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EDITORIAL

IN PREVIOUS ISSUES Fr Dan O'Donovan and myself had some exchanges on transcendence in Aboriginal religious culture. After I had terminated the discussion in my role as editor, feeling that we were starting to go round in circles, I was surprised at the number of readers who commented favourably on it.

Even though Fr O'Donovan may not have shared my judgement on the value of further discussion, he acceded gracefully to the termination. All the same, his mind was still ticking over on an allied but even broader theme. I saw a paper he had prepared for presentation at a clergy meeting in Broome on syncretism, wherein I figured, gently portrayed, as one of the minor baddies, and thought we should go public once more. He preferred, however, to rewrite his paper – in the form it appears in this issue. In spite of its length, it seems best to publish it in full. It gives a lot to think about. People may like to send in comments of their own for publication.

Two other papers, both a valuable combination of theory and personal experience, bear upon the same general theme from particular angles.

There are no reports of courses from the Daly River Centre in this issue as the two staff members are both away, themselves doing courses.

NYMU has now shifted to Darwin so as to work more closely with Nungalinya College. We thank Santa Teresa for bearing with us for two years.

Martin Wilson MSC

THE INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

D. O'DONOVAN

The teacher of sacred Scripture accepts truthful testimony wherever he finds it. So it is, that the Apostle several times quotes gentile sayings, as in 1 Corinthians 1, and Acts 17. This does not indicate approval of the whole gentile doctrine concerned; but one selects what is good, since truth, whoever may be its mouth-piece, is from the Holy Spirit; and rejects the evil . . .

(Thomas Aquinas, *In Titum*, c.1.)

I

THE SYNCRETIST PATTERN

A FEW SAMPLES of a widespread(ing) phenomenon:

1. In 1975, the WCC, meeting in conference in Nairobi, for the first time devoted a separate section (section III) to Christianity's relation to other religions.

Understanding 'dialogue' as expressing present-day striving for human community in the context of social divisions and conflicts, the Nairobi workbook explained:

The concept of 'world community' means neither a super-organisation nor the attempt to create a single religion for the whole world. 'World community' means rather a recognition of our interdependence . . . as well as the readiness to work together in a community that unifies different communities.

Dialogical contact with other religions should thus be seen in the context of this striving for world community.

A majority found their views well encapsulated in a formula coined by M.M. Thomas, moderator of the Central Committee, who spoke of '*Christocentric syncretism*' as the goal of inter-religious contact.

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Kimberley priests' conference, Broome, November 1981. The author alone is responsible for the views expressed in it. Fr O'Donovan lives as a hermit near Lombadina Mission in the Kimberleys. He has written for earlier issues of this periodical.

In opposition to this stood a minority of Lutheran theologians from Norway and Finland who reminded the meeting of the Reformation tradition which clearly distinguished between biblical faith and world religions.

(This is a brief summary of a *Theology Digest* article by Peter Beyerhaus. The original is 'Das Christentum und andere Religionen: Eine Kritische Stellungnahme zu Nairobi 1975', *Zeitschrift für Mission*, 3:4 (1977) 216-226. The abridged version appeared in *TD* 27:2, summer, 1979.)

The author observed:

Theological thinking has been strikingly absent from the whole dialogue programme. Pragmatic experience, not theological mandate, has been cited as its justification. Witness the statement that humanity's survival depends on establishing a global community. Has survival been given priority over NT eschatology?

It should, in fairness, be added that M.M. Thomas, who proposed the 'Christocentric syncretism' formula, distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate syncretism. The article I am here summarising does not give enough detail for the reader to form a judgement. It says, too vaguely, "Christocentric syncretism" would be a selective adaptation from other religions, the criterion being Christ's liberating humanity'. For me, it is the ancient term 'syncretism' itself, which the official Church has always rejected, that is offensive.

Beyerhaus states, finally:

We could anticipate that this newest WCC ecumenical programme would produce tension-filled deliberations. In fact, no attempt was made to articulate a systematic-theological basis, and no plenary report was issued.

2. Raimundo Panikkar is perhaps the best-known Catholic spokesman in the field of inter-religious dialogue. He is a priest, and a scholar of high principle.

Born in Barcelona of an Indian Hindu father and Spanish Catholic mother, he is currently professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, USA. He is also Honorary Professor in the United Theological College, Bangalore, India, and Libero Docente in the University of Rome. He holds a triple doctorate: in philosophy, theology and physics, and has written many books and learned articles. One of his earlier books is *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (some time in the fifties, I think; a new, enlarged edition appeared last year: D. L. & T.), a title which indicates Panikkar's main line of interest: Christianity vis-a-vis the Indian traditions. Another of his works is *Worship and Secular Man*, showing how widely his mind ranges. He spends several months each year in India.

Panikkar has recently written a book to which I now draw attention. It is named *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (Paulist Press, N.Y., 1978). N.B. He is speaking of intra- not inter- religious dialogue, thus distinguishing his own theory.

In this short book, Panikkar states his belief that, for fully satisfactory dialogue to occur between members of different faiths, both parties need to *step inside* each other's belief. See it from the inside, as one who actually shares it. Identify with it. Naturally, he emphasises that in doing so one still holds on to one's own.

His point is that one cannot really understand the other's religious vision without first personally experiencing it, undergoing it completely as it is.

He himself tells at the beginning of the book how he returned, not long before, to America, after a break of five or six years in India. On being asked how the experiment had gone, how he had found India, what those years had done for him, he replied:

Of course, those are big questions, not easy to answer in a few words. But if I were to put it in a nutshell I might say: when I went there, I found I was a Hindu. I return, a Buddhist. While never ceasing to be a Christian.

No mention is made, in the course of the book, of Judaism. (How, one wonders, would it be

possible, while remaining Christian, to identify fully with the Jewish faith?) Indeed it is noteworthy that those who have drifted into the thought-pattern we are describing, or show signs of doing so, are often indophile; thinkers and holy persons who are thoroughly at home in India, study its Sacred Books in Sanskrit, feel the pulsation in their own veins of its vibrant inner life. It is hard, in fact, once one has come to know her, not to fall in love with Mother Ganges.

A postscript must again be added here to Panikkar's case, in fairness. In the final pages of the book under review, he too (like M.M. Thomas of WCC) distinguishes. I will quote his own words. From a specialist whose thinking and expression can be razor-sharp, they seem to me fuzzy -- once more, too summary to know what he really means. If the remainder of the book is any indication, Panikkar's 'syncretism' is not acceptable.

Distinguishing between 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism', he says:

The former is an uncritical mixture of religious traditions and an agreement among them obtained by chopping off all possible discrepancies in favour of an amorphous common denominator. Syncretism is allowing for a possible assimilation of elements by virtue of which these elements cease to be foreign bodies, so that organic growth within each tradition is possible, and the mutual fecundation of religious traditions becomes a genuine option.

Avoiding eclecticism, but having in mind possible interactions -- although we should not minimise the existing tensions, philosophical, theological or religious, between the traditions under consideration -- we may envision corrections, warnings and complementarities that may not only allay mutual suspicions and so often one-sided positions, but also help cultivate a real human growth and thus contribute positively to a concrete humanisation of human life on earth.

(Towards the end of the last chapter,
'Sunyata and Pleroma. The Buddhist and Christian Response
to the Human Predicament')

I recall being made to stop and reflect in a book review which appeared in *The Month* some years ago, by the well-known English Benedictine, Bede Griffiths, now for some thirty years living, in hindu manner, as a christian monk in India. Hindus and Christians alike revere him as a holy man, and many spend periods at his ashram. At the end of that book review he referred, approvingly, to the 'growing consensus' on 'the complementarity' of the various religions (quotation from memory).

It is clear from other writings of his that Fr Bede is not advocating syncretism. At times however he sounds unsure; and one can only sympathise deeply with one who struggles daily with this subject in his inmost soul, situationally, in overwhelmingly Hindu surroundings.

But the term 'complementarity', let loose from his careful hands, can be taken up less carefully by readers, and run strange courses.

Do the bishops of England and Wales themselves sound an unsure note?

We accept that the Vatican Council taught Catholics to look on the other great religions with respect and to recognise that God is also in them. The Church now encourages us to approach them in the spirit of dialogue, of listening and sharing in humility . . . We (i.e. England and Wales) are now part of a society which is multi-cultural and multi-religious . . . we should try to become better acquainted with the backgrounds and beliefs of non-christian immigrants to our countries.

(*The Easter People*, 1980, para. 88)

An ensuing correspondence between two priests in *The Tablet* shows that their words, (as also the words of Vat. II's Declaration *Nostra aetate: On the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions*) have been given two widely different interpretations.

3. From the Aboriginal side, the veering by Christian scholars or missionaries toward the syncretist coast produces a predictable response.

As Peter Aengus, headman for Bardi Law at Lombadina, and also, at present, chairman of the Council, expressed it to me recently: 'We follow two Laws'. In the context of our conversation, he was speaking of *religions*; and what he was claiming for his people was that currently, they are followers of two religions, the Bardi and the Christian.

The question for the Christian missionary is: Is this possible? Are Bardi religious beliefs compatible with Christian? Or does a definitive choice, either way, have to be made between them?

It is my belief that a choice has to be made; and it stands to the credit of the UAM that they have not wavered on this point, even if they may turn the blind eye on de facto 'business' participation. As explained in my correspondence with Fr Wilson, the Aborigines of traditional religion have a religious philosophy which is totally different from the Christian. The two are not compatible. Evangelisation, therefore, calls for decision. Cf., however, Part II, section 3b below, on 'common ground'. It needs also to be said that the Aboriginal cultural revival, which has been in progress in the Kimberleys during the seventies and up to the present, leaves one with the impression that 'the Law' which is reviving and receiving again the devout support of the younger working-age males, is, or may be, substantially different from 'the Law' of traditional Aboriginal religion. One senses a departure from *religious* content, towards simple, *cultural* expression; as though 'the Law' were now seen to stand for (and to be the only Aboriginal thing strong and distinctive enough to stand for) Aboriginal cultural autonomy and identity. *If this is so* (and only then), it is a change of considerable moment to the Christian missionary. It means, in point of fact, that the two Laws (Aboriginal and Christian, the one now purely cultural, the other religious) *are*, in that case, quite compatible.

What makes it difficult in practice for us to discern, is the probability that, in between the white of retaining Aboriginal religion and the black of abandoning it, lies a wide shaded zone of varying admixtures of the two. It is more than likely that those younger working-age males involved in current Law-revival would find themselves somewhere in there. Possibly also reaction (counter-Christian? or counter-'European'? or both?) is one of the motivating elements in the revival.

One further senses at present that, with Christianity's failure to gain acceptance by the tribal Aborigine as a viable substitute for the old religious Law now fading, a religious void is left which nothing can fill until the Gospel is presented by Aborigines to Aborigines in Aboriginal form. We will return to this subject in the second part of this paper.

Sympathy and goodwill on the part of the Christian missionary, then, necessary though they be, are not enough. Where sympathy and goodwill alone are operative, the net result is that both evangelisers and evangelised are left with false impressions.

4. At the end of the syncretist road, where are gathered the 'popular religions' of Latin America, many of the new independent Christian Churches in Africa founded locally around a local prophet and the Christian Cargoism of contemporary Melanesia, one sees the value and need of a properly functioning magisterium of doctrine. This itself, however, as at present constituted in the Roman Church, is most enigmatic, and has still far to evolve. In the meantime, time and events press on; while the weather experts speak of a gathering storm.

II

DIALOGUE

Three issues need to be kept distinct:

1. religious freedom
2. 'soteriological optimism'
3. inter-religious dialogue
 - a. the unique nature of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ
 - b. common ground

1. *Religious Freedom*

(Briefly, since we have the clear Declaration of Vat. II, *Dignitatis humanae personae* to consult if we wish.)

