

Editorial

The main focus of *Nelen Yubu* No.67 is Reconciliation. This is the present major concern of many of us in Australia today. We rejoiced at the Mabo and Wik judgements which ended the *terra nullius* sham — and shame. We could scarcely believe it when we heard that our federal parliament intended to nullify all the advantages gained with its 'Ten Point Plan'.

Gerard Goldman displays the theological dimensions of the issue. Throughout the world there is the amazing synchronism of movements to redress the injustices suffered by cultural minorities. In most cases it is a matter of almost total dispossession of land held by ancient immemorial title and the consequent threat of cultural and racial genocide. For once the churches and theologians are up with the times. It is being proposed, as Gerard points out, that reconciliation is the new paradigm of mission.

In a talk I was able to have recently in his Broome office with the head of the Australian Reconciliation Commission, Patrick Dodson, I was pleased to hear him speak of the role the churches have to play in the process here in Australia. We are really asking the nation to *convert* within its mentality and spirit, to place justice and brotherhood, sisterhood above material gain. Patrick suggested that the type of spirituality, 'spirituality of the heart', that is being promoted in a special way by the missionary order I belong to (and he used to also) is particularly suited to the major task at hand in Australia today.

It is fitting, therefore, that in Dan O'Donovan's continued paper we should be looking to the Aboriginal people to find some practical way in which we might share in the richness of their millennial experience.

At the same time we are happy to record the experiences of an Aboriginal person meeting the challenges posed by modern schooling in an Aboriginal area. The irony of Miriam-Rose's paper is that, however reluctantly, she is one of the main channels of Aboriginal wisdom to us white Australians.

— Martin Wilson msc
Editor

Reconciliation — An Urgent Task: A Review of the Literature

Gerard M Goldman

RECONCILIATION is one of the burning themes and issues in theology and society today. It seems just about everyone has something to say about reconciliation and how to bring it about. In all the talk and writing about reconciliation two striking features are present. One is the variety of meanings given to 'reconciliation'. And perhaps related to this is the second feature: namely, the high degree of *polarity* present in the discussion — in the theological world *as much as* in the political arena — resulting in genuine antagonism and hostility towards those views different from one's own. The irony of this should not be lost on us! This paper humbly sets out to shed a little light on this contemporary discussion on reconciliation. I will conclude the review with a reflection on the possible need for a Trinitarian view of reconciliation.

Reconciliation: the emerging model of mission

Some commentators like Robert J. Schreiter (1996, 1997a, 1997b)¹ are suggesting that mission as reconciliation is becoming the new model of mission in the church.² He draws from David Bosch, who in his ground-breaking text *Transforming Mission*, discerned a variety of mission paradigms throughout Christian history. Many, like Schreiter (1996:245),

¹Schreiter's most recent writing on reconciliation was published in 1996 as, 'Reconciliation as Model of Mission', *Neus Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft*, 52(4):243-250. His 1997 article in *New Theological Review* actually predates the writing of the NZM journal. Apparently, NTR article was published one year later than originally promised. Personal correspondence from Schreiter, August 7th, 1997.

²Schreiter (1996:245) prefers the term 'model' to 'paradigm'. He indicates two advantages in doing this. First, paradigms are not nearly as self-enclosed as Kuhn first proposed. Second, the word model can draw from Clifford Gertz's use; that is we can have both a 'model of' what is happening, and a 'model for' how to act.

felt Bosch hesitated too much in proposing a new paradigm for the present. Bosch felt the church was most needing to respond to the 'post-modern' condition. With this in mind Bosch inclined to the view that the newly emerging paradigm was the ecumenical paradigm. Schreiter (p.245) asserts 'this does not present a compelling image or metaphor to galvanize missionary activity'. He is also quick to point out that Bosch had completed his manuscript before the dramatic events of 1989 and could not have foreseen the astonishing changes that would happen since that time (cf. Schreiter, 1996:245). Unexpected death in 1991 robbed the world of his reflections on these epoch-changing events.

Before proposing his new model of mission, Schreiter looks back to recent church history. He submits that the modern missionary period can be characterized by two metaphors; expansion and accompaniment. Expansion is that period covering the beginning of the nineteenth century to World War Two. In this, mission was closely connected with European colonial expansion. Here we have the motto, 'Civilize in order to Christianize'. Matthew 28:20 could be claimed as the key text for this model. The period of accompaniment covers the 1960s to the 1980s.³ The key words in this period are solidarity with the other, contextualization and inculturation, dialogue and commitments to liberation. Luke 4:16-20 captures this theme.

Schreiter observes that since this time — that is, during the 1980s — the emerging phenomenon of globalization began to accelerate.⁴ It has and continues to cause unprecedented division and pain. This shattering climate, which Schreiter (1997a:11) evocatively refers to as 'the aching heart of the world', must become the center of the church's call to mission. The ravaging effects of globalization on the poor and oppressed — who are

³Schreiter in a telephone conversation with me on 1st August, 1997, stated that this accompaniment should cover the 1960s to 1980s. This is not spelt out clearly in his writings to date. Cf. Schreiter, 1996.

⁴Schreiter notes: 'It is much debated when globalization began. The word to describe this phenomenon first appeared in 1959.' Personal communication, August 7th, 1997.

increasing in numbers at enormous rates — has returned us to the heart of the gospel. It is from this understanding that Schreiter (and others) are naming the emerging model of the church as ‘mission as reconciliation’.

I will now view the different authors’ contribution to the discussion on reconciliation.

What exactly do we mean by ‘reconciliation’?

Reconciliation is such a well used phrase these days — some say it is tired and worn out — that it is difficult to gain an accepted definition of what it actually is. Schreiter’s writings on reconciliation consistently begin with an outline of the various meanings that reconciliation has been given (cf. 1992a; 1992b; 1997b, 1997b). Reconciliation is heard in regard to arbitration, the cessation of hostility, the divorce court, the end of estrangement. In religious circles in Latin America it is used by conservative Catholic Bishops as an alternative to liberation theology. It is increasingly being used by nations in their efforts to recover from traumatic social upheaval and conflicts (some examples include: South Africa, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, El Salvador, and perhaps even Australia). Schreiter (1997b) observes that reconciliation is often ‘conflated with forgiveness, justice, reparation and expiation.’ Many see it as ‘the end point of a process which includes all these.’ Reconciliation has become for many a ‘codeword for amnesty for wrongdoers, repressing memories of atrocity, and returning to some semblance of a normal way of life.’

There are numerous theological meanings as well. It is used in the New Testament as God’s saving activity in the world. Roman Catholic theology is closely tied with the sacrament of the same name: it focuses on bringing the penitent back into relationship with God. Twentieth century Protestants draw from the fourth part of K. Barth’s monumental *Church Dogmatics*. A good example of Barthian theology is the German Protestant, Muller-Fahrenholz (1997:4), who defines

reconciliation as 'a supreme term to describe God's redeeming work.'

The Bible has numerous stories that refer to reconciliation. Ones that regularly receive attention in the literature are: the reunion of Isaac and Esau (Genesis 33); Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45); the parables of the lost sheep and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15); and the Day of Atonement. The latter one sees Christ's expiatory death as a model of reconciliation.

The Pauline Understanding of Reconciliation

The word 'to reconcile' (*katallassein*) is found only thirteen times and exclusively in the Pauline and Deuteropauline correspondence. Paul dramatically reinterprets the original Greek idea of reconciliation being the cessation of hostility between enemies. His use of the term is so novel that Cilliers Breytenbach (1986:3) asserts it 'is not to be found in Jewish or Old Testament religion.' Schreiter (1992a; 1997b)⁵ and Cilliers Breytenbach (1986) agree that reconciliation in Paul operates on three levels.

