal attire. Another pectoral cross was made from seeds and feathers for the assistant priest, Father Roy Hevern. Headbands were made by the women - white for the candidates, red for those already confirmed — and these were decorated with seed beads and inscribed Yara Kurrtin Yantarni (Come good Spirit). The men prepared clusters of wood shavings to adorn the foreheads of the candidates.

The women painted the backdrop painting of the pelican, a local totem (but in the European tradition of her feeding her young with her own blood), surrounded by traditional symbols. The men's paintings, depicting the journey of faith, surrounded the open-air 'sanctuary' of gums and red sand. The people like to see how other peoples perform their ceremonies, so there were also erected pictures of confirmation in Africa and Papua New Guinea.

Three fires represented the Trinity at the site, and a simple cross of desert oak stood by.

The ceremony began at 5.30 pm, the preferred time for most traditional ceremonies being sunset, as the mother of the day finishes her work and the moon rises to stand guard in the night. One of the men welcomed the Bishop and the visitors. There were people from as far away as Wyndham and Derby, and they brought with them songs specially prepared in their own languages, to join those prepared for the occasion in Walmatjari. The ceremony was led throughout by a young woman in a strong voice. The penitential rite was a traditional smoke ceremony; the people walked one by one through the smoke given off by burning a special wood, and they went on to place their hands on the Bishop's shoulder to drive out the evil spirit before he conferred the fullness of the good Spirit.

One of the men, chosen by themselves, gave the homily on the meaning of the readings in relation to the camp life as a whole, as an
aid to our 'tracking Jesus' (therefore continuing the community emphasis of the instructions). The Bishop also spoke of the good Spirit who had been present from the Dreamtime and he referred to the age-old use of oil and fats to anoint the sacred objects of the Law.

The Offertory procession was danced up by women in special skirts. Among the gifts were bush potatoes collected during the preceding week to be shared with the visitors in the feasting to follow. In line with the 'Tracking Jesus' theme, one old woman included in the gifts the traditional bark thongs she remembered her people wearing as they roamed the desert.

The sun had just set and the desert oak cross stood silhouetted against the orange-hued clouds as the ceremony ended. In the early dark glow of evening the men danced a corroboree of joy and thanksgiving, which was followed by a bush barbecue for locals and visitors alike.

These three ceremonies have been described in detail to illustrate the kind of adaptation possible in blending Christian sacraments with traditional symbols, decorations and customs. Because for Aborigines initiation ceremonies hold a place of special importance in the life of the person and the community, it is especially important to play up the Christian sacraments of initiation. A noticeable feature in the foregoing accounts is the way the whole community set to protracted preparation, with careful attention to the minutest detail even in items which would not outlast the ceremony. This way of acting, perhaps less evident in other walks of life, is especially characteristic of an activity tribal Aborigines value above any other, the ceremony. The lengthy preparations for the Christian ceremonies in these instances is an objective measure both of the renewal of the Mulan people recently returned to their homeland and of the internalisation of their initiation into following the tracks of Jesus.
SUCCEEDING IN A WHITE SOCIETY

Address to Twelfth Annual Conference
Aboriginal & Islander Catholic Council
Rockhampton. 9 January 1985

Frank Brennan SJ

In you I greet, with esteem and friendship, descendants of the first inhabitants of this land, who have lived here for centuries upon centuries. To greet you is to render respectful homage to the beginnings of human society in this vast region. To greet you is to recall with reverence God's plan and Providence as they have unfolded in your history and brought you to this day. To greet you in this portion of your land is to evoke the events of human living that have taken place on the scene of God's original creation of majestic nature in these parts. At the same time my coming among you looks back to your past in order to proclaim your dignity and support your destiny.

So spoke Pope John Paul II on 18 September 1984 when he came amongst the Indians of Canada who had gathered to celebrate 'self determination and the rights of aboriginal peoples'. The Pope went on to say:

My presence in your midst today is intended to be another expression of the deep interest and solicitude which the Church wishes to show for the native peoples of the New World. In 1537, in a document entitled Pastorale Officium, my predecessor Paul III proclaimed the rights of the native peoples of those times. He affirmed their dignity, defended their freedom, asserted that they could not be enslaved or deprived of their goods or ownership. At the same time my presence marks yet another phase in the long relationship that many of you have had with the Church.