Christian mission must always respect 'the other'. Such respect must be more than verbal. It must arise spontaneously out of the Christian heart, as a normal manifestation of divine Love dwelling there.

In our own case: Aboriginal people, even on Christian-run missions (perhaps *especially* there, since that is exactly where dis-respect may most easily arise), are perfectly entitled not to be Christian if they prefer their ancient beliefs, or no beliefs whatever.

One sentence in particular from Vat. II's document just referred to spells this out:

In spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices, everyone ought at all times to refrain from any manner of action which might seem to carry a hint of coercion or of a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy, especially when dealing with poor or uneducated people. Such a manner of action would have to be considered an abuse of one's own right and a violation of the right of others.

(ch. 1, #4)

2. '*Soteriological Optimism*'

The tag is Karl Rahner's, and describes the present official stand of the Catholic Church as set forth in Vat. II.

i) Those outside the visible Church, whether by positive decision or by circumstance, are not regarded as God's rejected. In the Leonard Feeney case (Boston, US) of the 1940s, the Church had already formally condemned the literal interpretation of 'extra Ecclesiam nulla salus'.

The relevant passage in Vat. II's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, is worth quoting in full:

... Nor is God himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17, 25-28), and who as Saviour wills that all be saved. (Cf. 1 Tim 2, 4)

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. [This term is from Eusebius of Caesarea, 4th century who produced

a work, *Praeparatio evangelica*.] She regards such qualities as given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

But rather often people, deceived by the Evil One, have become caught up in futile reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1, 21, 25). Or some there are who, living and dying in a world without God, are subject to utter hopelessness. Consequently, to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all such, and mindful of the command of the Lord, 'Preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk 16, 16), the Church painstakingly fosters her missionary work . . .

(The concluding part of that same ch. II also deserves attention. It offers resounding encouragement to every Christian missionary.)

ii) The allusion in this passage to a certain 'praeparatio evangelica', which is 'His grace' in those whom evangelisation has not yet reached, leads us to a second aspect of the Church's present 'soteriological optimism', stemming from a more developed theology of grace.

Grace is there before the Gospel comes.

What this means is that, in and by the Incarnation, *salvation of all has occurred*. Creation itself is ontically changed, changed in its being (*ontos*), essence, from what it was before. In Christ, it is 'a new creation', a 'new thing', not merely potentially but actually (even if, as with the unevangelised, without surfacing to consciousness). He 'assumed' it and, in assuming, radically healed it in all its constituent elements. This is a favourite theme of the Church Fathers. *The Transfiguration event is existing reality* (cf. Mk 9, 2-10 par.).

We are members, therefore, of a historically redeemed and elevated race. The grace which is there before the Gospel comes, as stated above, is the entire grace organism or, in scholastic terminology, following Aquinas, 'the grace of the virtues and the gifts'.

The distinction between baptised Christian and unbaptised pagan who, St Paul observes, may find himself better off at the Judgement (N.B. Rom. 2, 14-29; especially, vv.14-16), is that, in the case of the 'pagan', the newness of nature, achieved in Jesus Christ, is dormant, unconscious, and consequently inactive. An untapped source; unreleased. At baptism, a person who has received the gift of faith or, in other words, has had dormant faith within him awakened, energised, quickened by the Word, comes forward of his free will and has the fact ratified officially, in sign, by the believing community, becoming visibly and recognisably a member.

In Luke 24, 31 we glimpse the inner structure of evangelisation: '... and their eyes were opened, and they recognised . . .' What they suddenly 'recognised' was the 'him' (*ibid.*) who had been with them all along.

3. *The Inter-Religious Dialogue*

(Restricting ourselves to the dialogue between Christianity and the Australian Aboriginal religion.)

One precautionary word.

Christians have come now to take religious dialogue for granted. This has presented no difficulty for us since from the start Christianity has been an exoteric, or open, religion, with mandate to preach the Good News everywhere.

In addition, the world-culture prevalent today favours free exchange, public exposal of one's views etc.; and in this respect the major world religions have – most of them gladly – acquiesced.

Now, this might lead us Christians to assume, without further reflection, that the Aboriginal people are necessarily willing partners in religious dialogue with us. We must take care not to do so.

Aboriginal religion belongs to that type of religions which are esoteric in character. It is a

private house. One does not enter someone else's home without being invited.

One can of course ask, 'May I come in?' or 'Do you mind if I come in?' The owner of the house *may* mind, in fact, but not like to say so.

Hence, we must ask ourselves, before attempting to engage in dialogue, whether the action we are going to take may not be a breach of etiquette. Whether it is in good taste even to propose religious dialogue.

This difficulty is aggravated by the place of woman in Aboriginal religious Law. It may well be that the dialogue we are speaking of is, for Christian woman, a priori not possible.

The right to privacy raises its voice again whenever we are tempted to use Aboriginal mythology for homiletic or class-room purposes. If we know these stories from popularly circulating collections, there is doubtless no harm, and maybe even great advantage, in bringing them in. But if we have such materials from specialised scholarly journals, we need, once more, to watch our step.

Finally, it has to be acknowledged that the information upon which what follows is based has been, over a long time, confided by Aborigines to a select, trusted handful of investigators. Hence, it is only by privilege or friendly concession that we have it; as when one is allowed to overhear another's conversation.

The second half of this precautionary word concerns the Christian position.

Because of the unique historical nature of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the Christian in religious dialogue has a difficulty not shared by other religions. How can he fail to be considered as intolerant?

This imposes a greater burden of humility on the Christian in dialogue, a greater effort at understanding, keeping to the essentials of his word, and at bringing the broad perspective of his vision of world religions and of the evolving cosmos of which they are a part, as close as possible to the divine. In this sense, dialogue must be positively prayer.

The Christian position is made doubly embarrassing by the fact that, in the consciousness of most world religions (including the Aboriginal), Christians are characteristically invaders. They convert by overpowering, gun or stockwhip in hand. Also, characteristically, they despise. It is the sad heritage we carry. We may protest and disown it; but our sincerity will need proving. Nothing is gained by imagining that that is a thing of the past, which could not happen today. The weight of evidence, across the world, is too crushing.

a) *The unique nature of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ*

Every religion considers its truth unique in some way. And, in some way, each is.

But creation itself, and human nature with all man's gropings for the light, have been assumed by God, historically, only once: 'for there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all' (1 Tim 2, 5-6). 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5, 19), 'bodily' (Col 2, 9), in a way he never was and never will be in any besides.

In time, Christ is the one Word God has substantially uttered. All man's subjective revelations ('he was the true light which enlightens everyone', Jn 1, 9), meet their only final objective in him.

It is in this sense that the Fathers of the Church could speak of him not only as the true Noah, the true Moses, the true David, Solomon, etc.; but even, more daringly – and rarely – as the true Orpheus, the true Deukalion, the true Ulysses, Apollo, etc. This line could go on indefinitely through all the world's religious mythology: wherever a holy, or heroic, deliverer appears, in myth, and by his action saves, there 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' is envisaged in mystery.

Given the fact as explained above under II, 2, ii, of grace's presence, and activity, in every person of goodwill, even prior to evangelisation, this means that, for example, the Orpheus myth or the Deukalion myth etc. were, in their adherents, positive christic realisations, however dim. There *was* a meeting. What they experienced as enlightenment, or exaltation of spirit, or total release (we are not considering here the many pagan aberrations – Christianity had, and has, its aberrations too) was what a 12th century Christian mystic, William of St Thierry, in a different context, spoke of as 'the kiss of eternity' (*osculum aeternitatis*).

There are only two differences:

- In the case of the OT figures, we are no longer at the level of myth, but into history; and must speak rather of 'historical prefiguration'. (The peculiar nature of the first eleven chapters of the Bible, however, needs to be borne in mind.)
- Each comes to us through an originally different medium: Orpheus, Deukalion etc. through the medium of, say, the 'owner' of a particular dreaming, or its originator; Moses, David etc. through the Word of God, in Christ and in the Church.

(It is not within the scope of this paper to probe the mystery of *revelation's* presence also in myth.)

The type/anti-type understanding of the Fathers originates in St Paul himself, when he speaks of Adam as 'the form of the one to come': *typos tou mellontos* (Rom 5, 14. Cf. 1 Cor 10, 6.11; Heb 9, 23.23).

Syncretism, in all its forms, is ruled out.

With, and since, Christ's coming, all man's provisional religions become obsolete and, if they last on, an anachronism. (N.B. again, nevertheless, and this cannot be repeated too often: this is not to say that God does not still save the faithful of those other religions, nor that he does not *use* those other religious forms for salvific purpose, nor that they do not contain many positive elements – indeed, an immense store of accumulated wisdom, valuable for all time. See II, 2 above, and Aquinas' words under the paper's title.)

The Mosaic Law itself is antiquated now: 'The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their fathers . . .' (Heb 8, 8.13). In speaking of a new covenant, he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Not that Jesus Christ came to *destroy* all previous 'signs'. 'Those ancient signs of things he did not render meaningless (empty of their meaning) by confuting. Rather, he changed them, fulfilling.' And again, 'The Old Testament is not emptied of content in Christ, but its veil is removed (cf. 2 Cor 3, 13-18), so that what, without Christ, is obscure and covered over, through Christ may be understood and, as it were, laid bare.' (Augustine, *Adversus Judaeos*, III, 4 and *De Utilitate credendi*, III, 9. Both texts cited from Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, at II 133 and I 442 respectively.)

Vatican II's Decree on 'The Missionary Activity of the Church', *Ad gentes*, declares the Church's position today:

. . . The seed which is the Word of God sprouts from the good ground watered by divine dew. From this ground the seed draws nourishing elements which it transforms and assimilates into itself. Finally it bears much fruit. Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps 2, 8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can con-

tribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life.

... Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation¹ in the whole area of Christian life. Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accommodated¹ to the genius and the dispositions of each culture.

Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illumined by the light of the Gospel, and then be taken up into Christian unity. Finally, the individual young Churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, without prejudice to the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity.

Surveying the world scene now, serenely, as mankind moves with many fears into a complexifying future, Christ — the 'Whole Christ', Head and members — appears to me to be the one force strong enough, 'speaking the truth in Love' (Eph 4, 15), to carry the weight of technical progress.

One thing, and one thing only, gives it this strength: not anything of ours assuredly, nor anything created whatever, since we are sinful poor wretches, feeble in every way, while 'creation itself groans in travail'. But rather, *divine being/divine intent*.

Marred though its face still is with many 'spots and wrinkles', the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which we call 'the Church-Mystery', alone places *sacrificial love* boldly at the centre, in Christ as the very nature of God, in whose image man is made.

Here the traditional statement, 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' (outside the Church there is no salvation), and the beautiful biblical-patristic theme of the Ark of Noah, on which that statement rests, find their true interpretation. The waters of the Flood are the times we live in.

This is being strikingly borne out before the eyes of any impartial observer, during these last two decades in Latin and, more recently, Central America, where the Church is appearing in youthful vigour as the only spiritual and moral body capable of standing up to, influencing, giving direction to the corruption of power and wealth; in a word, of 'redeeming the time'.

(With what profound shame must we not, at the same time, acknowledge that the very corruption spoken of here is avowedly 'Christian'. On this anomaly, see the beginning of b) 5 below, regarding a Christianity dissociated from real life. It 'is not authentic Christianity. It is a Christianity which has missed the point'. Fr Cyril Hally's recent comment, here in Broome, about 'the Church's credibility being tested in Latin America' is indeed true. May this be, at least a salutary reminder to us that Evil is at work, most intensely, even in the Church of God, and that we ourselves are not beyond its reach.)