The first level is christological, with God reconciling the world through Christ (Romans 5:11). Through the cross of Christ humankind comes into a new relationship with God, in a sense humankind has been created anew (2 Corinthians 5:17). Breytenbach (p.3) asserts: 'From Paul's perspective, it is the substitutionary death of Christ which makes possible the reconciliation of [humankind] to God.'

The second level is ecclesiological, with Christ reconciling Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:12-18). Breytenbach (p.4) refers to this Ephesians text as the 'reconciliation of cultures.'

The third level is cosmic, where Christ reconciles all the spirits and powers of the universe, whether in heaven, on earth or under the earth (Colossians 1:19-22). The reconciling work of Christ is now entrusted to the Church in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

⁵Schreiter draws largely from the work of Jose Comblin.

Christian teaching based on the Pauline reconciliation correspondence

Schreiter (1992a, 1997b)⁶ identifies five points of Christian teaching on reconciliation that are mostly based on the Pauline correspondence. First, 'Reconciliation is the work of God who initiates and completes reconciliation in Christ' (Schreiter, 1997b). An important distinction is that Paul understands reconciliation as the work of God within us: we call this 'the experience of grace'. With this in mind, Schreiter (1997b) asserts that reconciliation is a 'prior condition, not a result of repentance and forgiveness.' Schreiter's position serves to highlight the gracious activity of God in the lives of persons. God loves us and is reconciling us even before we know we need to repent, or forgive, or that we could experience life any differently. This is indeed good news.

Second, Christians are called to be 'ambassadors for Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:20). This grace of reconciliation and ministry of reconciliation is more like a way of life — we could perhaps even call it a worldview (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16). Schreiter names it as 'a spirituality [rather] than a strategy'.⁷

Third, 'the experience of reconciliation makes of both victim and wrongdoer [this includes bystander] a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).' When we experience reconciliation we do not return to our former state. In a mysterious way we experience in part, the resurrection; we become more human — reflecting more the image of God. How is justice and forgiveness understood in the light of this new creation? Only those who have experienced this can answer. What is clear is that forgiving and healing are not matters of forgetting, as in

⁶Schreiter's 1997b text is an entry in the forthcoming Dictionary of Mission, under the heading, 'Reconciliation'. It is to be published towards the end of 1997. As the entry is just over three pages in length, I have chosen not to include draft page numbers.

⁷Schreiter's next book on reconciliation is going to explore reconciliation as both a spirituality and a strategy. The inference being that there are some things that communities can work on that create the potential for reconciliation to unfold. Personal conversation with Schreiter, 1st August, 1997.

the adage of 'forgive and forget'. As Schreiter observes: 'One can never forget, but one can remember in a different way; that is, a memory that now gives life to the future rather than dwelling on the undeniable hurt of the past'. Schreiter refers to Thomas' experience of the resurrected Christ in John 20, where Christ's glorified body still bears the scars of his torture; these scars become sources of healing for Thomas.

Fourth, 'the process of reconciliation that creates the new humanity is the narrative of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.' The passion and death becomes a "dangerous memory" (J. Metz) that subverts the power of injustice that estranges the world from God and humanity. The resurrection is the confirmation and the manifestation of God's power over evil' (1997b). The cross is the symbol, par excellence, of the paradoxical nature of God's reconciling power. As Schreiter illumines: 'To come to understand the meaning of the cross is to plumb the meaning of reconciliation.' Paul again and again speaks of the reconciling power of the cross of Jesus Christ to break down the barriers that separate persons from each other. I would add that Paul's witness of Stephen's 'cross' profoundly contributed to his understanding of the power of weakness and vulnerability. Christians are called to a way of the cross because through that self-emptying (kenotic) witness the power of God's overwhelming grace can unfold.

Lastly, the challenge of reconciliation is daunting. It is something that overwhelms most persons. Because of this Schreiter (1997b) ponders that 'it ultimately can only be grasped cosmically and perhaps eschatologically'.

What reconciliation is not

Due to the aforementioned plethora of uses of the term reconciliation, many writers give considerable attention to detailing what it is not. Schreiter in his important text *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, [1992a] gives most of his first chapter to detailing his

understanding of what reconciliation is not. He suggests three main pretenders.

First, reconciliation is not a hasty process (1992a:18-21).

We hear this in the phrases, 'forgive and forget', 'let's get on with the future', or even, 'isn't it time for reconciliation'. It is mostly called for by the perpetrators who want the focus taken off their abuse: they are committed to suppressing the history of violence.⁸ Schreiter (p.19) points out that trivializing the Other's story 'actually underscores how far the situation still is from a genuine reconciliation.' Those who call for forgetting are actually participating in the ongoing victimization of the person: they are really saying other's experience is not important. By trivializing the other's memory we are effectively ignoring their identity and therefore not acknowledging their human dignity (Schreiter 1992a:19).

The other problem with a hasty approach to reconciliation is that it fails to address the causes of suffering. Such an approach provides no guarantee that such violence will not be repeated (cf. pp.20-1).

It also fails to recognise the role that time has in the reconciliation process. It takes time for the person to give in to the inchoate yearning for sense-making out of their pain and hurt. This is captured movingly in two recent award winning novels, Oscar Hijuelos', *Mr. Ives' Christmas* [1995], and David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* [1995]. Both explore the way persons struggle over a long period of time to make meaning out of earlier tragedies and hurt. There is nothing forced or sudden in the way they come to new meaning.

Second, reconciliation is not an alternative to liberation (1992a:21-5).

Schreiter argues that reconciliation can only occur in a context that is committed to achieving social change. He notes

⁸James Cone (1969, 1975) says such an attitude has trivialised and ignored the sufferings of African-Americans.

that we often hear the phrase 'Reconciliation or Liberation' as if the two were in opposition. This logic is seriously flawed as it fails to take heed of the conflictive reality of life found in the biblical worldview. Schreiter tells us that we should not be surprised that the cosmic battle between goodness and evil is part of the human arena. The example par excellence is the 'blood of the cross'. Schreiter states:

Perhaps it would be better to say that not only may a Christian hold to a conflictive view of reality, but a Christian must hold to such a view in order to acknowledge sin and evil in the world and to participate in the process of overcoming it. (p.25)

Liberation theologians have recognised the reality of conflict in the fearless proclamation of the Reign of God. Many white North American (male) theologians have an almost pathological hatred of liberation theology. This may be symptomatic of the difficulty in challenging those in power to reconsider the morality of their privileged position. The resistance to this is both inside and outside of the church. It is important to acknowledge that we can recognise the existence of conflict without necessarily supporting violence. The two do not necessarily go together. As Schreiter states: ' . . . we can have a conflictive view of reality that does not require conflict as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life' (p.24).

Schreiter points out that those who advocate reconciliation as an alternative to liberation '[do] not acknowledge the deeply conflictive realities that create the chasms that reconciliation hopes to bridge' (p.22). Many Christians embrace a non-biblical 'consensus' worldview. In such a worldview conflict is understood as something to be avoided. A memory I have of such misunderstanding was when I was teaching at Wadeye in the Mission school. My Aboriginal team-teacher and I prepared the weekly staff prayer meeting on the theme of Land Rights for dispossessed Aborigines. The next day the school principal — a daily 'mass goer' — accused me of causing division between blacks and whites. No Aborigine told me that I was divisive;

they were surprised that a ku bamam (white person) would raise such an issue in a public (prayer) meeting. The principal — like so many well meaning Australian Christians — was held captive to the lie of consensus, and the lie of Australian history.

It is no coincidence that Liberation Theology has evolved amongst oppressed peoples. It took persons from the 'underside' to draw to attention that Christ's life was immersed in conflict — even from the moment he was born. As an adult he never avoided conflict in naming the unjust parts of both Jewish and Roman law. He shook people out of complacency. He experienced righteous anger. Liberation Theology draws from this biblical worldview to remind us that for reconciliation to be genuine, the source/s of conflict must be truthfully faced.