Rev. Frank Brennan is a Jesuit scholastic completing his theological studies at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville. A barrister, he holds degrees in law from the University of Queensland and the University of Melbourne. He has acted as adviser to the Queensland Catholic Bishops and the Western Australian Catholic Bishops on land rights matters in those States and is now an adviser to the Australian Episcopal Conference Committee for Development and Peace on the proposed national land rights legislation. He is one of the authors of Finding Common Ground (Dove Communications, 1985).
This is the third Annual Conference of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council which I have had the honour to address as adviser to the Queensland Catholic Bishops on Aboriginal Affairs. It has been a privilege for me to share in your pilgrimage of faith and struggle for justice and to witness your commitment to your Aboriginal heritage and to succeeding in a white society. Like all pilgrimages and struggles, yours is ongoing. The story is always unfinished; success is always partial. Like all pilgrimages and struggles, yours is inseparable from your past, grounded in present realities including political realities, and is directed to the future in hope of greater dignity and a grace-filled destiny for all.

In reviewing the past year with its achievements and disappointments, I hope that you, our politicians, and concerned citizens will seek again to determine which Aboriginal aspirations are legitimate and what possibilities exist for their recognition, protection and enhancement. Though we need to succeed, may our first consideration not be 'What is possible?' but 'What ought to be possible?' Let us look to our needs, not our wants; to our rights, not our privileges. Let us share our dreams and hopes for all in our society rather than our misgivings and fears for ourselves. Succeeding in a white society does not demand a denial of who we are, of your Aboriginality, or of differences in culture, perceptions and race. The sign of success will be our contribution to society, helping to make it a more just and humane society — a better Australia rather than a white Australia, a land which for the first time might be homeland for all its citizens including the descendants of its first inhabitants. In this spirit of hope, I review the legal and political developments of the last year.

A year ago I had reason to say:

By the time of your next conference, deeds of grant in trust should have been issued to all Queensland communities. The Services legislation should be enacted. Complementary Commonwealth legislation should also be enacted.

I will review those three matters.

Deed of Grant Legislation

Despite promises, assurances and predictions the Queensland Government is yet to issue its first deed of grant in trust. Fortunately, the deed of grant legislation was amended this year to give legal security of tenure to an Aboriginal community over any land the subject of a deed. Mr C W Pincus QC, then President of the Queensland Bar, advised the Heads of Churches that the amendments would 'adequately meet any, but rather theoretical objections on the ground of security of tenure.'¹¹ The Queensland Catholic and Anglical Bishops issued a statement in March saying:

While continuing not to express any view about the appropriateness of Deeds of Grant in Trust, we are pleased to note the opinion of leading Queen's Counsel ... that lands granted in Trust ... will be 'as secure as if they had been granted by Act of Parliament' and that the amendments 'do in fact make an Act of Parliament necessary to revoke or detract from such grants.'¹²
On 12 April Mr R C Katter, Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs, told Parliament: 'I intend to introduce, at some later time, further legislation relating specifically to land in these areas, including the enabling mechanism for individual private ownership of residential town allotments and surrounding areas.'³

Such legislation is yet to be introduced. Meanwhile the Minister has continued to predict the issue of deeds without and prior to the passage of such legislation.

While deeds of grant are to be issued for existing community reserves, the Queensland Government is yet to make provision for land tenure over country reserves such as Yallambee, Orana Park and Mossman Gorge. The areas available to the communities at Weipa and Cherbourg are yet to be clarified. The Queensland Government has not proposed any claims procedure for vacant crown lands being available to non-reserve residents on the basis of traditional ownership, historical association or need. Two-thirds of Queensland's Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders do not live on reserves.

Services Legislation

The Community Services (Aborigines) Act and the Community Services (Torres Strait) Act were passed by the Queensland Parliament in the wee hours of Friday, 13 April 1984. The Queensland Government's neglect and abuse of established statutory consultation processes left the new Minister, Mr Katter, with, in his words 'a span of only three months in which to effect consultation and draft the legislation.'⁴

The parliamentary processes of the night April 12-13 1984 were a farce in which the laws enacted without adequate consultation were made under the cover of night. The Aboriginal bill was first sighted by Parliament at 10.33 pm and 'exhaustively' debated between 7.37 am and 8.43 am. Since then Mr Katter has gone to great lengths to demonstrate the widespread acceptability of the legislation, even claiming that, 'It is interesting to note that when the community services legislation was discussed in the House, with the exception of two front-bench members, no one from the Opposition opened his mouth against the legislation.'⁵

In fact the heated debate lasted from 8.26 pm until 8.43 am.

