

## THE INTRUDING GOSPEL

### The Gospel and (Aboriginal) Culture

#### Course Content.

Study One 29/7/96

Introduction

Study Two 5/8/96

Culture and Christian Theology

Study Three 12/8/96

The Past: Part One, Two and Three.

Study Four 19/8/96

The present: Part One.

Study Five 26/8/96

The present: Part Two.

Study Six 2/9/96

The present: Part Three.

Study Seven 9/9/96

Guest Speakers

Study Eight 16/9/96

Eschatology

Study Nine 23/9/96

Summary

## Term Assignment for Christian Workers School

Select one of the following topics for a two thousand word essay. Use footnotes and give references.

- 1) What was the context of Djininyini Gondara's term "Aboriginal Pentecost". Discuss the Biblical validity of the term.
- 2) Briefly identify the ways that non-Aboriginal people could minister to an Aboriginal fellowship in the 1990's. Then attempt to put yourself in an Aboriginal persons shoes and consider the areas of tension which such a ministry could cause.
- 3) Using John Harris's book *One Blood*, as your principal source give your understanding of the history of the beginnings, growth and present form of the Church among the Aboriginal people.
- 4) Using biblical and historical evidence consider the ways in which the non-Aboriginal Church been part of the development of the Aboriginal Church.

### Recommended Reading

Attwood, Bain. Ed' 1996. In The Age Of Mabo. Allen & Unwin.

Berndt, R.& C. 1992. The World of the First Australians. Aboriginal Studies. Canberra.

Donovan, Vincent. 1982. Christianity Rediscovered. S.C.M. Press. London.

Flood, Josephine, 1983. Archaeology of the Dreamtime. Collins. Sydney.

Hart, Max. 1996. Story of Fire, Continued. NCP. Adelaide.

Harris, John 1990. One Blood, Albatross Books. Australia.

Mattingley, Christabel. Survival In Our Own Land. Hodder and Stroughton, ALDAA. Adelaide.

Reynolds, Henry. Any of his works are of good value.

## STUDY ONE.

# THE INTRUDING GOSPEL

## The Gospel and (Aboriginal) Culture

An Aboriginal lady confronted me some time ago with the question;

“what color will I be in heaven ?” “Pure white and glorified” I responded, and she retorted “what’s the matter with black?”

Behind this question is a vast untouched field for consideration. Being made in the image of God is more than individualism and more even than the coming together of a man and a woman in marriage, it is a reference to corporate humanity. Just as God is a communal being so too is humanity made in His image. This means that humanity is cultural by virtue of creation and not the fall. Culture therefore must relate to our promised glory and ultimate recreation as it relates to our original glory at creation. For this reason it needs to be firmly based in the eternal council of God.

With this insight, contextualisation, as distinct from syncretism, is not simply an expedience of missiological practice it is an essential component of honouring God by dignifying his created image.

Such an insight would have enabled me to say authoritatively to my Aboriginal friend, not only will she be black in glory but she will be perfect Aboriginal in glory and that God himself will be glorified in her Aboriginality.

### Personal Introduction

My experience with the Aboriginal Church began when I moved with my family to Gerard Reserve in the Riverland of South Australia. This was to provide a holiday for the resident missionary, the Rev. Laurie Reece A.M.<sup>1</sup> The initial four week period was greatly extended when Rev. Reece suffered a heart attack. After two years it was evident that philosophical differences with the mission would soon make it necessary for us to leave. However I was able to continue working with the same people as the District Welfare Officer for the Aboriginal Services section of Offenders' Aid and Rehabilitation Services in the Riverland of South Australia. After three years in this position I became Pastor of the Baptist Fellowship in Berri, South Australia. I was privileged to minister among Aboriginal people in the Riverland, in various capacities, over an eight year period.