Schreiter reminds us that truth-telling alone does not bring about reconciliation. We are obligated to create conditions that will not repeat the violence of the past. This requires commitment to changing personal and social structures of behavior. We do not want to hear the next generation telling the same story.

Most of humanity live in societies where those in power are committed to staying in control. The cry for justice amongst the poor and oppressed is palpable. People of good will feel sickened by the cynical exploitation of human life and join with the oppressed in proclaiming their God-given rights for freedom and basic human living conditions. It is in this context that Schreiter (1997a:11) argues: 'Liberation is a condition for reconciliation, not an alternative to it.'

Third, reconciliation is not a managed process (1992a:25-7)

Understanding reconciliation as a managed process is one of the most common misconceptions about reconciliation. Cessation of hostilities through arbitration and conflict management are often equated with reconciliation. Schreiter

reminds us that they are not. To put it simply, suspension of violence is not the same as overcoming it.

Schreiter draws to our attention that a managed approach to reconciliation 'falls far short of the Christian understanding of reconciliation in significant ways' (p.26). Firstly, it fails to appreciate that it is God who reconciles. Second, the managed process assumes that reconciliation is a skill that is to be mastered. This is alien to Christian worldview. Rather than being a skill to learn, Schreiter points out that reconciliation should more properly be understood as 'something [to be] discovered — the power of God's grace welling up in one's life' (p.26).

Clarifying the language of reconciliation

One of the significant challenges in a literature review on reconciliation is seeking common understanding on the actual terms used. Consider the following book titles: Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz's, *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation* [1997]; Donald W Schriver's, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* [1995]; Nicholas Tavuchis', *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* [1991]; and, William A Meninger's, *The Process of Forgiveness* [1997]. The way in which many of these authors use the terms, 'reconciliation', 'forgiveness', 'apology', even 'process', suggests that the meanings flow one into the other. This is not the case.

An exceptional book on reconciliation that suffers from the 'interchangeable syndrome' is Muller-Fahrenholz's, *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation*. The main reason why Muller-Fahrenholz uses both terms is his belief that 'reconciliation' is not a strong enough word to convey all its meaning (pp.2-4). He claims this is the reason for international reconciliation commissions like the one in South Africa adding the word 'Truth' to the titles of their

Reconciliation Commission. Thus it becomes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

He also points out that 'forgiveness is similarly diluted in many circles. This shows up in our language — we expect people to forgive us — we say, 'Excuse me' or 'Pardon me' presuming that forgiveness is naturally a right of the abuser. This is a cheap notion of forgiveness.

Authors like Muller-Fahrenheit prefer the word forgiveness to reconciliation because they believe forgiveness focuses attention on human responsibility.⁹ Muller-Fahrenheit understands reconciliation to be a process that commences with God. Forgiveness is the human part of this process; it is essentially about human relationships between victim and perpetrator. Forgiveness prioritizes human responsibility for action and highlights our accountability for inaction. This same understanding lies at the heart of Schriver's text, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*. Schriver argues convincingly from the New Testament that Jesus expected people to learn in community the art of forgiving (pp.35, 38ff). Indeed the amount of forgiveness we receive from God is determined by the amount that we are prepared to forgive others (cf. Matthew 6:14-15).

Both Muller-Fahrenheit and Schriver recognise the social and structural reality of sin. They explore forgiveness in the attempt to force us as persons, communities and nations to recognise the radical change that is required in responding to the offer of forgiveness. We don't just 'forgive and forget', but rather we forgive through our need to remember what has

⁹David W. Augsburger in his exceptional book, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* [1992], follows the same pattern. Unlike most writers' in his field, Augsburger recognises that reconciliation is about transforming relationships. He observantly points out that in the New Testament one of the most frequently used words for forgiveness is *charidzomai*, meaning an act of grace (p.284). Nevertheless, the rest of his discussion centered on the expectation in the New Testament that people were expected to forgive. Yes, there is grace that allows this to happen, but 'let's get on with forgiving' seems to be the argument.

Psychologists' contribution to reconciliation

Psychologists have much to offer to the discussion on reconciliation. A particular strength of the psychological literature is the way it highlights the role of memory and narrativity to help promote healing in the person.¹⁰ It reminds us that remembering is a difficult, yet necessary component of reconciliation.¹¹ Many victims of severe abuse undergo years of treatment in order to bring back their memories of abuse which have been damagingly repressed for years. There appears to be something deeply therapeutic and cathartic about remembering, and telling others about these memories. In the telling and retelling, we become able to integrate that part of our story into our (new) life. We become enlivened in the process.

For offenders, the difficulty in telling the truth is the sense of shame and guilt they feel about their part in the victims' story. Remembering the truth makes them accountable for their past behavior. They concede that they are responsible. Remembering challenges the sham of so-called ignorance. Child sex abusers have in instances claimed that they were not aware that the children were being damaged. Remembering means being open to the possibility of conversion, that is, radical change based on respect for the others' story and life. Unless offenders publicly remember, and make apology for their mistakes, there can be no foundation from which to build on.

A major weakness of some of the psychological literature is that it overly reduces forgiveness to the individual psychological narrative. Many psychologists fail to connect the individual with the wider social environment. One example of this is Meninger's, *The Process of Forgiveness*. Meninger's context is like most of psychological literature, that of individual persons trying to come to terms with past pains

¹⁰This insight is one that would need to be included in any 'strategy of reconciliation'.

¹¹Storytelling depends on memory. It is the memory that needs to be integrated into the person's new story.

through psychotherapy. He does not connect the person's narrative with the death-dealing forces that daily and historically oppress them. There is no mention of the need for perpetrators to be brought to account (cf. pp.19-21). This is implicit in his advice to the victim:

Forgiveness means that you no longer blame someone else for the course your life takes. You alone are responsible. How much easier it is to have an evil perpetrator to blame for everything that goes wrong. (p.29)

These words do not appear to make much sense of persons who have been systematically oppressed and victimized over a life-time — even generations. How do victims, like many Australian Aborigines, feel about such thinking? Until recently, my position has been very close to Meninger's. I worked in and supported a church alcohol treatment program for Aborigines which gave little attention to the racist and oppressive forces on their lives. 'Recovery' focused on helping individual members within the family system. The family's socio-political context was rarely considered important to treatment. I now believe that lack of awareness and attention to social causes of oppression and trauma serve to oppress — and perhaps even further traumatize — victims.

Two outstanding western psychologists who understand the wider socio-political nature of victim recovery work are Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* [1992] and N Duncan Sinclair, *Horrorific Traumata: A Pastoral Response to the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* [1993]. Herman convincingly argues that 'the study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise.' Why is it political? She answers: '[B]ecause it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people' (Afterword to 1997 printing, p.237). The individual can only be treated within the context of the broader social reality. Indeed, much of the recovery of the person may be tied up in becoming politically empowered to struggle for lasting social change. She notes that amongst many of her clients, recovering their full humanity occurs through

seeking justice and reparation. There is no sense of just forgiving and forgetting, but rather forgiving, remembering and being sustained by the experience of connecting with others to make structural change possible.

Sinclair views the person within the broader social framework of history. The person is not an isolate, but rather, deeply connected with the social policies of the time. He points out that the processes of recovery for a wounded individual are just the same for a nation. In her 'Afterword' to the 1997 printing of *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman makes the same point (cf. pp.241ff).

Reconciliation — A Critical Review

Three main points of dispute arise in the reconciliation literature. These center on: the relationship between liberation and reconciliation; the nature of the reconciliation process itself, is it the responsibility of God or the person; and lastly, who are the rightful subjects or priorities of reconciliation — victim, perpetrator, or bystander?