A year ago I told this Council,

... that despite the shortcomings in the consultation process, I am fairly optimistic that the Services legislation will be fairly enlightened as a piece of legislation directed at self-management and local government.

Unfortunately the legislation failed to measure up to what was promised.

The most significant development contained in the new Acts is the granting of local government powers to the community councils. Introducing the Torres Strait Act, Mr Katter said that these provisions 'are bringing these communities into line with the rest of the State'.⁶

Introducing the Aborigines Act, he said:

This bill reflects the Government's desire to unfetter Aboriginal and Islander people in formulating decisions which affect the
development of their communities and which shape their future position in Queensland society.\footnote{7}

He went on to describe the 'quintessence of this legislation':

that local government decision making powers will ... shift to the local democratically elected community council.\footnote{8}

However, these Acts contained a series of restrictions on community councils which do not apply to any other local councils in Queensland. They do not even apply to the Aboriginal Shire Councils of Aurukun and Mornington Island. Councils governed by these new Acts have to submit an annual budget to the Minister who is empowered to reject it in which case any expenditure by the Council will be illegal. Council chairmen have to submit monthly and annual financial statements to the Minister. All items of expenditure by Aboriginal Councils which are made from funds allocated by the Queensland Parliament have to be approved by a public servant. Council accounts are to be audited 'as if the council were a department of government of Queensland.' In other words, these Councils are not viewed as responsible elected Councils expending their own funds but as public servants expending government funds and therefore accountable to the Queensland Government through its officers. This is not the stuff of self-management; it is not even local government; it is a continuation of government by the public service. After all, the Minister and the Under-Secretary are empowered to provide the Councils with whatever departmental officers are necessary to enable Councils adequately to discharge these duties; and it is an offence for any person, including a Councillor, to obstruct these officers.

In neither of his second reading speeches introducing these new Acts did the Minister refer to the expressed and recorded wishes of the Advisory Councils and their Working parties. Since 1971 it had been established practice for the Minister to claim Advisory Council approval for legislation. One can only conclude that the coming of age by the Advisory Councils at Bamaga in July 1982 was their death. Once they stood up to government, expressed and recorded their disagreement, they were to be cast out into oblivion while undisclosed persons in George Street, Brisbane, decided what was good for Aborigines.

Meanwhile legislation was drafted containing provisions which do not give Aborigines and Islanders the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as every other Queenslander and which were at variance with what elected Aboriginal and Islander leaders sought. These provisions often repose powers in the Minister and Under-Secretary which are not exercisable over any other Queensland citizens or Councils. An analysis of the legislation is set out in my Consultation Document No. 9.

Understandably, government is concerned to protect its investment in these communities and to provide an orderly transition to local government for them. But by deviating from the expressed wishes of the elected leaders without explanation and without opportunity for discussion, the Queensland Government showed contempt for these communities and their leaders. Though the expenditure of government funds is to be monitored, we must ask: what is the purpose of such expenditure? Is it not to provide for the needs of the people? Though wanting an orderly transition to local
government, we must ask: isn't there a time when the apron strings must be cut? Shouldn't that time be determined by the people themselves?

How can it be claimed that laws are made for the development of communities and advancement of people when those laws do not accord equality of treatment and when the inequality of treatment has been neither consented to or requested by the people to be subject to the laws nor publicly justified by the lawmakers?

Without financial and administrative change, these new laws empower the Government to delay further the goals of self-management and local government, and to postpone equality of treatment under the law to Aboriginal citizens without their consent.

I am not saying this will occur, but that if the administration were so minded it could do so with legal immunity. Mr Katter has gone to great lengths to make himself available for discussions with reserve councillors since the passage of the legislation. He has also shown a willingness to administer the more restrictive provisions in the legislation benevolently. In August he circulated draft regulations to councillors giving an opportunity for community input prior to gazettal. In my opinion, the draft regulations, more so than the Acts, reveal a policy commitment to increasing self-management and local government on Aboriginal communities.