In coming up with the 'basic Christian communities' (BCC) solution (or, Love in action), it gets at *the underlying causes* of suffering and social unrest, after the manner of homeopathic medicine, rather than confining itself to attacking the symptoms or the final running sores (allopathic). 'Homeopathic medicine' and 'the way of the Cross' are cognate processes. As one great loving person of our time has put it: 'Love is a harsh and dreadful thing to ask of us, but it is the only answer' (Dorothy Day). While appearing to be a defensive measure, the BCC represent in fact, a sublime offensive, in grace, at once far-sighted and muscular.

¹ These terms are now seen as insufficient. In Pope Paul VI's apostolic letter *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the 'plan of the Incarnation' referred to in the opening of Vat. II's words, just quoted, is pressed better into service.

World religions today are, like society at large, its attitudes and ways, fragmented, and further fragmenting. While genuine uni-plurality is a strength, random fragmentation not only leads nowhere, but is fatal. It brings its own destruction. It might not be so terrible if it brought destruction only on itself. But, intended as religion is, in the design of God, to be a unifying soul to progress, in failing to rise to its appointed centre it fails history. It fails man. Instead of preventing disintegration, it accelerates it, joining its own weight to disintegration's already scarcely controllable forces. It has started, recently, even to justify itself in so doing, speaking of religious pluralism (read, syncretism) as the way of the future, when it is no way at all. In one short sentence, an unknown Christian of (possibly) the 5th century, has set the ideal clearly before us:

'I know your mystery, O Cross, why you have been erected' (says the apostle Andrew, as he draws near the cross on which he is about to die). 'For you are sunk firmly into the (ground of the) world to give firmness to the unstable . . .'

(*Martyrium Andreae*, 19)

The idea is that of a pin being stuck into something to hold it together.

In my book *The Well* the Cross of Jesus is referred to as 'the axial-post'.

Though this axial-post passes, invisibly, through the centre, is itself the centre, of all created reality, for one brief moment as Jesus hung there it took on visibility, to let us see and recognise. 'All things hold together in him', Col 1, 17: *syn-estēken* = lit. con-sist; find their consistency.

As the axial-post (Christ crucified) is at once divine and human, we are shown at that moment that world religion involves a double simultaneous dialectic. While each distinctive religious tradition dialectically engages with others (as with non-religion also) in the dialogue of Truth, so does each individually, and all together, engage dialectically with the (transcendent) Other.

By definition, re-lig-ion is centripetal. It engenders, as from its womb, centrifugality. Centrifugality is the child, not the mother. And to its mother the child returns. Its freedom consists in its dependence as, in the Trinity, plurality is conceived and born of unity.

For this dialectical movement along our common axis to succeed, however, the Christian Church, and other religious traditions, must understand, and be convinced, that historical accretions which are not necessary to the Truth, and impede its advancement, must be let go of in the higher interests of the uniplurality of all in history and in God. Barnacles and parasites of many kinds continually form a crust about the Ark of salvation. Like any decent ship, it needs frequently to be docked and scraped clean, to make it seaworthy for the voyage on.

Decisive for the future of mankind is world religion's ability, or inability, to keep itself accurately on course. It is in no way a phenomenon of chance. Yet, neither is it predetermined. It is responsibly free.

I would like here to clarify, in parenthesis as it were, an important question which arose at our last priests' conference.

Since, it was asked, the Aborigines of traditional religion have so strong an intuition of 'immanence' and life-forces, ought we not try to relate religiously with them in that direction, whatever about 'transcendence'?

This, as I see it, is not possible as, in that case, we would no longer be presenting the Christian message. Of course, our *accent* could be on immanence, but that is another matter.

While Aboriginal religion does admit, I think, of a relative transcendence, it does not appear to recognise an absolute transcendence.

Now, if he remains on the level of theism, logically an immanentist is pushed (as were the Greek Stoics who were immanentists without transcendence) into pantheism. The universe is a vast living organism. Its life-principle, called by the Stoics 'Pneuma'/'Logos', is divinised, even named – for example, 'Zeus' or 'Hermes'. (See the interesting prayer of the Stoic philosopher-

emperor Marcus Aurelius: 'What pleases you, O world, is agreeable to me. Nought is either premature or late which to you is timely. Everything your hours may bring, O nature, for me is goodly fruit: all is from you, all in you, all unto you' Medit. 4, 23.) Stoicism's 'Scripture' is Greek mythology.

But the Stoic world-vision is materialist through and through. 'Pneuma' itself (spirit) is no more than matter's most subtle form, itself material. The term 'Logos spermatikos' (seminal Word) currently in use in Christian missiology, is partly of Stoic provenance, and not so easy to understand. When used, it needs explaining. We might express the idea of Logos spermatikos today by saying that, for instance, pagan religion contains many positive elements, much of what is true and good. As such, these are of the Holy Spirit, according to Aquinas' maxim. These seminal words, however, have got to transmute, the time of transmutation arrived. If they insist on remaining seminal, they betray their own nature and their own truth. For they are unto, or for, the Word made flesh. Their seed-time has passed. (See 2 Cor 3, 10)

The Aboriginal religion(s) is not pantheistic. Neither is it materialistic. Neither is it polytheistic, as will be seen in a moment. What then?

Once one leaves the plane of theism, one must go either of two ways – we are talking, all the time, of an immanentistic religion:²

totemism		
fetishism	OR	buddhism
animism		
shamanism		

I believe that traditional Aboriginal religion(s) is best left unclassified under any of these pre-fabricated titles. It is – at least in its untouched form – a non-theistic religion. Professor R. Berndt observes: '... Beliefs about such a direct linkage with the major mythical beings imply ... the belief that *man is not fundamentally dissimilar to them* – that both share a common life force which is sacred'. (*Australian Aboriginal Religion*, 1974, quoting from an earlier work of his own, 1970. Emphasis mine; omission in text, his.) 'The Aborigines have no gods, just or unjust, to adjudicate the world', says Stanner. 'Not even by straining can one see in such culture-heroes as Baiame and Daramulun the true hint of a Yahweh, jealous, omniscient and omnipotent ...' (*The Dreaming*, 1956).³

The danger with historians of religion or comparative anthropologists, who scan the scene of world religions phenomenologically, is that they easily carry over words such as 'god', 'deity', 'heaven', 'supernatural', and so on; whereas one really needs to take each particular religion and examine it on, and in, its own terms. Berndt, for example, continues, in his very next sentence following on the above quotation, 'The intervening "totem" or symbol, in animal or other form, provides a tangible expression of man's relationship to his *deities*'! (Emphasis mine)

2 In *Nelen Yubu*, September 1981, Sister Margaret Tonkin FDNSC adopts Clifford Geertz's definition of 'religion':

Religion is:

1. a system of symbols which acts to
2. establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
3. formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
4. clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
5. the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Christianity is, by this definition, not a religion. I accept this as the most useful approach.

3 In his essay, 'Kosmogonie unter farbigen Völkern der Westlichen Wüste Australiens' (*Archiv für Ethnologie*, 60, 1965, pp.469-479) Dr Helmut Petri expresses the same opinion, even more deliberately. I am grateful to Fr Kevin McKelson SAC for drawing my attention to this.

In fact, it is precisely here that our two different views, the Aboriginal and the Christian, stand most starkly opposed.

If, as the Aborigines maintain, 'man is not fundamentally dissimilar to them', i.e. to 'the major mythical beings' (Berndt), then those same major mythical beings are not deities, not gods. To refer to them as deities or gods is to use a misnomer.

Answering, therefore, the 'immanentist' question: to pursue the way of immanence, while leaving the transcendence issue undefined or in suspense, is not to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ, but to betray it, and get nowhere.

We ought not be daunted by the prospect of 'getting transcendence across', as though it were a difficult concept. It is, on the contrary, a simple concept, once the mind adverts to the question. It was principally among the poor and illiterate that Muhammad scored his first successes. They had believed in many gods and goddesses of a nature kind, but took to the simplicity of Islam at once as a welcome liberation. Grasping the idea of divine Transcendence was no problem.

Further, we need to be careful even of presenting the Gospel to Australian Aborigines as 'story'. Strictly, it is not story, but hi-story. In our dialogue, we need to state this clearly; go to endless rounds, if needs be, and at the very outset, to make the distinction understood. These two – the transcendent nature of the God of revelation, and the historicity of the revelation of God – are indispensable initial items which cannot be postponed. Because otherwise the dialogue is unable to advance. We will remain forever at the infantile stage of exchanging and comparing 'stories'; caught in the impasse the Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker, felt caught in when she wrote, '... Why change our sacred myths for your sacred myths?' (From her poem, 'Integration, Yes'.)

b) Common ground

The most important common ground between the Aboriginal person or people in dialogue with the Christian person or people is the fact (referred to under II, 2, ii above) of our being:

1) already one in the grace-life.

It may be said, of course, that the Aborigine does not recognise this common ground. Nevertheless, that does not mean he is deprived of it. Mysteriously, it is there, and working. Then there is our

2) oneness in human brotherhood as persons.

We are, therefore, in the most advantageous position of having those two solid basics to presume on.

A consequence of this first, and second, is a third area of common ground, itself an elementary component of the human mystery. Carl Jung named it

3) 'the collective unconscious', which takes shape in (again a Jungian term) the 'archetypes'.

We can engage in dialogue, then, presuming also on the 'collective unconscious' we share as equals, the 'archetypal' possession with which we both were conceived and born.

As this is relevant to our own situation, may I quote, from chapter 3 of Fr Martin Wilson's book *New, Old and Timeless* a paragraph reproduced in his article, 'Nugumanj: Father in heaven'?

It (i.e. 'the Nelen Yubu approach'), consists in engaging in dialogue with Aboriginal people on basic religious issues. It is a dialogue where Aboriginal people will be speaking out of their own inherited religious mentality, speaking from and in terms of the categories of religious thought native to themselves. Hopefully it is not yet too late for them to do so. The topics would be basic human religious values as

found in the evangelical message. Such dialogue would not result, except incidentally, in reports of traditional Aboriginal belief and practice, especially of belief and practice that are no longer extant. On the contrary, it would manifest categories and processes of Aboriginal religious thought that are operative at the present moment, most of it presumably as the conserved and presently dynamic portion of their traditional religious heritage. The more of their past that is remembered, the richer the dialogue should be. I would expect that the details of many particular rites and myths will have dropped out of memory (as they have been doing from time immemorial, cf. Stanner *On Aboriginal Religion*, 1966: 139-148) and their reconstruction would have little more than an antiquarian interest. By contrast, the categories of religious thought and behaviour have an enduring permanence and operativeness in the subconscious mind and especially in that shared psychological substratum we indicate when we speak of the collective unconscious.

Since both 'collective unconscious' and 'archetype' are useful terms in the setting of our common ground in dialogue with Aborigines, it may be of value to have Jung's own explanation of them (from 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', first published in the *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1934, and later revised and published in *Von den Wurzeln des Bewusstseins*, Zurich, 1954. The version given below appeared as introduction to *Four Archetypes*, by C.G. Jung, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972.).

The hypothesis of a collective unconscious belongs to the class of ideas that people at first find strange but soon come to possess and use as familiar conceptions. This has been the case with the concept of the unconscious in general. After the philosophical idea of the unconscious, in the form presented chiefly by Carus and von Hartmann, had gone down under the overwhelming wave of materialism and empiricism, leaving hardly a ripple behind it, it gradually reappeared in the scientific domain of medical psychology.

At first the concept of the unconscious was limited to denoting the state of repressed or forgotten contents. Even with Freud, who makes the unconscious — at least metaphorically — take the stage as the acting subject, it is really nothing but the gathering place of forgotten and repressed contents, and has a functional significance thanks only to these. For Freud, accordingly, the unconscious is of an exclusively personal nature, although he was aware of its archaic and mythological thought-forms.

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.