The relationship between reconciliation and liberation

Schreiter's claim: 'No reconciliation without liberation' is a noble one. It raises up the voices of the poor and oppressed in a global culture that so easily silences them. Schreiter's writings remind us that liberation must never be off the agenda of society and particularly our churches. Schreiter's position is a healthy reaction to those conservative voices who wish to spiritualise and sanitise reconciliation by ignoring the wider social framework of reconciliation.

I do not agree that reconciliation is in conflict with liberation. Nor do I accept that liberation is a prerequisite of reconciliation. I believe that the movement of reconciliation is tasted by the victim before liberation occurs. Through experiencing a small part of the unfathomable mystery of reconciliation the person recognises that their experience is sacred. In turn, they realise that the experience of those who

came before them (ancestors) and those who come after them (future generations) are equally important. It is this that stirs them to seek a sustained expression of liberation. This expression of liberation, can only be defined by the victims who have already experienced some of the reconciling nature of God. This is why reconciliation will look and feel different from what they felt it would be. As such, reconciliation is greater and more demanding than justice. It both includes justice, yet goes beyond it. And in some circumstances, where justice can never happen (we can't bring back the dead), it makes sense and meaning (and hope) out of terrible madness and alienation. Reconciliation embraces the call for justice, however, in the mysterious way of the cross, makes renewed (creative) meaning out of seeming tragedy so as to create even greater hope that goodness will indeed win out over evil.

Reconciliation — God's responsibility or the persons' responsibility?

Does reconciliation properly commence with the perpetrator's apology (cf. Tavuchis), or is it already at work in God's healing love of the victim? (Schreiter). The literature is split on whether reconciliation is primarily a God-driven process or a human oriented responsibility. The latter group divides into two categories. One being those who advocate a conflict management approach; they see forgiveness as something that people can learn, practice, and master. The other group offers the Christian injunction to 'forgive and forget'. Schreiter reacts to both of these by emphasizing that reconciliation is the work of God.¹² He retorts that reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy. A number of writers remind us that the Christian injunction to 'forgive and forget', 'to become reconcilers', this has no credibility — especially when it comes from the mouths of those in power. Perpetrators and bystanders have no grounds to call on victims

¹²Schreiter admitted as much in a phone call conversation with him on 1st August, 1997.

to forgive. Forgiveness is the one domain that cannot be forced on victims.

My sense is that reconciliation is not the responsibility of God alone. The person must respond to the gift; the gift is only realized when the person participates in it. The person is the active subject of God's grace: the person has the freedom to reject or accept this offer. Like the Reign of God, we could say that reconciliation is here, but not yet.

Schreiter's next book on reconciliation is apparently going to nuance his present published position on a number of areas.¹³ One of these is to highlight the way reconciliation is both a spirituality and a strategy. If strategy includes human participation then I am in agreement. If strategy only involves discussion on God's cosmic plan then I disagree as it will have missed the aforementioned need for the person to participate with God in the reconciliation process. Talk about strategy must be on guard against any thinking that the person controls the process. The person discovers God's reconciling grace in his/her own time. Nevertheless, Christians as ministers of reconciliation are called to promote the possibility of reconciliation. We can do this through creating safe places and times in the community for truth-telling, so that trust may be re-established between persons.

Who are the main subjects of reconciliation? Victims, perpetrators, or bystanders?

Lastly, who are the rightful subjects of reconciliation? Many of the writers concentrate on the role of the victim or the perpetrator. Some recognise that persons can fall into both groups. Many writers give no attention to the role of the bystander, that vast majority who feel they have no connection with wrongs committed against others. The bystander usually claims ignorance. For David Bosch (1986:169) this claim is nonsense. He puts it simply; 'ignorance is not innocence',

¹³Personal communication with Schreiter, 1st August, 1997.

rather, '[i]t is the worst form of guilt.' For nations, like Australia, the biggest challenge for the reconciliation process is engaging the bystanders to see their connection to the historical pattern of abuse which Aborigines have suffered.

Some argue that reconciliation begins with the victim; others have claimed that it starts with the apology by the perpetrator. I do not think reconciliation begins with a category of person, rather it begins with a quality. This God-given quality necessary for reconciliation may be human vulnerability. Vulnerability is a challenge for all persons — rich and poor alike; victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. It is only through vulnerability that the person can fully experience the reconciling love of God. This overwhelming experience of love confronts the person with having to honour themselves, others, and all of creation. They realise that their life has to change and very often see the 'utter rubbish' of life around them (Paul). This experience of love is transformational. When people experience this love they feel obliged to tell others about it. They want others to experience it too. Some will try to promote their newly acquired vision of transforming love through the public arena. Others will do this more privately.¹⁴ Since reconciliation begins with the person who has accepted his/her condition of vulnerability, only that person can sense what reconciliation and justice may feel and look like for them. And even then, it almost certainly will surprise them. I believe Nelson Mandela captures this in the following reflection on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He ponders:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will help uncover the truth. But afterwards many of the perpetrators may be granted amnesty. Intellectually and politically one understands why this is necessary. *But deep in your heart, and when you are alone with your memories, this is no easy matter.* (Italics added. Cited in Worsnip, 1997:3)

¹⁴Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous capture this. AA realizes that a person's recovery is intimately connected with publicly remembering one's story and privately helping others.

This same mystery is evident in self-help groups for family members of murder victims who advocate forgiveness for the one who murdered their loved one. Where does this forgiveness come from? *I suggest that it may come from the movement of the Spirit in the person's condition of vulnerability. When the person is able to acknowledge and honor their brokenness the power of God mysteriously wells up in the person.* The poor appear to be better positioned to admit their human brokenness than those who in the eyes of the world appear 'non-broken'. The poor's life experience has made them more accustomed to brokenness. The non-poor, on the other hand get used to their experience of power, wealth, even privilege. They have more resources than the poor to place their security in. As such, they appear to have greater difficulty in sustaining a level of vulnerability in their life as the temptation is always to take back the power and security.

Reconciliation — Where have we come from? Where are we going?

One of the distinctive features of the above review is the degree of polarity that is present in the discussion. There is at times a sense of hostility towards each other's position. Some argue that only reconciliation is required, not liberation. Others reply that liberation is a prerequisite for reconciliation. Some suggests that we should drop the term reconciliation altogether as it only emphasizes the work of God and ignores the incarnational responsibility of the person to change unjust structures. These prefer the term forgiveness, as forgiveness highlights the horizontal or human dimension of reconciliation — this is referred to as 'costly forgiveness'. Others agree we should drop the term reconciliation for an opposite reason, namely to emphasise the so-called Christian injunction to forgive (and forget) — this attitude is referred to by some as 'cheap forgiveness'.

This mixed understanding of reconciliation does not appear to be new to Christianity. Cilliers Breytenbach (1986) surveyed the different ways theologians over the centuries have understood reconciliation. He advises us that there never has been 'such [a] thing as the Christian doctrine of reconciliation' (p.12). Why not? Breytenbach suggests that context determined the manner in which theologians looked at reconciliation. The theologians' circumstances, worldview, and — not surprisingly — the type and degree of opposition they were contending with, all contributed to the way they thought about it (p.13). Times have not changed much!

Need for a Trinitarian understanding of reconciliation

The contextual question has always been an important one. And, there is no doubt that it has emerged as perhaps the dominant issue in our post-modern, so-called post-colonial era. It is my suspicion, nevertheless, that there lies another theological factor at work in the confused and often antagonistic talk about reconciliation — namely, an inadequate Trinitarian understanding of reconciliation.

As I understand it, the Christian reconciliation literature presently falls into two camps; those who emphasise the role of God (vertical) and those who emphasise the role of the person (horizontal). *The role of the Holy Spirit often escapes mention*. It is my suspicion that the pneumatological absence indicates a lack of attention to the Trinitarian nature of reconciliation: The absence of the Holy Spirit may be a significant reason for this polarisation of views. To put it simply, reducing reconciliation to either the work of God or the responsibility of humankind ignores the Trinitarian reality. This creates overly vertical (God domain) or horizontal (incarnational domain) distortions and, as such, misses the relational, conversational nature of the Trinity.