No matter how good a man Mr Katter is, he is no substitute for a good law and an enlightened administration. It is not for me to pass public judgment on the administration of the new Department of Community Services; that is a matter for the Aboriginal and Islander leader.

In my view the new laws, though an advance, are defective insofar as they contain provisions which treat Aborigines differently from other citizens and in ways not sought by them, nor justified to Parliament. With the rest of us, Aborigines are entitled to equal protection under the rule of law as well as benevolent administration by good blokes.

Complementary Commonwealth Legislation

Speaking of the Queensland legislation, Mr Katter told Parliament on 4 October 1984 that it was 'interesting to note that there has been no official condemnation by the Federal Government, as would be expected.'

At the time of the legislation's passage, Mr Katter told a press conference:

It is my understanding that the Federal Government's attitudes have moderated tremendously. Now you know, we have been informed privately along these lines. It is the impression that I have got in discussions with [Mr] Holding and far from criticising the Federal Government for it let me praise them. They have come around to Queensland's point of view in a very large number of areas and we think they are showing enlightenment in that movement.'

A press release from the Office of the Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs, Mr Bob Katter, dated 8 June 1984 stated:
Mr Katter said that Mr Holding had given him an assurance that there would be no attempt made by the Federal Government to override Queensland's Aboriginal and Islander legislation and administration.

The conduct of the Commonwealth Government in recent months seems to bear out Mr Katter's observations. You will recall that Mr Holding introduced a resolution to the House of Representatives on 8 December 1983 containing the Government's five principles:

1. Aboriginal land to be held under inalienable freehold title.
2. Protection of Aboriginal sites.
3. Aboriginal control in relation to mining on Aboriginal land.
5. Compensation for lost land to be negotiated.

That resolution has never been brought on for debate or vote. Comments by the Prime Minister during the recent election campaign seem to render the substance of the resolution a dead letter. During the campaign, the spotlight was on Western Australia which was drafting its own legislation following the release of the report of the Seaman Inquiry. On 19 October 1984 'Mr Hawke confirmed his previous advice to the WA Premier that there was no intention on the part of the National Government to introduce federal legislation that would override Western Australia's decision not to permit any veto over mining or exploration.11 According to his media release,

The Prime Minister reconfirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to its constitutional responsibilities in this area and added that those States which have or are working towards legislation which is compatible with the Commonwealth aims have no cause for concern from any federal legislation on this subject.

The Western Australian Government's proposed action clearly places WA in that category of States in which Commonwealth legislation would not be contradictory.12

Western Australia's draft Aboriginal land bill which is to be presented to Parliament in February does not provide for inalienable freehold title nor for Aboriginal control in relation to mining on Aboriginal land. Neither does it address the issues of mining royalty equivalents and compensation for lost land. In relation to control over mining activity as exercised by traditional owners in the Northern Territory, the Prime Minister has said, 'We don't believe that the right of veto is an integral part of having effective, fair and efficient land rights legislation.13 This Federal Government belief is to be contrasted with Justice Woodward's belief, 'that to deny the Aboriginals the right to prevent mining on their land is to deny the reality of their land rights. In an address to the 'Minerals Outlook Seminar' of the Australian Mining Industry Council on 2 May 1984, Mr Holding quoted Mr Justice Woodward with approval under the heading 'Aboriginal Control in Relation to Mining on Aboriginal Land' and had said:

Let me remind you that the view expressed by Mr Justice Woodward has been endorsed by successive Commonwealth Governments for the past decade. And let me make it quite clear that the present Government will continue to endorse that view.14
Though there is no doubt about the Commonwealth's power and responsibility to make laws for the benefit of Aborigines following the 1967 referendum, Mr Hawke has said,

If we are as Australians going to have the people of Australia reflecting now some 20 years later the desire they expressed overwhelmingly in 1967, if we're going to have that working effectively we've got to have an acceptance by the majority of the Australian people that what is being done reflects their wishes and desires. ... The worst thing that could happen for the Aboriginal people of Australia and for the Australian community is that there should be imposed unilaterally from Canberra some position which is not accepted by the majority of Australian people in giving effect to the wish they expressed in 1967 for a national position.\(^\text{15}\)