Psychic existence can be recognised only by the presence of contents that are *capable of consciousness*. We can therefore speak of unconscious only in so far as we are able to demonstrate its contents. The contents of the personal unconscious are chiefly the *feeling-toned complexes*, as they are called; they constitute the personal and private side of psychic life. The contents of the collective unconscious, on the other hand, are known as *archetypes* . . .

. . . The term 'représentations collectives', used by Levy-Bruhl to denote the symbolic figures in the primitive view of the world, could easily be applied to unconscious contents as well, since it means practically the same thing. Primitive tribal lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way. They are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into

conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching. This last is a typical means of expression for the transmission of collective contents originally derived from the unconscious.

Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairytale. But here too we are dealing with forms that have received a specific stamp and have been handed down through long periods of time. The term 'Archetype' thus applies only indirectly to the 'representations collectives', since it designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience. In this sense there is a considerable difference between the archetype and the historical formula that has evolved. Especially on the higher levels of esoteric teaching the archetypes appear in a form that reveals quite unmistakably the critical and evaluating influence of conscious elaboration. Their immediate manifestation, as we encounter it in dreams and visions, is much more individual, less understandable, and more naïve than in myths, for example. The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.

As the archetypes, like all numinous contents, are relatively autonomous, they cannot be integrated simply by rational means, but require a dialectical procedure, a real coming to terms with them, often conducted by the patient in dialogue form, so that, without knowing it, he puts into effect the alchemical definition of the *meditatio*: 'an inner colloquy with one's good angel'. Usually the process runs a dramatic course, with many ups and downs. It expresses itself in, or is accompanied by, dream symbols that are related to the 'representations collectives', which in the form of mythological motifs have portrayed psychic processes of transformation since the earliest times.

More briefly, the 'collective unconscious' is described by a disciple of Jung as 'that part of the psyche which retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind'. (*Man and his Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung, Part 2, by Joseph Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', Picador, 1978, p.98)

What does all this mean in practice?

It means that we, the two parties in dialogue, have at our disposal an immense common symbol-apparatus or language, with which on the one hand to listen to, and understand, the truth our partner is communicating and, on the other, to communicate our own. (Eliade's popular study *Patterns in Comparative Religion* outlines this universal symbol language.)

This common symbol-language is all-important in the Christian-Aboriginal dialogue. The more we are able to feel comfortable with it, the more successful is our communication likely to be. Happily, the Bible is full of the imagery of world mythology which it takes for granted and uses freely, always, however, adapting it to its own unique purpose.

It has one notable advantage as 'language'. It precedes 'lingo'. It is with it that 'lingo' plays around, weaving its sacral texture. Hence, in familiarising ourselves with it, in making it our language of choice, we are getting to a deep stratum of religious commonality. And, once again, our souls are in agreement there, the Aboriginal and the Christian.

Under this common symbol-language heading would be included symbol-acts and action forms used in religious ceremonial: paraphernalia and body decoration; body movement in dance and beating the rhythm; bush surroundings, the night-time and fire; etc.

It must be admitted that this has been a neglected sector in our Christian presentation of the Gospel. The reason is not difficult to find; and in it we meet, perhaps in its most poignant form, the present Christian dialogue-dilemma.

It is, in few words, this: on the one hand, to present a Gospel in which an Aborigine could feel immediately at home, with familiar ceremonial expression in dance and song, removed

from all un-necessary European trappings, like church-buildings, books, rather stiff and un-natural (un-lifelike) conduct, etc., Christian mission absolutely *needs* Aboriginal Christian religious creators. On the other, our customary mission-structure is so top-heavy and one-sided that any Aboriginal creativity or initiative of Christian kind cannot even come to the birth. (I will return to this subject at the end of the paper, but only to touch on it. It really calls for full-scale honest treatment, in collaboration with Aboriginal Christians themselves.)

A fourth area of common ground between us is:

4) *the sacred universe.*

This particularly powerful 'vision' Aborigines and Christians share, even if their premises are wholly different.

Professor R. Berndt (*op. cit.*) states the Aboriginal position:

The Dreaming, as a concept, then, is all-pervasive . . . The dimension of the sacred is substantially the same as the Dreaming . . .

It covers all time, all space. Man is part of an essentially religious drama which has no confines. In this, even the ground and he are one.

The Christian has a similar worldview.

In the earlier of the two creation accounts (Gen 2, 4-25), man (Hebrew: *âdam*) is formed from the ground (*adâma*). Both man and ground are holy by origin from the Holy, from 'Its' creative touch. Between them is mysterious affinity.⁴ And, extending outward from them, holiness holds together, musically as it were, all the created universe. Even the heavens speak (with man and ground) the glory of God (Ps 19, 2).

We are, therefore, Aborigines and Christians already *one in ecological awareness.*

We share further under this same title a common belief, though again from different premises, in man's affinity with the animals, a recurrent theme in Christian hagiography. The perfected person, e.g. Francis of Assisi or Seraphim of Sarov, was approached by even the fiercest animals, and in his peace, in their common, re-found, paradisiac peace – or rather love (God-likeness), which casts out fear – communed with them. Isaiah even projected the human commonwealth of messianic times in those terms: 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, etc. . . and a little child shall lead them' (Is 11, 6-9).

Shamanism, many elements of which are found incorporated in Aboriginal religious ceremonial and custom, emphasises friendship with the animals. The shaman (ecstatic) knows and speaks animal language, and is befriended by them. He learns from them their secrets. This is explained by a primordial 'paradisiac' relationship they share; (the Aborigine would say 'dream-time').

We may conclude this paper by pointing to a fifth area of agreement between Aborigines and Christians. For both alike,

4 Cf. water- and mineral- 'divining', and related subjects: clairvoyance, telepathy, psycho-physical communication with plants, psycho-kinesis (i.e. moving objects by psychic action alone), vibration, aura, etc.; all of which more enlightened science now treats respectfully. Called 'psychical physics' by those scientists who believe the cause lies in the psyche of the human agent, it is called 'electromagnetics' by those who consider the cause to lie in the organic or inorganic materials to which, say, the diviner's instrument reacts. It is also called, more generally, 'radiesthesia', from the Latin root for 'radiation' and the Greek for 'perception'. Aborigines could be 'sensitives' of a high order in this opening field of exploration, which may well be a determining factor in man's future.

5) *religion means life in its entirety.*

This, clearly, is of the greatest practical moment. Religious dialogue always moves like surface swell on a real-life sea — the Wind blowing. This is not to say that it lacks depth, is superficial. *The sea is its depth.* It is a swelling of the sea.

It is In-carnation of divine Love at work.

There is more to it than 'talking religion'.

One of the things that must most have perplexed the Australian Aborigine on first contacting Christianity was the dichotomy, in the Christianity he saw in operation, between 'religion' and 'real life'. He would have found this, and doubtless still does, its most baffling aspect. In that, he is right. A Christianity in which the two are not one is not authentic Christianity. It is a Christianity which has missed the point.

Yet it has had on Aboriginal religion its deadly effect: it has dichotomised, by its influence, what before had been marvellously one.

What is left by and large — a dichotomised Aboriginal religion — is no more the ancient truth than is a dichotomised Christianity the Gospel of Jesus.

In dialogue, both may rediscover their respective sources. That would be a gain. A common ground, now a stage higher, would be established. Religion would move, from 'business'-centre or church building out into the streets and back again. We would, from then on, at least, be dialoguing about the right thing.

For both of us the 'right thing' is *relational*, the concord of many at one.

In theory, Christians have this signified to perfection in the revealed mystery of divine Trinity, the source of a contemplative real-life in active discipleship of Jesus.

In practice, the Aborigines have an ingeniously working system which leaves no one out. The door is open all the time, relationally, to 'the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind'.

Is there not here significant common ground, where we each have our strengths and weaknesses?

Religion means life in its entirety.

A nice statement, in theory.

Reducing it to practice would entail such consequences as our treating with the utmost positive encouragement, the utmost undying enthusiasm of hope and trust, the utmost tenderness, practical experiments, of any serious kind, by Aboriginal people, realising in the love of Christ that they can be destroyed, stifled as it were, by being cynically watched or spoken of. Indeed, in cynically watching or speaking of them one would display one's own moral nakedness, and disqualify oneself for the inter-religious dialogue.

Such experiments by the Aboriginal people are not necessarily going to go 'our way'. More likely than not — and this surely is their interest as *Aboriginal* experiments — they will go another way. Ought not this be for us a source of joy?

In an address to the Catholic mission staff in Broome, 1973, anthropologist Dr Erich Kolig gave this advice:

... The basic value underlying the new approach is the one of freedom of choice. This value forms the fundament for any action taken in the field of Aboriginal advancement, and it also forms the basic argument against the imposition of other values such as the overriding importance of economic efficiency, European-style benevolence, etc. The Aboriginal society, or sub-society, is to be conceded the right to choose for itself the level of efficiency, etc.

(Paper titled, 'The Future starts now:
the Role of Catholic Missions in Aboriginal Advancement')

For his part, Professor Stanner offers his own candid opinion. Here are the concluding few paragraphs of his typically careful essay, 'Religion and the Aborigines', 1967. The article had

opened with the words: 'The title of the paper is somewhat misleading. "Aboriginal Religion and the Christian Missions" would be nearer the mark . . .'

. . . It would be hard to invent two societies — or two structures of personality — less like each other than Aboriginal and European. What I have said about the religion was no less true about the family system, social organisation, economic life and so on.

Even had there been no secular problem, there would have been sufficient difficulty on the religious side. Aborigines have been notably sceptical about the revelatory character of Christianity; they grasp its redemptive character not at all; its historical character eludes them; its evangelical impulse puzzles them — "what are they really doing here?"

It ought to be obvious from all this why the early missionaries found the Aborigines poor prospects for conversion and in other respects hard to bring to terms with Europeanism. Broadly speaking, these difficulties remain . . .

The printed heading ('Christianity as help or hindrance in a half-way world'), could suggest that I want to start an abstract discussion of the appropriateness of Christianity. This is not so. I could see no sense in so doing: I do not see the missionary impulse towards the Aborigines weakening. My thoughts relate rather to the appropriateness of the Christian mission as a social agency or instrument. Does it help anyone, to persist with the multi-purpose mission centre?

For many decades missions perforce had to be health, welfare, educational and employment centres. There were no other possibilities. They managed well enough when numbers were small and when there was a simpler milieu. This has ceased to be the case. Most missions have increased greatly in size but few are staffed or constituted properly to carry out the range of duties now expected of them. The tasks have become a physical burden. More importantly, they distract from and even comprise religious duties.

In the period which Mr Hasluck described as one of 'mercy and reclamation' a mission station could hope to be a sort of comprehensive public agency while pursuing its private religious task. I do not see that it can go on doing so indefinitely.

A set of new conditions have emerged since the early 1950s. The characteristic mission has ceased to be a remote and isolated place in tenuous connection with civilisation; the tempo and content of life have changed for everyone, including Aborigines, and a whole complex of tasks is falling to missionaries which is not properly theirs at all. One of the effects is to widen the area of friction with the Aborigines, e.g. peace-keeping, which is really a function of civil authority . . .

In 1974, the Uniting Church of North Australia conducted a top-grade survey of Arnhem Land Aboriginal communities which have been mission-centres. (Incidentally, its report, *Free to Decide*, would make an excellent framework for a Catholic unified policy; 'mutatis mutandis', since this is Kimberley and not NT. A very difficult work of synthesis has been splendidly done. Why not avail of it, the Uniting Church permitting?)

They found a fairly general desire among Aborigines they spoke with, that Christian missionaries should stay with them, rather than government or other personnel. But it was also plainly stated that former *roles* will have to change completely.

Perhaps this could be a compromise solution to the problem so well expressed by Professor Stanner and, for long now, so painfully felt by missionaries themselves.