It seems that many have overlooked what the giant theologian, Karl Barth, laid down in exquisite fashion in his

Church Dogmatics. Barth (1962:760) felt just as the Holy Spirit is 'the bond of peace' between the Father and the Son, 'so in the historical work of reconciliation [the Spirit] is the One who constitutes and guarantees the unity of the *totus Christus*, i.e., of Jesus Christ in the heights and in the depths, in His transcendence and in His immanence.' We need to quote Barth (pp.760-1) at length:

This co-ordination and unity is the work of the active grace of God ... The work of the Holy Spirit, however, is to bring and to hold together that which is different and therefore, as it would seem, necessarily and irresistibly disruptive in the relationship of Jesus Christ to His community, namely, the divine working, being and action on the one side and the human on the other, the creative freedom and act on the one side and the creaturely on the other, the eternal reality and possibility on the one side and the temporal on the other. His work is to bring and to hold them together, not to identify, intermingle nor confound them, not to change the one into the other nor to merge the one into the other, but to co-ordinate them, to make them parallel, to bring them into harmony and therefore bind them into a true unity.

A Trinitarian theological model of reconciliation must draw to attention the crucial co-ordinating role of the Spirit; the actions of the Spirit serve to emphasise the relational feature of our Trinitarian faith. When we understand this reality we can better recognise the person being a subject who participates with God the Creator, through the agency of the Spirit (Acts 15:28). Theological discourse on reconciliation must recognise these relational, accompanying, conversational, qualities of the Trinity. A Trinitarian understanding of reconciliation, as such, would remind us that reconciliation is not God's work alone, nor is it only the domain of persons — it is all of these, and more.

Trinitarian theology reminds us that God honors the person by calling the person to work with God as partner, servant — and yes, even as — friend. Non-Trinitarian thinking results in the polarized 'either/or' categories I have noted above. It misses the mysterious interplay of the Trinitarian God. *The mystery of reconciliation is perhaps the marvelous vulnerability of God as Trinity.* We are called to

enter into this. In so doing, the power of the Holy Spirit is able to lead us in ways of being that are new, surprising, always enlivening. We never know what reconciliation is going to look or feel like. The reconciling nature of the blood of the cross of Christ is our model, however, this only makes sense in the context of a Trinitarian reality.

If we accept that reconciliation is the emerging model of mission, then discovering the Trinitarian foundation of reconciliation is perhaps one of the most urgent tasks of the contemporary theological project.

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Secdesk, continued from p.40

Roebourne (Sr Olive Mangan) and other exciting venues, previously only enticing names to me, eventually landing at inland Tardun for another break with Frs Ray Hevern and Gerhard Christoph (who worked on the *Worms* re-translation). Then on to beautiful Perth and Langford for a weekend of much needed rest and 'spoiling' by our hosts, Fr Harry Morrissey and Br Finbar O'Sullivan. Crossing the Nullarbor was not as colourful as I had expected, but the view from the dangerous clifftops at the head of the Bight was thrilling and terrifying. Then back to Port Augusta for another night; on to Adelaide to drop in on my cousin Fr Michael Fallon, and Fr Chris McPhee, then 'across the rolling plains' to reach home after six weeks and one day of perfect

weather. We had only one shower of rain during the whole trek, somewhere on the WA coast road when I was driving, and we met a long convoy of army trucks, all at the same time! So, business completed, we have settled back into work with memories of a fantastic trip and outstanding hospitality. Our thanks truly go to you all who helped us, and made that journey one of a lifetime for us.

Just before going to press, *Nelen Yubu's* editor Martin Wilson was unfortunate enough to suffer a heart attack. After release from Prince of Wales Hospital he is on light duties, awaiting further developments. With prayer, we hope he will make a good recovery.

We wish all our subscribers a holy and happy Christmas, 1997.

Secretary Keren

Helping the Learning Process in an Aboriginal School: a Principal's Perspective

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann

THIS paper will first describe the character of our school and its environment; secondly it will present a brief summary of the background and current experience of its Principal, and thirdly, will outline a case study of a particular problem learner. Contemporary literature will be consulted to discover the learner's situation more accurately and to identify a workable development strategy. The object of the exercise is to provide better help for the learner who needs it, at the same time developing some assessment of the principal's capacity to place her role at the service of those who depend on it.

The school and its environment

St. Francis Xavier's School was established by Religious Sisters forty years ago and still benefits from their advice and example. It is situated by the Daly River, 240 km south of Darwin and 70 km from the Timor Sea. It is classified as a remote area. The road is reasonably good but we can be cut off for days or even weeks if the 'big wet' in a given year is really big. Mail reaches us twice a week by plane. We receive two TV channels. Housing and local government services are good.

Our school infrastructure is well established and there are generous grounds and facilities. Placed virtually in the centre of the settlement, the school is the primary meeting place for the community. Parents and visitors gravitate to it constantly. Many come to discuss matters only vaguely related with formal education. The school and its teachers are a genuine community resource. We have a secondary as well as primary section, and

on another site, an adult education unit. A particular family may have a student in all three.

For students and teachers the settlement is simply part of the wider environment with its river, billabongs, and bush; with their inhabitants, the birds, the fish, and the animals. In a real sense our school has no walls, as nature is a constant part of our mental landscape, a vitally important part of learning. Our dreamings, our art and our song spring from these sources. Our children have started 'school' long before they set foot in the school room.

Engaging as our environment truly is, as Principal my perspective must range farther. To ensure that maximum resources and helping skills reach this learning community there is need for an eagle's view, an ability to scan the horizon, taking in those broad and general issues of education most likely to be dealt with in Darwin or Canberra. Contacts with education offices both Territory and Catholic, higher education institutes, and Aboriginal school networks are essential for our well being. Occasionally, it is necessary to go beyond the horizon with the courage and vision of the albatross, to go overseas if necessary in search of ideas (happily possible these days through the computerised literature search).

Notwithstanding the attraction of new places and new people my primary focus remains the learning nest where student and teacher interact, the place Rankin (1978) designates as the heart of the educational system. Nonetheless, the tension between wanting to be at my school and needing to be somewhere else remains. Should I be in Darwin, or Daly River today or this week? If needs be, Darwin it is. On occasions it can work the other way. Distant places can be a temptation to escape from the problems of every day. The tension is challenging but creative as long as the guiding principle is the wellbeing of the teachers and learners of this school. All energy is productive on this basis irrespective of where it is expended.

Principal's background

Some biographical notes are necessary to understand my perspective. My language is Ngangiwumirri and my homeland is Malfiyin, 100km from Daly River. My primary schooling took place at St. Francis Xavier. My first experience of secondary education occurred in our adult education setting, its principal focus being art. Teacher training was followed by appointments in Darwin and inner city Melbourne which provided insights into the struggle migrants were having with English as a second language.

On my return to the Territory a considerable involvement developed with local government. This resulted in my becoming president of the local council for six years. While this commitment remained secondary to my career as teacher it enabled me to work for the general advancement of our people. In turn this improved the capacity of our children to benefit from educational opportunity.

Currently my home is situated about 400 metres from the school. Children from the school frequently walk to or from school with me. Their families and background are very well known to me.

My Aboriginal experience has gifted me with a deep knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture, while my familiarity with English has been considerably advanced by my marriage to a European.

Awareness of the differences between Aboriginal and European landscapes makes me very sensitive to the difficulties Aboriginal children face as they enter a European school system. In a very real way their situation is more difficult than those of most migrant children, especially those with European backgrounds who are already familiar with the alphabet and aware of a family tradition which places great value upon being at school and working hard to succeed.