With respect, I suggest something worse: the situation created by the Commonwealth Government in the last two years promising a national position based on five vague principles, leaving unchecked non-Aboriginal fears that other interests are at risk, failing to educate the public about the legitimate aspirations of Aborigines for land and services, and resorting to rhetoric and a diversity of statements from the Prime Minister and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Holding. The time is overdue for a public disclosure of the nuts and bolts which constitute an acceptable 'national position' for meeting the various legitimate aspirations of Aborigines. There is need for a timetable giving state governments reasonable time within which to deliver and stipulating the date for Commonwealth action aimed at topping the bottle in cases where a state government has failed to deliver. This timetable has as its date of conclusion, 26 January 1988. So the time for the achievement of a national position is now only three years. It is time for all governments and political parties to abandon the high ground of rhetoric and to slog out practical, just proposals in the trenches of political reality.

The wanton ambiguity of the Federal Government's statements during the election campaign was equalled by the contradictory statements of the Opposition parties. The Coalition's Aboriginal Affairs policy for the campaign stated:

The Coalition believes there is a need for positive policies to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people who have a close and continuing association with their Aboriginal lands, to live according to their traditional culture and lifestyle. This will be enhanced if they can be given secure title to appropriate land, provided that land has not been alienated.\(^\text{16}\)

And yet the Western Australian Liberal Party campaigned extensively on an anti-land rights platform circulating pamphlets stating, 'Aboriginal Land Rights are not acceptable to the Liberal Party in Western Australia and there can be no compromise on this issue.'\(^\text{17}\) Judging by their policy statements, Liberal governments if in office in Perth and Canberra would be committed to land rights legislation at a federal level for Western Australia as such legislation would meet the criteria that 'any Federal Government action in relation to land should only be taken where necessary, and then only after detailed consultation with the State.'\(^\text{18}\)

It is time for all political leaders to heed the words of Senator
Fred Chaney and Mr Ian Viner who have served as Liberal Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs. In a joint statement on the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act passed by the Federal Parliament in 1976 under the Fraser government, they said:

The legislation was originated by one Government and brought into law by another. It and the report by Mr Justice Woodward received support from all parties in the Federal Parliament. In this arena at least, there has been no divisive political argument on the justice of Aboriginal claims nor of the prior ownership of Aborigines — not only of land in the Northern Territory but of the whole of Australia before British settlement in 1788.

Apart from providing the legal machinery for Aborigines to regain their own land, the Act has much wider significance. It is a recognition of the special cultural identity of the Aboriginal people within the life and laws of Australian society. It acknowledges the affinity with the land that is fundamental to Aborigines' sense of identity and which characterised their traditional society.

At the very basis of the Act is the intent to eliminate that fundamental inequality and injustice which to date has frequently been characteristic of our society in dealings with Aborigines. At the heart of the Act is the special relationship that Aborigines have with their land. It is what sacred sites are all about. It has become fashionable to ridicule and condemn this spiritual association with the land, to insult Aborigines to whom it is still of great importance, and to assert that sacred sites are found only after mineral exploration has uncovered promising finds on Aboriginal lands.

This attitude assumes that while the traditional culture of the Aboriginal people may be surviving in small pockets of isolated land in Central Australia and Arnhem Land, the invasion of the dominant white culture with its seductive trappings has effectively destroyed Aboriginal culture elsewhere. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who espouse this view are effectively cutting off all common ground for negotiating a just settlement in both social and economical terms with Australia's Aboriginal people.

In simple terms, it is an unwillingness to be tolerant, or to accept that all people do not have the same ways of looking at things. ... it is a failure to accept the enduring qualities of Aboriginal culture which despite all odds have survived 200 years of the intrusion of Western culture. The one aid to that survival has been land.

The ultimate injustice would be the denial of that aid by political parties in search of the shifting sands which they call the middle ground. Soon it will be too late to build on the rock of justice.

Conclusion

Deeds of grant and complementary Commonwealth legislation are yet to materialise. Good laws once made must be complemented by good administration. Good social policy for the benefit of minority groups requires community acceptance. All of us, including Government, have a responsibility to ensure that the legitimate
aspirations of the descendants of Australia's first inhabitants are understood, and in being understood are realised, and in being realised are respected. Then with God's help we might all succeed in what most deserves success in any society — according love and respect to all persons in Christ, whether they be Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, (and we might add) Aboriginal or not. What we can achieve in our personal lives by the exercise of charity can be fully complemented in our social structures and policy only by the exercise of justice.