I suppose the main practical question then would be: but are we personally *able* now to change roles so completely? And what if we are not? Ought we, in that case, withdraw, in the interests of the religious dialogue itself?

'Dia-log' means that the parties stand as equals. There are two (dia) words (log) on the level; each open, each vulnerable, disarmed.

Is the institutional Christ the Aborigine has met in our traditional mission-centres vulnerable enough for real exchange to happen? as vulnerable as Jesus the Nazarene was on the roads of Galilee or Judea?

Does our present mission situation, where the Christian is always in charge, always directing the show, even admit of genuine dialogue with the tribal Aborigine?

There are those recent words of Fr John Leary on completing his Kimberley visit, about Aborigines being more natural and spontaneous when met with outside of our organised mission strongholds.

Is it time to de-institutionalise in the interests of the dialogue of God? But how would we do it and where would we go?

Questions.

Perhaps it might do us all the good in the world, in heaven's Mystery, to be 'redundant' for a while, to feel what it's like, as so many in our wider society have to do today – even at times the most industrious. The redundant are vulnerable and therefore more naturally level off.

If we all were out of jobs, we would have more time.

Perhaps, dispersing from our mission administrative posts, we could re-associate under another form, which would have as its aim the consolidating of Christian relations across the north into Queensland (koinōnia, communion in faith and action), including Uniting Church, Anglican Church and, possibly, other Christian affiliations. In clear understanding of what unites, and what still separates us.⁵ In an article for *The Month*, January '78, 'Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ', Sri Lankan Fr Aloysius Pieris SJ, well-known leader in the field of inter-religious dialogue in Asia, wrote:

... An ecumenical congress that assembles to discuss these (i.e. inter-ecclesial) issues is a luxury we Asians cannot afford. Rather, let us simply allow the western experience of classical ecumenism to flow freely into the depths of our spirit, so that it, gradually, becomes the *mood* rather than the aim, a *style* of life and not the goal of organised action. The Churches in Asia have no time to face one another as in the classical model; they should, rather, *face the world together!* The church-to-church ecumenism would also be the *spontaneous outcome of a common endeavour to discover the Asian face of Christ*; that is to say, inter-ecclesial ecumenism, there, in Asia, ought to be a by-product of the new praxis which is trans-ecclesial, Christ-centred and world-oriented. (All emphases his.)

We might establish, at least tentatively, joint ties with the Ecumenical Theological Fellowship of Asia (ETFa; centre, Sri Lanka; secretary and PR-man, Fr Tissa Balasurya OMI. Fr Balasurya was present at the May 1980 WCC convention in Melbourne on 'World Mission and Evangelism'. The media at the time featured him. His theology is good, judging from the little I have seen of it.) This Theological Fellowship is engaged, conjunctively with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, in a broadly similar programme. We would find ourselves there, needless to say, at the very heart of inter-religious dialogue.

At the Association's Sri Lanka Conference of January 1979 (at which the founding of ETFa took place, and which was supported by, among others, the Theological Research Centre of the Office of Human Development of the Asian Bishops' Conference) there were eight 'fraternal delegates' present from North and South (Latin) America and Africa. No one from Australasia which, one might have expected, would be the non-Asian continent most interested. At the February 1980 Conference (in Sao Paulo, Brazil) of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, there were observers from North America and Europe; every continent being thus represented except Australasia.

5 A first step in this direction seems already to have been taken in Nungalinga College's invitation to Fr Martin Wilson to enrol as a faculty member, and Fr Wilson's grateful acceptance.

Last year, as we know, representatives from four Catholic Bishops' Conferences (Australia, NT, PNG and Solomon Islands, and the Pacific) meeting in Sydney, agreed in principle to establish a 'Pacific Partnership for Human Development', which would help the Church recognise and meet the human needs of the region. The proposal advocates integration of Catholic development agencies and ecumenical co-operation. Among the stated goals are: 'service of human development of peoples, which includes their spiritual, social and material development; development of programmes of education, animation and conscientisation, especially at the national level.' The bishops recommended the initiation of projects which would help people 'to understand their situation and the structures which govern their lives and which help them to organise for self-determination and the changing of unjust structures'. In pursuance of this policy, the Australian bishops have this year made social justice Sunday ecumenical, with Anglicans and Uniting Church working collaborately with the RC.

If tensions exist within the ETFA, this is a welcome sign of life. Could not a delegation from a Christian Union of North Australia if necessary contribute a balancing element, and thus help in the maturing process of an organisation so full of promise? Karl Rahner has written an essay on what he calls 'the tutiorism of venture'. Have we the courage required to expose ourselves to risk, hazard? (For Rahner, this usually is, in the long run, the 'safer way' — via tutor.) Have we the trust required in God's presence with us, especially in our grappling with the problematic?

This would not mean abandoning the Aborigines we have for so long ministered to in faith and love. On the contrary. Since, presumably, our delegates to the ETFA meetings (probably only two or three would be invited) would be Aboriginal Australians, it would be a friendly deference, rather, on the part of white Australian Christians, at the proper moment, to Christian Aboriginality. A branch does not hold on to the fruit when it is ripe, but lets it drop.

We need not imagine that Aboriginal delegates would find themselves out of place there. They would be quite in place. Then, out of this new faith-and-action current of their own, they could embark on a new evangelising of their people in global perspective. Returning to base, they would organise their own follow-through.

It is now a fact of history that the centre of gravity in Christian theology has moved, long since, from Europe.

Also noteworthy is the emergence of new voices, new orchestral instruments: Feminine theology, Black theology, Liberation theology, to name only the most significant.

This is perhaps the single most relieving feature of present world events.

But, it may be thought, is there not one theology only, the universal Gospel?

Every particularity needs its theology. Jesus is seen differently through white eyes and through black. The same Jesus, but differently seen. The American negro cry, 'Christ is black, baby', is perfectly true.

Again, the word of Jesus is heard differently by woman's ear and by man's. The same word, but differently perceived. 'God is woman' is perfectly true.

To this fact of new particular theologies appearing, must be added that other: Vatican II's advice to lay persons that they engage in theology and illumine it with their own lay Christian light (Past. Constit. on the Church in the Modern World, §§43 and 62) has been heeded and carried out. The 'professional theologian' no longer speaks alone, nor from a rostrum.

These are two developments of far-reaching significance, both of them clearly observable in the proceedings of the ETFA yearly conferences. In them, a re-juvenated Church appears, amazingly, as having effected, in a short few critical years, through circumstances so tragic and agonising, a most timely domestic coup, leaving traditional Roman centrality in better equilibrium (somewhat) than before, and unloosing in the process fresh, at times boisterous, winds of change.

From their first meeting as an independent theological venture, the ETFA (most of whose members are non-professionals) declared their intention of constructing their own theology to fit their own Asian region. They were determined not to import any brand of theology from elsewhere, though they would listen to the universal voice in all its variety. And indeed, one has only to consider that Christians in Asia are in a 2% minority to realise that the Asian theology is going to be, of necessity, quite distinct.

It is there the Australian Christian Aborigine belongs. That is, at present, his Christian 'Sitz im Leben'.

As for us white Australians, we must have the grace and tact, just now, to take a back seat; to be enablers at this delicate juncture, and, in the charity of Christ, to practise at being receivers of what may be, at first, a Word of unfamiliar sound.

Our Christian ministry to local Aboriginal communities which desire it would continue in the meantime. Only, from now on, much more would be left to Aboriginal Christian initiative.

BETTER WITH . . . OR WITHOUT?

Four years' ministry in Kununurra, WA

NOEL McMASTER CSsR

ANYONE WHO WEARS GLASSES will be familiar with the eye specialist's question 'better with . . . or without?' as he tries to find the lens that will provide the best vision – for now. Over the past four years in the town of Kununurra, WA, the same question seems to describe my experience of ministering to the local Aboriginal population. The task seems to have been to find the right 'lens' to enable these people to see what other Christians see through their own more or less finely ground religious and cultural lenses. (Kununurra has a predominantly white population with about four to five hundred Aboriginal people living in and around the town, some in town houses, some in centres such as Mirima village – the Reserve – and some in camps. The Aboriginal people I write about in this article are mostly full-bloods not living in town houses.)

To amplify this experience I would like to refer to the following occurrences. Four years ago the parish liturgy was celebrated in the local town church and seemed to be a mixture. Aboriginal people contributed weekly two songs in an Aboriginal language and occasionally (e.g. at Easter) performed a dance. The greater remaining part of the Eucharistic celebration was the Roman liturgy of the Mass. Even though tourists from time to time voiced their enthusiasm (it was great; we've never experienced anything like that before), in my judgement the mixture did justice to neither tradition. So it was decided to promote a liturgy for the Aboriginal people on their own ground away from the Church, in a suitable shady spot near their homes. We used the Mass liturgy composed by Father Kevin McKelson, SAC, of La Grange Mission, WA. As yet there is no final answer to our question 'better with . . . or without?' The Mass continues with mostly women participating; the role of men remains ambiguous; and children are elusive!

Something similar has happened with these children in the parish school of predominantly Aboriginal enrolment. Religious instruction continues in a familiar western context with perhaps a small borrowing from PNG and local Aboriginal content such as reference to Dreamtime stories and the use of language equivalents like 'Father in heaven'. But there are no more schoolroom Masses, the hope being that children would naturally join their relations in the new local liturgies. That there is no noticeable breakthrough in participation is probably explained by loose and broken family structures, and by the intangible but real persistence of traditional

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mythology and psychology. Young boys have occasionally been absent from school because they were with elders and learning the beginnings of the 'law'. (The Catholic school experience here, ironically, may not be unlike the experience in many a government school where religious instruction is of dubious validity due to the lack of individual home support and reinforcement.)

A third more fundamental development concerns the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. A glance at the baptismal register shows that there have been boom periods of evangelisation and baptising over the past fifteen years. This sacramental praxis has slowed almost to a halt and, with reference especially to younger people, for the following reasons. Young previously baptised and Catholic-school educated people are in the main detached from continuing sacramental life. No effective means of assisting their perseverance has been found. Over the last couple of years some effort was made to link confirmation with the process of Aboriginal initiation, at least in the case of young boys in the school, but without success. Aboriginal initiation for such boys is still significant, even though in Kununurra their lives could hardly be described as tribal.

But though these efforts have produced little visible fruit there may still be room for further exploration. For example, the suggestion is made by Dionisio Borobio that there be a 'universalisation of a catechumenate before confirmation in adolescence, which presupposes a rearrangement of the overall initiation process in which baptism could be delayed at will and the eucharist in the adult assembly would come to be seen as the culmination of the process.'¹ This suggestion is founded on the spiritual possibilities that belong to any rite of passage, in this instance the making of young men, or in other instances the physical and biological maturation of girls. At these moments or stages in life the possible deepening of one's own mystery goes hand in hand with the possible opening out to the source and ground of all mystery, the Other.² Maximisation of this moment is our present concern. Better with . . . or without? is still our question.

All of the above I have described as a search for the right lens to slip into the Aboriginal spectacles so that they could see what we believe is the truth that sets all people free. Behind it, I would like to think, was a conviction that God's grace was broad and the Aboriginal mind's eye, being quite sound, would in the end see this truth.

Aboriginal Religion – Discontinuity

In this context I believe the recent dialogue in *Nelen Yubu* between Fathers Dan O'Donovan and Martin Wilson has been very timely.³ Pastoral implications of the dialogue have emerged as matters for further discussion at the Broome Diocese's Conference of Priests. What may have seemed an ethereal exchange between a hermit/contemplative and a philosopher/anthropologist has been at least for this parish priest an occasion of clarification and renewed hope. I would like to explain why by referring to my own reading and reflection before returning to the opening question 'better with . . . or without?'