It is a matter of fact that the existing system was developed by Europeans for European children and while it might not always suit them, it suits Aboriginal children even less! It should not be surprising then that most Aboriginal children experience learning difficulties, some more than others. Let me introduce you to one of them.

The Situation of Livia Wulviyarra (LW)

LW is an eight year old girl whose problems with reading and speaking English are of serious concern. A word test involving fairly basic words like 'he, me, you, with, and' was presented to her in August this year. She was only able to identify seven out of fifteen. In another test inviting her to identify fairly straightforward objects such as bell, tent, fish and duck, she was able to identify eight out of twelve but could only spell two i.e. sun and dog.

She is a natural athlete, a good swimmer and netballer. After a recent interschool sports she was asked five questions which drew the following responses:

Did you like sports day?	No reply.
Who came to play?	She named the three visiting schools correctly.
Did you play?	Nodded.
What game did you play?	Netball.
Did you win?	Nodded.

Diffidence in her use of English is fairly obvious. Four of the five questions elicited one word in total. In contrast to this her mathematical ability is better than average. Her general attitude in class is attentive and she seems to try hard to improve her English ability but with scant success. Her spoken English is Aboriginal variety, a kind of Creole that is favoured in the general community; Though not encouraged at school it holds sway here too. LW uses some Ngangikurringa language words such as *damuy* (eyes), *deme* (hands), and *mamuka* (goodbye). She is generally happy at school, kind to her peers and popular. At

the end of the school day she seeks a quiet area in the school office rather than go immediately home.

LW's qualified Aboriginal teacher is well aware of her needs and gives her help with reading and story writing, while the special education teacher spends time in her class each week and in addition gives her some personal time.

Her situation raises questions which need answers for all responsible for helping her, particularly the principal who remains ultimately responsible for the learning outcomes of all students. From my reading of Egan (1994), the three key questions seem to be these: Has her learning situation been accurately and fully defined? Are there unused resources that can be called upon? Are there new opportunities to be identified with potential to improve her learning program?

Insights from the literature relative to LW's case.

The literature speaks in three voices. The first speaks directly to me in my role as principal. The second speaks of aspects of LW's case that would be relevant to any eight year old girl irrespective of racial origin. The third speaks to or about her Aboriginality.

To obtain maximum help for LW there must be someone who is able to comprehend the immediate (the school), the intermediate (Aboriginal school networks) and the more remote environments (departments of education) and has the capacity and credibility to move from one to the other. By definition this must be the principal as the person authorised to direct the school, represent it in other forums, and legitimately claim the attention of those who allocate resources. Wolfendale (1992) describes this as having access to communication links, the hierarchies, and the organisation of the wider system. Obtaining and retaining a special education teacher in a school is a case in point. Such people are a scarce resource. A strong claim has to be made to succeed in the face of other claimants. We need a

special education teacher. We have one. LW's chances for development would be diminished were this not so.

The principal must also be team leader in any move to provide a comprehensive effort to help a particular learner. Building and maintaining such a team demands the principal's continuous concern. Stainback and Stainback (1990) describe the role as multi-faceted, requiring support from teachers, encouragement for families, the recruitment of specialists and the gathering of necessary material resources. The effectiveness of all this in the end is tested by what it achieves for LW. The principal must be the reference person. No one else in appropriately placed to do so.

Some observations from the literature are relevant to any eight year old with learning difficulties. Hayes (1994) insists that close attention should be paid to the individuality of the child and the particularity of the family. The virtual absence of LW's father is a negative factor, removing as it does a potential adult helper able to share in the decisions affecting her development. It also places a heavy domestic burden upon her mother who has four children under ten years of age to cope with, scarcely leaving much space for story telling. There are no books in the home. Nor can the voices from two TV channels be counted as much of a learning asset. For practical purposes LW's is a sole parent family. Wider community resources must therefore be sought from her extended family or neighbourhood network. The priest in the settlement is a "father figure" to whom many of the children respond. His interest in her progress can be a confidence-builder for her.

LW's place on the family map is a further compelling reason why her development is critical. As eldest of four children her influence upon the younger three could be considerable. The Matthew effect described by Stanovich (1986) seems applicable. For good or ill the situation can improve or get worse, not just for LW. Both her siblings and the school may eventually be

richer or poorer depending upon whether her reading and writing skills improve or not.

The third voice from the literature (and the most telling in my view) speaks to LW's Aboriginality. There is clear support for examining closely the cultural identity of the learner. Heward and Orlansky (1992) assert that those most effective in helping exceptional children are sensitive to the student's heritage and values. While this is evidently sensible, it has not always been the case for either migrants or Aborigines in Australia. Arnold (1985) is more specific in noting what he terms "socio-linguistic interference" which occurs when the same words or same gesture carry two quite different messages. In such a situation teaching can be well meant but unproductive or even counterproductive. Awareness and knowledge of a culture is even more necessary than sensitivity. In these respects LW is well served. We are presenting her with an innovation whereby our classes are defined by language groups, not by age or ability. By doing so we emphasise the primary influence of culture. This arrangement provides a setting with which the children, their teachers and their elders affiliate. It reinforces identity, instils confidence, and taps into community resources. Constant effort is made within these groups to accurately reflect Aboriginal culture thus enabling the educational process.

Two years ago our school had one Aboriginal teacher out of nine. Now we have six. This development not only enabled the setting up of language group classes, it also helps to illustrate further the influence of the principal's role in putting into place the conditions most likely to help the learning process. Having a majority of qualified Aboriginal teachers represents the achievement of a long term goal.

There are other advantages for LW stemming from her language group membership. In it both children and teacher are one in realising the eloquence of non-verbal communication, what Rankin (1978) calls the "language without words". Silence gestures, facial expression, body posture and movement are

central to Aboriginal communication with Aboriginal staff. LW is assured that these will be interpreted correctly. Perhaps more influential still is the reality that her teacher has experienced the pressures of thinking in one language and being taught in another. Aboriginal teachers in a European system belong to that category identified by Ferber (1983) as 'wounded healers'. Teachers remain very sensitive to situations that they have themselves lived through.

An initial strategy for better learning for LW.

While all of the above observations have meaning for LW's situation the most practical step is suggested by Builder (1991). She observes that children having problems with reading and writing also experience difficulties in their approach to learning. They seem to lack confidence, have poor memory, poor attention span, low concentration skills and perhaps behavioural problems. She classifies these as symptoms that reveal poor self esteem and subsequent lack of confidence. Unless the symptoms are removed, self esteem will remain low and skill levels will not advance. The challenge for the educator, she believes, is the management of a change which will really involve the learner. To do this the learner must have some prospect of success. With the experience of success, confidence grows and the energy arises to take a further step forward. In LW's case the strategy for change lies therefore in focussing upon her strengths — her above average abilities in mathematics and her sporting prowess. Constructing reading and writing exercises around these themes have more likelihood of tapping into sources of confidence. In turn these have the power to involve her, giving her a further taste of success. A positive strategy could change her learning experience and its outcome.

Such an approach must be tolerant of error. It does not assume that readers do not make mistakes, that they know all the words or do not guess sometimes. It values the attempt to try even if success does not always result. As Elkin (1990)

observes, one learns to ride a bike gradually. Falling off is part of the process of learning. Fear of failing and likely ridicule inhibits learning. LW must be able to feel that she has the hope of success in the tasks set and be assured that occasional failure is an accepted part of the learning process.

Final Comment

A principal must accept the tension which occurs between having immediate and remote environments with responsibilities in both. The unifying element is the educational objective at their core — helping the learner to become a competent and confident citizen. In an Aboriginal context the cultural dimension makes the task more complex and there is more at stake as indigenous children and teachers adapt to a model designed for a different culture. As this is the culture which has shaped recent Australian society, it is the one Aboriginal students must learn about and function in.