During the recent federal election, Australian voters were prepared to tolerate and the major political parties were prepared to utter contradictory and ambiguous statements about Aborigines and land rights: statements which caused further racial tension without contributing to the resolution of conflicting claims. It would be unthinkable for similar sorts of statements to be uttered and tolerated about a capital gains tax, for example. This highlights that we are yet to convert our society to a care and responsibility for the dignity and destiny of all people. In this enterprise, I wish you success in the next three years as we approach 26 January 1988, the day on which we as a nation will strain our ear to hear God's word:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom my soul delights.  
I have endowed him with my spirit  
that he may bring true justice to the nations.

He does not cry out or shout aloud,  
or make his voice heard in the streets.  
He does not break the crushed reed,  
nor quench the wavering flame.

Faithfully he brings true justice;  
he will neither waver, nor be crushed  
until true justice is established on earth,  
for the islands are awaiting his law. (Isaiah 42:1-4)

In our quest for a more just society, let us heed the words of Pope John Paul to the Canadian Indians:

It is clear from the historical record that over the centuries your peoples have been repeatedly the victims of injustice by newcomers who, in their blindness, often saw all your culture as inferior. Today, happily, this situation has been largely reversed, and people are learning to appreciate that there is great richness in your culture, and to treat you with greater respect.

My predecessor Paul VI explained very clearly that there are close links between the preaching of the Gospel and human advancement. And human advancement includes development and liberation (cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 30-31). And so today, in speaking to you, I present to you the Gospel message with its commandment of fraternal love, with its demands for justice and human rights and with all its liberating power.

Today I want to proclaim that freedom which is required for a just and equitable measure of self-determination in your own lives as native peoples. In union with the whole Church I proclaim all your rights — and their corresponding duties. And I also condemn
physical, cultural and religious oppression, and all that would in any way deprive you or any group of what rightly belongs to you.

It is clearly the position of the Church that peoples have a right in public life to participate in decisions affecting their lives: 'Participation constitutes a right which is to be applied both in the economic and in the social and political fields' (Justitia in Mundo I; cf. Gaudium et Spes, 75).

This is true for everyone. It has particular applications for you as native peoples, in your strivings to take your rightful place among the peoples of the earth, with a just and equitable degree of self-governing. For you a land-base with adequate resources is also necessary for developing a viable economy for present and future generations. You need likewise to be in a position to develop your lands and your economic potential, and to educate your children and plan your future.

[The quotations of Pope John Paul II are from his Address to the Native Populations of Canada, Fort Simpson, 18 September 1984, L'Osservatore Romano, 8 October, 1984, pp. 15-16].

Footnotes

3. 294 QPD 2891.
4. Catholic Leader, 10 June 1984, p.5.
5. 1984 QPD 1013; 4 October 1984.
6. 294 QPD 2755.
7. ibid. 2891.
8. ibid. 2893.
12. ibid.
15. Transcript of Press Conference, 19 October 1984, p.3.
19. F Chaney & I Viner, 'An Accommodation of Interests, 1980, pp4-5.'
REVIEW NOTES

Religion in Aboriginal Australia: an anthology


Max Charlesworth and associates have produced what they subtitle as an 'anthology', i.e. bits and pieces collected here and there from larger works that deal with Aboriginal religion. There are 19 pieces, most written by contemporary authors or scholars who have but recently died (A P Elkin, W E H Stanner); a few are from earlier 'classical' works, e.g. by B Spencer, A W Howitt, L Warner.

The anthology professes to be aimed at the general reader who might be interested in a scholarly presentation of the main features of Aboriginal religion. The features are those exclusively of traditional religion. The exclusion of 'changes brought about in Aboriginal religions through their contact with Christianity' (p.16) robs the book of a great deal of vital impulse. This judgement, of course, is an expression of reviewer's bias. To publish a presumably up-to-date anthology on Aboriginal religion with that sort of exclusion is, to my mind, rather like producing a work on marine life that never actually treats of fish. I acknowledge the passing reference he gives (in footnote 7, p.17, and bibliography p.20) to my own attempts to understand the dynamics of Aboriginal religion by reference to analytic categories generated out of the Christian form of religious experience, though one could have expected more accuracy in reporting place of publication.