Gradually over the last four years I have inclined to the view that Aboriginal religion, as religion, i.e. man's expression in symbol, myth, and ritual of the meaning of life's beginning, progress, and future, is a closed system, the status quo about which Father Dan wrote.

Maddock explains in *The Australian Aborigines* that the Aboriginal plan of life is believed by them to have been laid down during The Dreaming. Subsequently there may have been occasional interventions by the original creative powers. But generally language and social order, songs and rites and customs are attributed to those powers who created *in the beginning* and who stand over against man. Any place for human creativity in culture, and for tradition as the

means of transmitting this culture, is excluded. To this extent Aborigines have in respect of their culture (including religion) a false consciousness.⁴ Their rites, accordingly, are an evocation of the imaginary, i.e. of their imagined view of the beginning of their world and the powers that surrounded it.⁵ Their only role is fidelity to the Dreaming.

With an interesting twist Eliade speaks of the Aborigines' need to live in a 'real world' by which he means an 'articulated, significant, resourceful land, formed, enriched and consecrated by Supernatural Beings'.⁶ He adds that man has assumed the responsibility of maintaining this world by communicating with the Dreamtime, i.e. by re-enacting his mythical history. If he fails in this responsibility the world will disintegrate.

Maddock seems to have concluded that the 'real' spoken of by Eliade is so precisely as religious, i.e. for faithful and conforming Aborigines who somehow in the course of time have developed a false consciousness. At any rate, as Stanner points out, life now for such as these is as it was for those in the beginning: 'human, all too human' with but one determined path to follow.⁷ 'The Dreamtime was a ground of consummation. The doctrine of the Dreaming is a sort of eschatology, a doctrine of final things which were also first things.'⁸ The Supernatural, primordial Beings, at first moulders of men and the landscape and then retiring and otiose, are apparently within the status quo of following up the Dreaming, the failure of which would be their failure too. There is no alternative.⁹ There seems to be no Other.

In this sense the Aboriginal religion seems to me to be a discontinuity, a falling away from the potential inherently contained in the mysteries and passages of life their religion has encompassed in its symbols, myths, and rituals. Such a falling away is glimpsed in what Father E.A. Worms presents on the one hand as essential features of Aboriginal religion, and on the other as probably incidental accretions. Hence the personal Sky Being is joined by secondary beings such as ancestors' spirits and hero spirits. Again, esoteric practices which exclude women are introduced.¹⁰ Whether or not the distinction: essential/probable incidental accretions, is valid, the examples given suggest the 'human, all too human' context in which religion as man's reaching out to God can build a closed windowless structure for itself in which a pale image of the God of faith who might have been is sent upstairs to languish.¹¹

Of course, such a general conclusion should not rule out the possibility of particular exceptions in religious belief and practice as they survive today. In Kununurra as no doubt in many other places it is difficult to verify just how much of what appears in the literature is actually found in situ. What follows should indicate that there may well be chinks in the Aboriginal religious structure allowing a promising flight of the Aboriginal religious spirit.

Grace and Self-Transcendence – Continuity

If, then, Aboriginal religion in general represents a discontinuity, a continuity is to be found in the potential that exists in the life of every human, spiritual person. Aboriginal men and women are no less human than anyone else, and following Karl Rahner's notion of grace, their capacity to transcend themselves in the spiritual activities of loving and caring, of burying and remembering, opens their lives on to an horizon at which the transcendent God can be touched in faith, even if, in Rahner's expression, anonymously.¹²

The ground for this view of grace is, according to Rahner, God's universal salvific will. God would have all men and women to be saved, and saved in Christ! It is the self-transcendence achieved supremely by Christ that makes possible and specifies all human self-transcendence which if genuine will lead to the ultimate of others, the Holy, the Wholly Other, the *Mysterium Tremens*, God, Father, Abba.

This view of grace would seem to be a positive and promising approach to Aboriginal mission today. It could fulfil the promise already present in the Aboriginal belief of the survival of the human spirit which, however, can be denied a true self-transcendence by being reincarnated, or by merging with the creative beings and spirits in the land of the dead.¹³ It could enhance and name the expressions of real Christ-like self-transcendence, their loving and caring and sharing, expressions that are threatened more and more as many drift into the worst of western ways, there to live and die deprived of any suggestion of the sacred.¹⁴

Possibilities of Graced, Religious Life

Such considerations bring us to the nitty gritty of every day life. Here in Kununurra, for example, we have the problem of catechising youngsters who as my predecessor as parish priest remarked, might stand at the school gate and throw a blade of grass to the wind to determine which camp it would be for that night. And whichever camp it might be, it is there that the girls of grade seven learn that Geraldine's new baby has the spirit of Wadi's old wife who died last year. It is in these camps that youthful males and females, many from our Catholic schools or missions, ignore their age-old marriage customs in bringing children into the world, and later hand them over to Grannies for upbringing and education, while they pursue a little of working and a lot of wassailing. Baptism at an early age for their children would in most cases be acceptable, likewise first communion at an appropriate age; and almost inevitable is the day that will initiate the process of making a young boy into a young man in the more or less traditional Aboriginal way.

The religious element in this life-style is adequately described as socio-cultural or popular religiosity, a remnant of ritual expression which often seems to survive due to a momentum generated in other days and now diminishing.¹⁵ It is as characteristic of Christianity as of the Aboriginal religious tradition, and in any tradition merits careful attention. Such religiosity may represent an irrepressible inclination to ritualise self-transcendence, especially at the times of human passage; birth, adolescence, marriage, death. How many today go public religiously only at these times?

In these areas of occasional socio-cultural religiosity (the request for baptism, the desire for first communion), there is room for much study. As a mere beginning, any approach would wisely take note of the healthy symbiosis suggested by Aidan Kavanagh.¹⁶ In the context of the universalised catechumenate mentioned earlier, this would mean that baptism, confirmation, and eucharist would always retain their uniquely Christic character and grace and symbolism. Any apt cultural symbols from the Aboriginal tradition would be better transplanted into Christian ritual rather than our conforming Christian liturgy to patterns detected in Aboriginal ritual. In the eucharistic liturgy, for example, Father Kevin McKelson's Mass represents at least a beginning of bringing suitable elements of language and rhythm into the Christian ritual of the Mass.

The temptation to follow the reverse pattern, as in rigidly attaching baptism, confirmation, eucharist to the Aboriginal rite of initiation (the making of a young man) will be avoided if it is remembered that the Christian sacraments of initiation are strictly speaking not rites of human passage at all.¹⁷ They are uniquely personal moments of grace which may occur before, during or after puberty or adolescence. This is not to forget, however, as previously noted, that human passage is well suited to the deepening of one's mystery and thus the quickening of grace. But whether Christian initiation and the human passage of puberty/adolescence coincide or not, the possible symbiosis is in this: an individual is baptised and admitted to the eucharist in a unique experience of grace that can well be encompassed in an indigenised sacramental liturgy. As a

Christian this person then passes through an appropriate (Aboriginal) rite of passage. In this way the Christian sacramental liturgy may well have been enriched, and the cultural rite of passage is Christianised by Christians passing through it.¹⁸

Somehow I suspect that what has just been said, though feasible, has moved too fast for the average person's occasional inclination towards religious ritual. Our promotion of popular religiosity cannot produce lasting fruit unless at the same time we grapple with the matrix of all genuine religious expression, the grace so essential for enduring 'worship in spirit and truth'. This brings us back to the 'supernatural existential' that Rahner speaks of and already referred to as an opening to the Other in faith. 'Human being is transcendence and at the same time an "awaiter" of God's word addressed to it in this world and in history.'¹⁹ Our greatest concern today is how to face and belong to this world in which people are waiting, and how to help them understand the ground of their occasional religiosity.

I can explain to some extent what I mean here by relating two events which happened this very day that I write. This morning I had arranged a meeting with some Aboriginal people to pray: one of their relatives had recently died. Our meeting was to follow a community council meeting, but as it turned out neither meeting took place. A third meeting concerning land had been arranged to take place some distance from Kununurra and with an ample supply of vehicles this meeting in the end drew most of the people to it. Then this afternoon I walked through our local White Gum Park and stopped to talk with a group of teenage Aboriginal lads who were a short distance from another group of slightly older lads. One of these latter suddenly approached me and with a series of colourful and sexually explicit expressions questioned my status as a priest. These two quite different experiences highlight the difficulty there is in relating to our people. Tomorrow I will probably reach the first group to some degree when we have the funeral . . . a rite of passage! yet sadly so undeveloped. The second group, the younger generation with all the complexes arising from idleness, alienation, and an occasional 'rumour of angels', will be harder to reach. And yet if we believe in the universal availability of grace there can be no turning away. 'After all,' as Roger Haight, S.J. says in *The Experience and Language of Grace*, 'anonymity is a very ambiguous state.' In the world of 'Word-awaiters' we are all called to deliver the word somehow.

Practicalities: Some Steps Forward, Some Marking Time

So far in this article there has been only one mention of the white population in our town. Perhaps it is here we could re-enter. Knowingly or not, we and our forebears have surely contributed to the making of our present confused nation. In Australia we have moved in and cramped and crippled another way of life. We have lately offered a crutch or two, but that is far short of invoking Christ's power to enable Aborigines to get up and walk tall again. And yet as Christians we would like to see that happen.

Our earlier mission history is often rightly credited with providing, metaphorically, an invaluable nursing service for those who have been so badly crippled. Now we need new plans and news ways of dealing with what in many respects has the appearance of a serious relapse, especially in the young I have mentioned.

How *do* we relate to these young boys/men and girls/women? Our western economic system is not going to be changed overnight to bring a wholesome feeling of belonging for all. Nor is the clock going to be turned back for a fresh start that will ensure the avoidance of all the mistakes and exploitation of the past. Lost life-supporting values of marriage, family, and kinship are not easily regained, nor necessarily restored exactly as they were before. There will be many more years yet of agonising trial and error, but my hope would be that Christian people like

those of the diocese of Broome could unite and use their resources and resourcefulness to reach the present generation of young Aboriginal people and those soon to join them. They are all, men and women, made for that equal dignity that would grow out of clearly seeing the grace of Christ already within them, but as yet glimpsed only out of the corner of one's spiritual eye (Haight).

Sometimes in particular places there seems reason for unalloyed hope. Such is to be seen in the continuing enthusiasm of groups from the Broome diocese who have benefited from the Daly River programme under the guidance of Father John Leary and Sister Mary McGowan. This is a programme of spiritual self-discovery and leadership, an integral part of which would surely be the recognition of God's grace (the supernatural existential) illuminating all that is good in a culture, all that expresses genuine self-transcendence, and that points to the Other who is nevertheless very close and redeeming in the person of Christ. Such hope is to be seen too in the efforts of those who encourage the above groups to continue to meet and interact with one another. Out of this may be born the indigenous lay movement of missionaries I have heard Father McKelson speak of, and from that an indigenous clergy . . . It is a promising and exciting act, if all the actors and actresses can put it together.

At other times and in other places one thinks with weariness rather than welcome of the procession of projects, programmes, and protests. At these times our only comfort may be the un-failing memory that the programme and protest of Christ finished with his death. To keep this memory alive, even implicitly, by accepting and sharing failure and frustration with all our people, and celebrating with the few its paradoxical hope in the Eucharist whenever possible, perhaps that is the best that can be presently hoped for.