The LW's of this world will not succeed in doing so, however, without being secure about their own cultural identity. That is why comments about a possible learning program for LW have used her Aboriginality as a reference point. Ongoing effort will be required to achieve this. Further adaptations will need to be made and other helpers sought at particular stages. This is the nature of the consultative process. It has been described attractively as the celebration of the collective wisdom of children and adults (Thousand et al., 1992). It does not assume agreement amongst all participants but their willingness to hear each other, respecting differences in the interests of a creative solution for the individual learner.

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Book Notice

ANTHONY REX PEILE SAC, *Body and Soul: an Aboriginal view*. Edited by Peter Bindon. Hesperian Press, 1997. 308 pages plus xxvi. Hardcover. ISBN 0 85905 233 8.

Available from Hesperian Press, PO Box 317, Victoria Park, WA 6979, and from The Pallottines in Australia, (Rev. Fr M McMahon sac), 45 Ionic Street, Shelley WA 6148, Tel. (09) 354 4061. Price \$50.00

Anthony Peile was born 1931 in East Malvern, Victoria. He joined the Pallottines in 1949 and was ordained in 1956. In 1959 he was posted to the Kimberley, where he spent the rest of his life. He died in 1989. His last 28 years were spent in the Balgo mission, among the Kukatja people. The book, produced posthumously, contains the essence of his linguistic work in ethno-medicine: to display the wealth of medical knowledge held by the people, which deliverers of health services would do well to keep in mind.

—MJW

Meditation, Aboriginal Style?

An exploration, Part 2

Dan O'Donovan

Paul the apostle was haunted by the wonder of *totality*, the totality revealed to him, which he had not fully realised before. This keeps surfacing, breaking out, one might say, through all his letters, but most notably in Ephesians and Colossians, both of which are Pauline, even if not authored firsthand by Paul. The 'fullness of God', 'the fullness of Christ', 'the fullness of the Church', the fullness of the cosmic and metacosmic mystery. 'Fullness' does not even quite catch all the richly shaded colour of the word he wrote and spoke, which was *pleroma*.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner person, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians, 3, 14-19)

Now, if we are to be filled with all the fullness of God, the fullness of God must be our fullness too.

In grasping this truth experientially, (feeling it), and allowing their life's course to flow out of the experienced understanding, traditional Aborigines stand in a privileged position. They were very much people of the totality; and still, in their deeper inherited nature, are.

In his theological writings, the Reverend Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra promotes what he calls holism, the holistic vision,

which is a good modern equivalent of totality, conveying the same sense.

In a precious article on the spiritualities of the many Aboriginal peoples of the world, Jesuit ethnologist and historian of religions, Joseph Goetz, has spoken of their characteristic 'spirituality of integration'. A most important subject in our fragmenting world today, challenging the Aborigine to witness without fear to what he or she knows.

We are not saying, of course, that the pre-Christian totality denotes the same thing as Paul's *pleroma*. 'It is in him, (Jesus Christ), that all things hold together' (Colossians, 1, 17). Simply that, provisionally, it was for the Aboriginal initiate — and already, genetically, for the not-yet-initiated — All that there is: the Totum, the whole of undivided reality; and he or she found their only rest and sanity in it. The real was the Sacred. The Sacred was the Whole. The Whole was *Life*. It was Dreaming and Law.

But now, let us resume where we left off in the previous article.

A. *Body posture*

First, choose a good time of the day, and find a quiet place, where you are alone. In a group it is even better. You feel the strength of one another's faith and company. But in that case the group needs to be alone. Natural pleasant surroundings are fine. The mind easily grows restful when it is surrounded by nature, as Miriam-Rose has so well demonstrated. It is better if there is not much light.

Now, sit yourself down comfortably, but not carelessly, on the ground. The cross-legged position is generally recognised as the best. It gives a feeling of balance, of being firmly seated. This has a stabilising effect on your mind, full of many distractions.

Over the years, I have envied Aboriginal people their suppleness of limb. This is a natural gift. They are, as it were,

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made for contemplation. As I studied, in Hesychasm, in Yoga and in Zen how to arrange your body for the various sitting postures, I started to notice that many Aboriginal people, in bush community situations or in town, sit that way without the slightest difficulty. It is the way of sitting which makes them feel most at home.

That is exactly the ideal. One sits, in preparation for prayer — or trains oneself to do so if one has fallen into careless sitting habits — in the way which makes one feel most at home. If a cushion helps, use a cushion. If you are unable to sit cross-legged, you can do this exercise in a chair. In this case, the chair should be firm, leading you to keep your back straight. Not a cosy armchair. Your bare feet should be flat on the ground.

(There are refinements of this cross legged sitting-posture, proven by long testing to work better. These you may attend to later on, if you wish; but in general this plain cross-legged sitting is already good. It is a calming position.)

Allow your hands to rest on your lap. As you sit there, with your legs crossed comfortably, *straighten your back.* (This one item is considered important by most who have worked on prayer-techniques.) And *lift up your head.* Your body now is firm as a straight pole. The current of life, even soul-life, moves freely up and down the spine reaching your brain and giving you a sensation of full strength, of expansion.

B. Breathing

Next, quiet and relaxed, become aware of your breathing. Simply that. Breathe in and out evenly, freely, easily. More slowly and deeply, if that is comfortable; and using your nostrils rather than your mouth. (Again, there are refinements of this exercise, but basically that is enough.)

C. Awareness

People are talking a lot these days, about social awareness: being aware of, or awake to, the social conditions under which

we live, so that perhaps we may be able to do something to improve them. If not alone, then maybe along with others.

Well, the personal awareness which comes out of the meditation exercises we are talking about is a first, and continuing, stage in the direction of the wider social awareness. So, to be more fully aware of yourself and your immediate surroundings, the following techniques will be helpful:

Sitting up, with your back straight, focus your eyes on something on the ground about one metre (three feet) straight in front of you. This is better than closing your eyes. Your eyes are now settled, but without strain. Keep them that way in what follows.

You are ready to become more aware of your body, its different parts. Feet, hands, middle, head. Just be aware of the feeling in them. Spend a while at this.

Become aware again, more particularly, of your breathing. The inflow of your breath; the outflow. For a while. This helps you let go of all those useless thoughts, and rest your mind. Also there is a sort of pleasure in feeling your body breathe, when you attend to it.

Now, become aware of your heart which, in the biblical understanding which is ours, is the centre of your person. Your heart is you. Feel it beating. Listen to it. And try saying quietly the holy name, JE-SUS. (It means: God saves; makes healthy, whole.) You needn't hear yourself saying it. Just shape the word with your tongue. Or, 'say' it in your heart. If you like, you can say the first part of it, with your breathing in, and the second, -SUS, with your breathing out. Do this for a while. Slowly. Your attention and awareness are centred in your heart as you do so.

Notice that we are passing over, at this stage, from numbers 1 and 2 of the four steps mentioned at the end of the first article in this series (*Nelen Yubu* No.66 p.25), to numbers 3 and 4: from the quiet prayer of simple awareness to that prayer of the

heart which cannot happen without the action of God's grace joining itself with us.

Because, prayer is always and necessarily a gift: God's gift of himself to us, our gift of ourself to God. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us something about this most mysterious thing. 'The Spirit helps us in our weakness,' he says. 'For, we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspeakable groanings.' That is, the divine Spirit, living in us, pleads for us, or acts as medium between God and us, through the Son, to the Father. In another place, it is again explained: through Jesus, 'we have access in one Spirit to the Father.' (Ephesians, 2, 18)

Another, last move in our meditation-technique is this: the Name, JESUS, is resting in your heart. By 'Name' we mean the entire reality of Jesus, which we find to be 'like oil poured out', a healing ointment (Song of Songs, 1, 3). Now bring your mind right down into your heart to rest there too. This may sound strange. It is indeed strange, but true, and very useful. Try it. But it must be done in peace, and without strain. Push the mind down, gently, along the way of your breathing. You will find the mind likes to be at rest in your heart. It is as though the heart were where it belongs.