The stiff price will give pause to scholars with limited budgets who probably already have the books from which the main excerpts are taken. I found Charlesworth's 17-page introduction a useful résumé of the state of scholarship on the issue of Aboriginal religion. However, I am surprised at the misleading slant he gives to Fr E A Worms' thought (pp. 6 and 9), as he (Charlesworth) is currently involved in translating under my general editorship the very section of Fr Worms' long essay on Aboriginal religion which indicates Fr Worms' disagreement with his academic mentor, Fr W Schmidt, on the issue of primitive monotheism in Australia: I suspect Fr Worms' rather surprising classification of original and accessory features of Australian religion resulted rather from the correlation of observed geographical incidence of features with an hypothesised pattern of Immigration.
There are short introductions also to each of the four parts of the anthology: Kenneth Maddock to Part 1 on doctrinal and credal foundations of Aboriginal religious life; Howard Murphy to Part 2, rites and ceremonies; Diane Bell to the section on women; Max Charlesworth again to Part 4, on variety and change in Aboriginal religion, excluding as mentioned earlier, change induced by contact with Christianity.

M J Wilson


Frank Brennan's, the major section (p.11-47) covers much the same ground as his address to the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council in January 1985 which is printed in full in this issue of Nelen Yubu. The section is entitled 'Right Reasons for Aboriginal Land Rights'. He describes briefly the traditional Aboriginal relationship to land, mainly by means of a long quotation from W E H Stanner. He eschews all legal niceties with the assumption that Aborigines were legal owners of Australia: hence various groups today should either have their title legally recognised (tribal groups still living on traditional land) or they should receive appropriate compensation (grant of secure title to reserve land for displaced groups, 'assistance' for those 'making the transition to an urban existence', p.17).

He gives a brief survey of the present legal situation in Aboriginal land in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia (pp.18-19). The background to the Northern Territory 1976 Act is presented in one paragraph on p.36 in the context of Commonwealth land rights law reform (pp.35-39). The bulk of his section however is concerned with the peculiar antics of Queensland politicians in regard to Aboriginal appeals for justice in that state. This is an area in which, to their credit, the churches have become actively concerned and Frank Brennan himself has been their able instrument. All the active campaigning by Aborigines and their supporters have borne substantial fruit in principle: on p.29 Brennan acknowledges that the Queensland legislation of deeds of grant in trust does concede 'a form of inalienable title'. Unfortunately up to the date of publication no deed had in fact been granted.

I would question several of his arguments: they seem to me to be unnecessary blemishes on a well presented case. For instance, the cutting of 'apron strings' is surely not a unilateral decision (p.35). I wonder how he can say (p.36), even in the particular context of possible Commonwealth action, 'States do not have rights — neither does the Commonwealth'. In my possibly antique terminology they are 'moral persons', the subjects of rights and duties, precisely because they are made up of people. And finally, I would not think the Prime Minister's press release quoted at length (with the omission, surely, of 'must' in the third sentence) on p.39 was judged fairly.
The second section (pp.49-67) is John T Egan's presentation of the moral basis for land rights. He outlines a fourfold basis for Aboriginal land rights: first occupancy; need for cultural identity; right to self-determination; right to religious freedom.

The argument is almost entirely from authority — the statements of Popes, a Spanish moral theologian and a Spanish missionary, Vatican II, the 1971 Synod of Bishops and the Archbishop of Wellington, NZ. I take it that John Egan has in mind a group or groups somewhere of faithful Australian Catholics who don't like Aboriginal land rights! Some Aboriginal testimony is adduced, partly (we note with appreciation) from Claude Mostowik's article in Nelen Yubu, No. 13.

While I would not want to question such an array of authorities, nor to dispute his conclusions, I wonder about the cogency of several of his arguments. In particular I wonder if the right to self-determination is a valid reason on its own and separately from the issue of cultural identity (second argument). And I think he rather spoils his fourth argument (from religious freedom) when he admits (p.63) that the Church (officially? universally? some Church people?) 'may be cautious about some of the beliefs and practices of Aboriginal religion'. This was the nub of Hugh Morgan's argument!