Conclusion

And so to return to the metaphor with which I began. The spiritual eye of man can never be darkened. He may fashion a blurred lens for himself, and do it so thoroughly that it is almost like a cataract on the natural lens, rather than an opaque optical prescription. But whether it be blurred lens (Aboriginal religion) or ill-prescribed lens (many of our offerings), the power to see is still there. The Wilson-O'Donovan dialogue was a worthwhile exchange. I hope my contribution, very much of the G-P variety, might prompt further opinions, not the least of which would be those of Aboriginal men and women themselves. In the end they judge the relevance of my question 'Better with . . . or without?' If relevant, they are the ones to provide the answer.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Dionisio Borobio, 'The Four Sacraments of Popular Religiosity', p.97, in *Concilium; Liturgy and Human Passage*, Seabury Press, New York, 1979.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.92.
- 3 *Nelen Yubu*, Nos. 4, 5, 7.
- 4 Kenneth Maddock, *The Australian Aborigines, A Portrait of Their Society*, Penguin, 1974, p.129.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.131.
- 6 Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions, An Introduction*, Cornell University Press, 1973, p.66.
- 7 W.E.H. Stanner, 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' (1962), p.122, in *White Man Got No Dreaming: essays 1938-1973*, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1979.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.140.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.140.
- 10 Eliade, *op. cit.*, p.194-5.
- 11 On faith-religion, cf. John Thornhill, SM, 'Towards a Theology of the Good News', p.236-9, in the *Australasian Catholic Record*, July, 1979.

- 12 Roger Haight, SJ, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979, p.120.
- 13 Eliade, *op. cit.*, p.169.
- 14 D. O'Donovan, in *Nelen Yubu*, No. 7, p.34.
- 15 Borobio, *op. cit.*, p.86.
- 16 Aidan Kavanagh, in *Concilium* as above, note 1, 'Life Cycle Events, Civil Ritual, and the Christian', pp.21-2.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.16.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.22.
- 19 Haight, *op. cit.*, p.120.

BLACK AND WHITE: A CONFLICT OF ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES IN AUSTRALIA

EUGENE D. STOCKTON

Describing the Problem

ANTHROPOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA is chiefly concerned with Aboriginal people. But an anthropological fact which must be faced is the deep-seated frustration of white Australians, no matter how well-informed and well-intentioned, in the face of the 'Aboriginal problem' (or as Aborigines prefer to call it, the 'white man's problem'). This is the reaction found even among people quite free of racism, though racism in varying degrees compounds the problem in many parts of the community.

It is not simply the difference in culture and the attendant difference in value systems. Educated, sympathetic people can usually cope with cross-cultural situations. So, for example, Australian-born whites have had relatively little difficulty in accommodating to non-European migrants, among whom patterns of thought, religious beliefs and practices, domestic habits, priority of values, etc. differ markedly from those of the majority. I am suggesting that what Australian-born whites share with migrants, both European and non-European, but do not share with Aborigines, is something which is more basic than culture and can be seen as a major determinant of culture.

It is this factor, which, for want of a better term, I am labelling *economic perspective*. This signifies a total outlook, a world view or all-inclusive conceptual framework, which an individual adopts towards his environment in terms of how that environment supplies his needs and wants. Further reflection may suggest greater complexity, but at this stage I suggest three economic components, which, by their nature and varying importance in the total economic activity of a people, distinguish that people's basic attitude to the resources in their environment. Again, more suitable labels may be found for these components, but for the purposes of this presentation the concepts proposed are more important than the terms.

Subsistence activities are those engaged in providing for an individual and his dependents the basic necessities of life, such as food, drink, shelter, clothing. It is not necessary at this

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stage to distinguish between needs and wants, but it can be recognized that the expectation of a people of what makes for an adequate life will vary enormously according to the social and material development of a people or class. Rest might be considered part of this needful activity, but for the present it will not be included in this analysis as it is a constant in any way of life.

Liberal activities fill the remainder of the waking time left over from subsistence activities, and include leisure, religious ritual, education, display of skill or art, sport and play, sex, interpersonal communication and anything else which makes for quality of life. Inevitably, a society will rationalize some or all of these activities as needful, and within its economic thinking the boundary between subsistence and liberal activity will be blurred.

A third notion, which involves both subsistence and liberal activities, but which is more a way of thought affecting activities than an activity itself, is *storage strategies*, by which a people thinks ahead to provide for needs and wants in the future.

The Hunter-Gatherer Economy

The earliest form of economy is that of the hunter-gatherer. Subsistence activities consist in *culling resources readily available in the immediate environment*. Anthropologists' use of the word 'exploit' betrays a rather Western mentality and creates the faulty impression of an intent to extract all usable resources of a particular environment. In any balanced ecosystem, all forms of life are in a more casual relationship to each other, such that, when for any one species an item of diet becomes scarcer and more difficult to find, it is replaced by another which is more readily available. Balance is preserved by population control, effected by other predator species and perhaps by little-understood biological restraints within the species.

Hunter-gatherer man relates to his environment in the same way as other living forms. The time spent on subsistence activities will vary from good season to bad, but no more time can be spent on a given day than what is required to provide for the needs of the present. Liberal activities take up the rest of the time, which, by standards of other economies, is very extensive. This is well illustrated in the recent case study of the Yolngu (Altman 1979). Storage strategies are minimal, limited by the few available means of preserving food, and include increased ritual, totemic prohibition of certain foods, mobility of the clan to avoid depleting any one area of its resources, and the use of a wide range of food items. This appears to be the result of an instinctive and religiously conditioned sense of balance rather than an instance of forward-planning. Future thinking is not typical, at least by Western standards.

The above model is well described for the Australian context by Rhys Jones (1977:202) as

homeostasy, the balance between man and land which is so deeply imbedded within Aboriginal behaviour and lore, and which was the prime feature of his prehistory for three hundred centuries. Invention of a new tool can be seen as the cultural analogue of mutation, presenting new possibilities for society to choose or to discard. In Australia the choice was towards more time and not more food . . . The siphoning off of the man hours gained by the deployment of a new technology into non-productive activities can, in this context, be seen as a powerful homeostatic mechanism, ensuring that the labour thus released is not invested into some positive feed back system, whose result might at best be anarchic to the social order and, at worst, disastrous for the long term balance of the community to its resources.

The Economic Evolution of the West

The neolithic revolution is aptly named and must have been induced by powerful causes (population explosion, climatic change?) to have effected such a radical change in economic

thinking as found in pastoralist-agriculturalist society. Subsistence activities consisted chiefly in intensive exploitation of a single resource in confined spaces (e.g. cereals in a field, herds on defined range lands). To judge by ethnographic studies of the two types of society in their simplest state, the pastoralist-agriculturalist expended a far greater part of his day in productive work than the hunter-gatherer, leaving less time for liberal activities. However, the economic unit was no longer the family or clan (except for the nomadic pastoralist, who in any case was linked to a larger economic unit), but the village or city.

In this larger economic unit there is a division of interdependent activities: on the basis of a secure food production by the farmer, there is possible the freeing of other individuals for the production of various kinds of durable hardware (e.g. housing, pottery, metal goods, etc.) and the specialisation of others in liberal activities (e.g. priests, artists, rulers, warriors etc.). All share in a productive economy, but not all are productive. With developing civilisation, there are activities which are liberal from the point of view of the society (art, architecture, ornamentation, writing), but which from the point of view of the artisan are subsistence activities, a means of livelihood.

Distinctive of this economic revolution are the greatly extended possibilities of storage (cereals, processing of grapes and olives into long-lasting products, animals on the hoof, hardware, irrigation) and of accumulating wealth (not only the possession of stored products, but also of the means of production, such as lands, herds, slaves). Hence begins the disparity between rich and poor, such that equal effort on the part of the one and of the other can reap very unequal returns, and apparently so correlated that the wealth of the one derives largely from the productivity of the other. Excess wealth in turn is invested in further storage mechanisms or in liberal activities (the source of subsistence for craftsmen and artisans). More effective means of storage results in the lifting of the natural constraints on extractive and productive activity, and in the threat of exhausting resources in a way not possible before.

The development of civilisation witnessed to the magnification of these related processes (empires, tribute and tax, large scale production, international trade, artistic development, world religious with splendid apparatus, rich and poor locked in self-perpetuating classes each with a distinctive culture). The invention of money profoundly affected the storage strategies (portable wealth, ease of exchange, borrowing on the future, investment) and became itself a self-reproducing resource. The Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions are the natural sequel in the working out of an economic idea. We are yet to find out where we are being led by computer technology, nuclear energy, permanent pools of chronic unemployment and industrial oligopoly.

In western cultures these economic processes have been differently enshrined in the quasi-religious ideologies of capitalism and communism. Despite their mutual hostility, both systems have in common the primacy of economic values, the acknowledged dynamism of conflict and the pragmatic bending of their respective dogmas (e.g. legislated protection of vested interests from the effects of supply and demand, Soviet competition in international trade along capitalistic lines). *Competition* is so much part of the system that it is found, not only in commercial life, but also in democratic processes (government versus opposition), judicial processes (prosecution versus defence), education and careers (rat race to the top) and sport. It does not do to suggest that competing enterprises are like two equal and opposed forces cancelling each other out in waste of energy, that there is more to sport than winning, that new nations opting for consensus-operated one-party systems may be just as democratic in their own way as ours, that striking unions are flexing economic muscle no more than big business to increase returns in a *laissez-faire* system.

The above is not meant to be an indictment of western civilisation and of its economic base. It is to show how much economic history lies behind us. We are the products of 7,000 years of action-packed economic development. Even 'developing' nations, trying to catch up with the 'developed' nations, have found that the short-cuts of some processes, which cost European nations centuries of agony to grow through, have resulted in severe socio-economic stresses for their peoples.

The white Australian, if he reflects at all on his economic outlook, considers it blandly as the natural way of doing things, totally ignorant of the organic growth over millenia which makes his perspective appear natural. Confronted by the Aboriginal, living in his cities and towns, speaking his language, outwardly conforming to society's ways and dictates, often little more tanned than the national ideal, he is perplexed by an economic outlook that is so perversely opposite to his own. It is himself he understands so little.

Aborigines in a White Milieu

Over some 40,000 years, Aboriginal society evolved but slowly to the delicate balance with its bush environment which prevailed at the coming of the first British colonists. Such technological changes as did occur were seen less as an advantage to greater productivity (which was not needed on a day to day basis), but as providing more time for the really self-enriching activities:

(they) invested the advantages of the new tools into the realms of the ego, the mind and the soul.

(Jones 1977:202)

Even before the coming of white men, there were contacts with Macassan and Papuan traders, but this resulted in minimal influence on the indigenous people. I propose it as a truism that, in cross-cultural contact, change is resisted rather than welcomed, and that one culture is likely to adopt only those elements in the other which *it sees as conducive to the economic goals than perceived* (Stockton 1977:216). To cite two examples:

- a) Aborigines readily adopted, even in advance of white contact, European tomahawks, as well as scrap metal and glass for the manufacture of traditional implements (Reynolds 1978:63-4);
- b) American Indians quickly seized on the advantage of the European's gun and horse for hunting and warfare.

My work as a chaplain among urban Aborigines convinced me that more Aboriginal domestic culture and economic thinking persists among detribalised Aborigines than is generally recognised. Contact with European culture has effected changes in material items of diet, clothing, housing and transport, and in the disruption of important cultural values through the loss of land, religion and the means of subsistence, as settlers occupied all usable space. The history of contact between the two races was not such as to favour a flow from one to the other of deeper, more positive cultural values, or to make up significantly for those lost. Hence, despite disintegration, remnants of tribal culture have persisted, handed down from household to household, since almost every Aboriginal who identifies as such (no matter what racial mixture has occurred) has come from an Aboriginal household. In each generation the most powerful cultural influence, apart from current consumer items and what might be expected from poverty culture, has been the Aboriginal household. Each Aboriginal household stands in an unbroken chain of households linking the present with the tribal past. This unbroken continuity has resulted in a people, even those accustomed to urban life, who possess a distinctive mentality, self-expression and value system, more at variance with the general white society than obtains between any of its component migrant groups.