With the head thus left emptied of mind, be to the mind resting in your heart like a mother watching over her sleeping baby, brushing away the flies (thoughts, images) from its face. It is a loving, motherly service. I have seen Aboriginal mothers do this for their babies.

You have passed now into the fourth stage mentioned earlier: that of complete silence of word and thought. This is the end of our meditation exercise. Stay there as long as you will.

If you practise this prayer-technique each day, a half-hour in the morning and again in the evening, and keep at it, trusting in its benefit, you will find before long that you can quickly and easily empty your mind of thoughts. As is the case with most

things, the more you practise, the quicker you become good at it. It is then that you will begin to have intimate, unspoken understandings, which are the work at once of nature and grace. Understandings of yourself, of other people, of human situations. You will see everything more clearly and more deeply: body and soul one. Yourself one with the natural world around you.

One also with other people? Sometimes, in the deeper sense only. At the practical level, your meditation-awareness will have awakened you to your not-oneness with certain misguided thought-patterns and actions of others. This consciousness will further enlighten, stimulate and energise you as you oppose them, enabling you to do so without losing your own peace; indeed, greatly maturing your love.

The fact is that the personal awareness you have been cultivating, as well as introducing you to many forms of pleasure and satisfaction, must expose you also, more consciously, vividly, rawly, to pain. Your new inner 'muscle' which is the divine Spirit and your own freedom, will make it possible now for you to handle this. In turn, and in your way, you will save.

This article is only a general outline. In the next, we will consider the most significant Bible readings which have a bearing on our subject. Out of them, in fact, our marvellously rich Christian mystical tradition has 'lived and grown like a plant of the field.' (Read Ezekiel, 16, 7)

From the Secretary's Desk...

Time is short for this issue, so I shall just make mention of the fact that *Nelen Yubu* took a nostalgic trip in July-August this year back to its old stamping grounds, as well as to break new ground. Needless to say, every moment of it was relished, and we owe thanks to such a lot of people, who made us welcome. It was a 'business trip' for our Editor, who needed a co-driver so I went along too, and it was made so much more enjoyable because Fr Tony Caruana (St Paul's Seminary) loaned us a Holden Acclaim for the 15,134 km journey. Crossing the western plains of NSW was sheer delight, before we headed through Broken Hill to Port Augusta to be welcomed by Fr Ray Brain CP. Next day found us on The Track, pushing up past Uluru (the day it snowed), after which we reached Alice Springs to spend a pleasant weekend with Fr Brian Healy, plus a flying visit to Santa Teresa to see Fr Bernard Lahn. We were really in the Red Centre now, complete with saltbush and spinifex as we headed for Katherine and the Douglas Hot Springs. At Darwin we landed at the Ranch, thanks to Fr Bob Mitchell, and met Brs George Cusack, Ken Gallagher and Ed Bennett, also Fr Frank Flynn. I had arranged to stay with Helen Drummond who had been a lay missionary with me at Daly River, and in whose lovely home at Leanyer I now met her brother Ivan and her parents from Melbourne; Helen and I certainly relived old times. Bathurst and Melville Islands lying in their sparkling seas were next, to stay with

Fr Leo Wearden and Br John Pye. One thing that must be highlighted is that we even caught a decent-sized barra in one of the creeks of Bathurst Is! Sr Barbara AD kindly drove down from Pularumpi and took us back there for a day, a most enjoyable outing. After that it was back to Daly River, an old haunt of ours, where we spent about a week the guests of Brs Ted Merritt and Garnet Groves, and capped it all with dinner at the OLSH convent, thanks to the FDNSC Sisters St Anne, Marie, Therese-Marie, Christopher, and SGS Sr Val Deakin. A day's run out to Peppimenarti — and our stay in the NT was over. Continuing on across the top of the continent through Kununurra, Turkey Creek (Srs Anne Boland, and Pat Sealy, Brs Nick Billick and Terry Kingston), we pulled up at Halls Creek to stay with Sr Sarah Hogan for the night after a long journey in the dark. Fitzroy Crossing, and so to Broome. As a lay missionary, I had been stationed at Kalumburu, but had never been to Broome, via those massive red cliffs and strange red soil ridges crossing the top country. Indeed the stopovers were most welcome. In Broome we were driven all over the town by Fr Kevin McKelson sac who took us under his wing and fed me daily on my favourite, very fresh muffins. He showed us where to go to watch the famous sunset, and we even had a swim at Cable Beach! Pressing on down the west coast of WA, we passed through places like Port Hedland, Sandfire with its peacocks,

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increasing in numbers at enormous rates — has returned us to the heart of the gospel. It is from this understanding that Schreiter (and others) are naming the emerging model of the church as 'mission as reconciliation'.

I will now view the different authors' contribution to the discussion on reconciliation.

What exactly do we mean by 'reconciliation'?

Reconciliation is such a well used phrase these days — some say it is tired and worn out — that it is difficult to gain an accepted definition of what it actually is. Schreiter's writings on reconciliation consistently begin with an outline of the various meanings that reconciliation has been given (cf. 1992a; 1992b; 1997b, 1997b). Reconciliation is heard in regard to arbitration, the cessation of hostility, the divorce court, the end of estrangement. In religious circles in Latin America it is used by conservative Catholic Bishops as an alternative to liberation theology. It is increasingly being used by nations in their efforts to recover from traumatic social upheaval and conflicts (some examples include: South Africa, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, El Salvador, and perhaps even Australia). Schreiter (1997b) observes that reconciliation is often 'conflated with forgiveness, justice, reparation and expiation.' Many see it as 'the end point of a process which includes all these.' Reconciliation has become for many a 'codeword for amnesty for wrongdoers, repressing memories of atrocity, and returning to some semblance of a normal way of life.'

There are numerous theological meanings as well. It is used in the New Testament as God's saving activity in the world. Roman Catholic theology is closely tied with the sacrament of the same name: it focuses on bringing the penitent back into relationship with God. Twentieth century Protestants draw from the fourth part of K. Barth's monumental *Church Dogmatics*. A good example of Barthian theology is the German Protestant, Muller-Fahrenholz (1997:4), who defines

happened and to ensure that this can never be repeated. We also demonstrate our capacity to receive forgiveness by the manner in which we look for holistic reparation of the victim. I will speak more directly on this below.

Another example of conflation of terms with reconciliation is Nicholas Tavuchis' book, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Tavuchis is convinced that reconciliation commences with the offender apologizing for past wrongs. The heart of his thesis is that when the 'gift' of an apology 'is accepted and reciprocated by forgiveness, [the] world is transformed' (p.8). The managed process understanding of reconciliation is evident when he reduces transformation to mean 'the resumption of normal social relations' (p.121). There is no sense of a new creation through transformed relationships in this view. The striking lacunae of Tavuchis' position is his own assertion that the apology is only a successful tool when it is freely received by the victim. For him, the forgiveness that is required for this to occur is a 'mysterious and unpredictable faculty [which] has not been adequately addressed or formulated' (p.122). He concludes: 'we stand in the need of a sociology and phenomenology of forgiveness' (p.122).

Nevertheless, Tavuchis' text has some key insights that are most helpful to this discussion. He highlights the difficulty and symbolic power of apology. Why is apology so difficult for people and leaders of communities and nations? Because it 'expresses itself as the painful re-remembering, literally of being mindful again, or what we were as members and, at the same time, what we have jeopardized or lost by virtue of our offensive [past and maybe present] speech or action' (1991:8). It requires us to be vulnerable. Tavuchis names this 'vulnerable expression' as 'a form of self-punishment that cuts deeply because we are obliged to retell, relive and seek forgiveness . . .'