John Honner in the third section (pp.69-79) briefly but competently displays the extraordinary silliness of the theological arguments proposed in May 1984 by Hugh Morgan, Western Mining Corp., to support the emancipation of Australian miners from the limits imposed by Aboriginal land rights and sacred sites. One rather suspects the truth of the rumour Honner reports in conclusion on p.79, viz. that Morgan's speech was really a joke that got out of hand. In this case one might wonder if it is worth paying it even this much attention. One trouble is that there are places in the world, e.g. South Africa, where this sort of racist theology is taken very seriously indeed. A fundamentalist doesn't have to search very hard in the Old Testament to find 'theological' support for the most extreme forms of chauvinistic racism. A miner playing with theology can be as dangerous as a theologian playing with dynamite.

Another trouble with Morgan's joke (if it wasn't such then Honner's dilemma on p.79 is effective indeed) is that it can trigger off the sort of explosive reaction exhibited by Jack Doolan's feature article in the NT News (1 June 1984, p.6), 'Aborigines, land rights and religion'. Morgan had claimed that land rights troubled Aboriginal christians by inviting them to 'step back to the world of paganism, superstition, fear and darkness'. Doolan's triumphant reply (before he goes on to imply the opposite) is that there are hardly any Aborigines who have honestly embraced Christianity and, embarrassingly, he proceeds to adduce the support of Bishop Gsell, the former Catholic Bishop of Darwin.

Morgan at least had this going for him, that churchmen who support land rights generally fluff their lines when asked to make christian sense of the traditional religious base for Aboriginal land rights: I have already instanced John Egan above. Aboriginal christians themselves are often quite delighted by the general congruence they perceive between traditional and christian ideologies, and I think it is a pity christian writers in this area do not take more heed of the theoretical basis for the congruence that I outlined in Nelen Yubu No. 13 (pp.3-13), 'Aboriginal religion and christianity: ideological symbolism, ritual sacramentalism'.

MJW

The book is a helpful compact account of the historical evolution of anthropological theory on religion in relation to the study of Aborigines and their culture by European and white Australian scholars. In fact, as is pointed out in Chapter Two (on the period 1825-1870) the line of English ethnological and anthropological societies and institutes sprang from the Aborigines Protection Society which itself resulted in 1838 from a Parliamentary Select Committee inquiring into the treatment of native inhabitants of British settlements after Quaker and Evangelical philanthropists had succeeded in securing the abolition of slavery in 1833.

The book's main value is that it provides a compact reasoned account of attitudes towards Aboriginal religion from the time of first contact up to the present. For instance, by relating the early writers in this field to the rationalist European cultural and philosophic fashion of their time he makes intelligible that extraordinary early denial, even by church ministers, of the very existence of 'religion' among the Aborigines.

The book does a good job in covering so vast and complex a field in little over a hundred and fifty pages. It is pretty obvious that the last pages (pp.123-134) covering scholars of recent times (Lévi Strauss, Stanner, Elkin and Eliade) were tacked on to a dissertation so as to give it a contemporary relevance as a published book. While one could wish for a more careful presentation of the thought of a rich thinker like Stanner, in view of the limitations of space and the usefulness of the book it would be churlish of me to complain about specific points.

I would however like to make two remarks. I would have thought Kenelm Burridge's (1973) *Encountering Aborigines: anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal* could have been more acknowledged (cf. p.ix). I would see the two books as complementary: Swain's is more a chronicle of scholars, Burridge's an essay in intellectual interpretation (so in fact closer to the meaning of Swain's somewhat misleading title!).

Secondly, it is a pity Swain has paid no attention to E.A. Worms' major essay *Australische Eingeborenen-Religionen* (1968). Certainly Swain had to restrict his coverage for practical reasons. On p.102 he explains that he has selected only the theories that link the earlier chapters of his book with 'present-day thinking on aboriginal religion.' Worms' essay certainly does this. The lack of an English translation has resulted in its almost total neglect. Nelen Yubu hopes to remedy this defect in the near future.

Finally, Swain's book carries a useful bibliography of main works (pp.141-156) — though I wonder why Stanner's (1979) *White Man Got No Dreaming* was omitted, and of course E.A. Worms' 1968 essay (and French translation, 1972).

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