NELEN YUBU

A study of Aborigines living in Sydney (Stockton 1972:45-5) made, among others, the following observations on their economic status and value system:

the Aboriginal household in Sydney, although it often appears to be alienated from its non-aboriginal neighbours and community structures, does not operate in a vacuum, but actively participates within a kinship group involving other households in Sydney and/or in the country area from which a prominent member of the household took origin. Reserve and storage mechanisms are present within this community, . . . (i.e. in terms of) visiting parents with a strong city-country axis, care of the children by relatives often for long periods, sharing accommodation with visiting families, exchange of goods, willing support of sick and aged (which) are significant components of the global situation of a Sydney household. As Rowley notes, 'the duty of hospitality may tend to prevent the accumulation of capital for investment in domestic comfort and security, education, etc. The result is a cushion against poverty, at the expense of the ambitious individual.' The Aboriginal, typically, lives in the present, gratifying present needs and wants, and does not show the European concern for forward planning, budgetting, saving and other such future-orientated behaviour.

To the frequent charges of laziness and of the 'walkabout instinct', the same study continued:

Laziness is basically a lack or weakness of motivation. If one is doing a job, especially of a routine nature, without understanding how it fits into a total effort one naturally loses interest . . . The European can adjust himself to an uninteresting work-round by the thought of the pay-packet and what it will obtain for him; for an Aboriginal with a lower appreciation of material goods this motivation does not operate as strongly. As for the 'walkabout instinct', all workers need holidays to relieve the dehumanising tedium of work, but whereas the European is conditioned to looking forward to his regular vacation, the volatile, present-oriented Aboriginal is inclined to terminate his employment on a sudden impulse . . . Again it is basically a question of interest, and of its opposite, boredom.

(Stockton 1972:56-7)

Without using Elkin's slighting term 'intelligent parasitism' (1974:364-70), I propose that the economic outlook of the modern, urbanised, part-blood Aboriginal (and even more that of his tribal or reserve-dwelling kin) is still that of the hunter-gatherer, but in a changed environment. He feels no compunction in 'culling what is readily available' in a modern welfare state, but he is not drawn to contributing to the productivity of that state, to hedging his future by normal storage strategies or to responding to the forms of economic motivation which prevail among whites. But the picture is not simply one of a 'happy savage in the city'. The media have increased his expectations of the quality of life, particularly of material goods, expectations which most often lead to frustration or debt. His self-image is confused, because while following a course which seems natural to him (and nothing in 200 years has happened to change his economic goals), he is aware that the dominant culture attaches a stigma to his role.

Are there no solutions to the problem? Certainly, none that are quick and total. It is a beginning, though, to recognise the differences in economic perspective of both groups, to uphold the validity of the two outlooks and to resist applying the value judgements operative in the one to the life style engendered by the other. Without being judgmental, one can seek practical ways by which these people can find a useful, self-fulfilling niche in what is, after all, a pluralist society. Although Australian society, like any other in the western world which has been shaped by the same economic history, is one geared to productivity, not all of its members are productive in economic terms. I am not, for one; nor is the sportsman, the artist, the scholar, the gambler, except in indirect ways. Bigots apart, our society has been humorously tolerant of

the bohemian in the past and of alternative life styles of present, recognising that such elements add to the richness and freshness of society, by their very revolt against accepted standards.

It is not generally practicable to produce in one generation an economic outlook which has taken millenia to evolve among whites, but, rather than demanding such a radical change, it may be possible to find a place for difference in general society. It is not for agents of that society working close to Aborigines to try to change people, but to support the individual to determine his own role, a role that is satisfying to him in terms of his history and culture and which is also valued by society at large. Much can be done to enable the Aboriginal to reach the same delicate balance with his new environment, as he attained in the old. At the same time, our society would gain enormously from the release of the sheer *person power* of the Aboriginal.

A Prophetic Challenge

To the Christian, especially to one whose Church has interested itself in questions of social justice for over a century, Aborigines pose a prophetic challenge. The very frustration he feels in the face of the dark people drives him to look again at the economic assumptions of his society in the light of his religious background. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, sets out for the Covenant People a positive, healthy economic perspective (B. Gordon 1975:70-103) — how much is it possible today and even normative for Christians? Is greed ('profit incentive'), besides being a dehumanising force, the only economic motivation possible, or can biblical notions of service and stewardship be given a try?

Should people's efforts be rewarded on the basis of supply and demand (filling wants) or on the basis of their real value to society (filling needs)? In other words, is the work of a nurse, teacher or policeman of more value, and therefore to be better rewarded, than that of a disco operator? What is the value of entrepreneurial services, and in which areas? What are the ethics of artificial promotion and advertising, and how do they affect the atmosphere of honesty in society? Has the question of usury been satisfactorily settled by the medieval Schoolmen (B. Gordon 1975:187-235)? Islam, whose sacred book also forbids the concept of wealth creating wealth through interest, has developed a modern banking system in accord with its religious ideals. Can we investigate this possibility too?

With the growing complexity of economic relationships and operations, with chronic fiscal problems, and with the decline of moral restraint in business, can we afford any longer the non-intervention of the state in the market place? Can industrial operations bigger than sovereign states, spanning oceans, affecting international relationships and controlling millions of workers for the greater part of their waking lives, be left accountable only to oligarchic managements? Without suggesting nationalisation of all but strategic industries, is it wise to leave the storage, distribution and information mechanisms of a nation in the hands of a few private individuals? *Pace* media propaganda, is monopolistic control of economy (accountable to shareholders) really better than state control (accountable to voters)? In a free enterprise system, how many people are in fact *free* to determine their working lives and allowed to be *enterprising*; and do they find it more satisfying working for a faceless management than for an elected body? Is large scale production really the most efficient, not to speak of the most human, way (Schumacher 1974)? And are economic questions the most urgent in the nation, anyway?

This is not meant to be a political manifesto, but a call to church people not to sanction without question the status quo. The Christian tradition has a wealth of experience and reflection to bring to bear on a socio-economic regime which is already lurching into an unknown future of drastic change. It also has a divine call to work for salvation in this world, as well as

in the next. A small group of people, poor, but defiant in their difference to the economic thinking of general society, could be a God-given catalyst to the Christians of one nation to rethink the system to which they have become habituated.

Begun as an anthropological analysis of white reaction to black, and of the economic basis of the conflict between the two, this has also been the record of how one white man found himself disturbed by the Aboriginal presence and how this disturbance led him to question himself and his society.

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NYMU – NUNGALINYA COLLEGE

ORIENTATION COURSE

31 MARCH – 16 JULY

Nungalinya College (a joint Anglican-Uniting Churches training and resource centre) and NYMU are offering an orientation course in the middle of 1982 for mission staff and people working in Aboriginal communities, especially those without previous experience of the Aboriginal social environment.

The course will cover seven weeks, but will be formed of four (4) separate modules, all of which or any of which or any combination of which may be taken.

Course Description

First Module: Aboriginal People and the Australian Scene

31 May – 11 June

A two-week full time course for people coming to work in an Aboriginal community or who want to know more about how Aboriginal communities relate to the wider Australian society.

The content of the course will depend to some extent on the interests of those who attend. However, at least some of the following topics will be covered:

- Aboriginal affairs policy – government and church;
- Land Rights legislation;
- The role of Government agencies;
- The role of Aboriginal agencies;
- Aborigines and mining companies;
- Aborigines and the pastoral industry;
- Do's and don'ts in an Aboriginal community.

Limit: 20 students.
Co-ordinator: Murray Johnson
Fee: \$40

Second Module: Cultural Orientation

14 – 25 June

A two-week full time course for people who wish to become familiar with present day Aboriginal culture.

First week:

- Social factors, eg. kinship systems, marriage systems,
- social organization (moieties, sections, etc.), economy,
- social control, land owning and use.

NELEN YUBU

Second week:

Religious culture – belief (mythology, nature of man, spirits, land, social groups); ritual (initiatory, funerary, particular rites); shamanism; relationship with Christianity.

Limit: 20 students
Co-ordinator: Martin Wilson MSC
Fee: \$40

Third Module: Learning an Aboriginal language

A one-week course on the method of language learning.

Limit: 15 students
Co-ordinator: Michael Christie
Fee: \$20

Fourth Module: Gupapuyngu

A two-week course in Gupapuyngu, a language of NE Arnhem Land. It is strongly suggested that those wishing to do this course should also apply for the Third Module if they have had no previous linguistic training.

Limit: 15 students
Co-ordinator: Michael Christie
Fee: \$40

As the fourth module is not practical for staff from Catholic Missions, Nelen Yubu will offer an alternative course during this time on aspects of Catholic Missiology, with particular reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

Enrolment

A number of enrolment forms will be (or will have been) posted to persons and places likely to be interested. Further forms and information can be obtained by contacting *either*:

The Registrar
Nungalingya College
P.O. Box 40371
Casuarina NT 5792

or:

The Director
Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit
P.O. Box 40794
Casuarina NT 5792

The fees for the courses are as noted. However if accommodation is sought at Nungalingya College (there is room for about 18 people during the time of the course), the accommodation fee, meals included, is an extra \$80 a week.

Other Joint Courses

The Director of the Community Studies department at Nungalingya College, Rev. Murray Johnson, and NYMU are in the process of planning some other special workshops, eg. a workshop of pastors of various churches in Aboriginal communities on the theme of initiation,

Aboriginal and Christian. This could be held in the week beginning Monday 13 September or the following week. A possible location (yet to be negotiated with those concerned) would be the Daly River Centre.

It would be good if any pastors likely to be interested in such a course would let either Murray Johnson or myself know. We would keep them informed.

Other Nungalingya College Courses

Apart from those described here, other Nungalingya College courses can be provided by arrangement. These may be held in Darwin or in the community making the request, depending on the nature of the course and the numbers of prospective participants.

Any of the topics discussed in the First and Second Modules of the Orientation Course can become Modules for shorter, separate courses.

Other subjects that could be explored include:

- History of race relations in the Northern Territory;
- Social analysis;
- Community organization;
- Organizing projects;
- Christian perspectives on development;
- Using the media;
- Alcohol abuse;
- Styles of community work.

Only a few topics could be handled in any one year, but the same topic could be treated in various locations.

For further details please contact:

The Registrar
Nungalingya College
P.O. Box 40371
Casuarina, 5792

Fees listed are *tuition fees only*.

Full board at Nungalingya College is \$80 per week.

Nungalingya Community Development Courses for Aboriginal People

CD 1. <i>Styles of Community Work</i>	15 – 19 March
CD 2. <i>Aborigines and the Law</i>	22 March – 2 April
E. 1. <i>Business Paperwork</i>	19 – 23 July
E. 2. <i>Darwin Resource Agencies</i>	26 – 30 July
CD 3. <i>Economic Development</i>	2 – 6 August
CD 4. <i>Financial Management</i>	9 – 20 August
E. 3. <i>Public Speaking to a White Audience</i>	23 – 27 August
E. 4. <i>Communication Technology</i>	30 August – 3 September
CD 5. <i>Alcohol Abuse</i>	11 – 22 October
CD 6. <i>Project Planning</i>	25 – 29 October

Departments at Nungalinya College

Beside the Community Development department, Nungalinya College conducts courses in two other departments: *Language Studies* (courses in English as a second language for Aboriginal people, courses in methodology and in Gupapuyngu for non-Aborigines) and *Theological Studies* (at Certificate of Theology and Diploma of Theology levels).

At the moment student accommodation at Nungalinya College consists of six houses used by Aboriginal families (some 32 persons, children included) and a student block that can accommodate 30 people (three beds to a room). There are seven people doing the Diploma of Theology course, which constitutes ministerial training for the Uniting Church and is a part of such training for the Anglican Church. There are about twelve doing the 'Church Leaders' Course', i.e. Certificate of Theology level. Three people are doing the English courses full time, and most wives of men doing the Church Leaders' Course are themselves doing some English language studies.

M. J. WILSON MSC.

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