More recently, through working with Max Hart<sup>2</sup> to publish the second edition of his book entitled, *A Story of Fire, Continued*, my involvement has been rekindled and extended to include Aboriginal people from many parts of Australia. In this capacity I had an opportunity to contact and interview leaders of the Church among Aboriginal people, with particular focus on those

---

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Reece is an Ordained Baptist Minister and a qualified anthropologist whose work has been recognized in the USA. Some years ago he was appointed as the advisor on Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth heads of Government conference in Melbourne. He was awarded the Order of Australia for his years of service amongst the Aboriginal people of Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Max Hart was Senior Lecturer in Primary Education, Western Teachers' College, Adelaide, South Australia, and the founding principal of the Aboriginal Education unit at Underdale Campus of the University of South Australia. He is also the author of “A Story of Fire (Aboriginal Christianity)” 1988, “Kulila, on Aboriginal Education”, 1974, “A History of Education amongst full-blood Aborigines in South Australia.” Thesis for M.Ed. 1970. He is now in retirement and writing a second edition to his book “A Story of Fire”.

already referred to in the book.

While fulfilling this responsibility I began to interview other Aboriginal leaders who were not related to the book but whose story needed to be told. These interviews have contributed to my own appreciation of the Aboriginal Church and to the development of an oral history library for future research.

## Foundation principles

The background for this work includes interviews with over eighty Aboriginal leaders. All these leaders have a good grasp of the history of Aboriginal and non—Aboriginal Christian relationships and although they may not have been able to hide their frustrations; they all expressed love for their denominational heritage and/or umbrella organization. This is in spite of the cultural blunders, insults and atrocities, in which the Church has been - and through ignorance and apathy, possibly is still - involved, the Aboriginal people have maintained their love for the bearers of Good News.<sup>3</sup> The Aboriginal Christian leaders themselves are no doubt responsible for this. They appeared to be quiet, strong and confident in their faith and responsibilities. It was not uncommon for the people to be fluent in three or more languages (not simply dialects) and this showed them to be skilled and talented people.

This work is an overview and is not a definitive statement of the Christian Church among the Aboriginal people of Australia. The records and observations upon which it is based are only snap-shots of a constantly moving panorama of activity. The following thoughts, therefore, are personal reflections. They are my subjective response to a cross-cultural experience as I was drawn in by confrontation to active participation with worshipping people.

A further significant fact serves as a precautionary warning to any who believe they have the answer to the so-called “Aboriginal problem”. Paternalistic and condescending attitudes fail to do justice to the complexities and pain suffered by all concerned. It lumps all Aboriginal people together as though there were no internal cultural, racial, tribal or any other distinctions within Australian Aboriginal peoples. In fact, prior to European occupations they were a multitude of nations (or people groups) which were clearly defined separate entities who had only “negotiated” interaction or war<sup>4</sup>. For this reason it must be stressed that what might be said about one group within Australia may be quite wrong for another.

It is presumptuous to think of accurately assessing the depth and vitality of the church in a community with no personal knowledge or interaction with the people especially when there is an obvious cultural difference. A two or three day visit or quick phone call, does not allow one to know or be known, or gain a true insight. Therefore if anything of value is achieved it is entirely due to the grace and openness of the Aboriginal leaders themselves.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> One recent example of this. An ABC television documentary, screened in Adelaide in 1995, was about the resealing of Mapoon in North Queensland. The Presbyterian Church closed the mission when Comalco's mining lease was renewed in the early 1960s. The people returned from a hunting trip to find their homes in flames. They were arrested and relocated at various other mission stations in the Top End. The land title has recently been returned to the community as the traditional owners of the area, and the first thing they did was establish a Church. The leader interviewed stated it was God's land before and it is God's land again. John Ham's gives an account of this history in *One Blood* p. 495f.

<sup>4</sup> Blainey, *A Land Half Won*. p. 88f. Blainey writes of evidence of tribal wars to acquire territory and secure against drought. He states 'it is possible that many tribes suffered more deaths through warfare in the eighteenth century than they suffered through warfare with the British colonists in the nineteenth century'. Evidence he has gathered shows that a death rate due to war of up to two in every six hundred people is not impossible. One justification (sic) often given for colonisation was that British rule would give the people peace in place of tribal warfare, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> To quote Elders of the Groote Eylandt Church 'A you come again you must stay for at least two weeks or you will not be able to know us”.

## Definitions

### Aborigine

This term, like so many terms used in the field of Aboriginal studies, is a European one. It comes from the latin *ab origine* meaning “from the beginning” and is used to refer to the original inhabitants of a place (any place). I was instructed by a missionary of long standing (of the “new school”) that the correct term is “Aborigine” and not “Aboriginal” (unless the grammar demands it). However, every indigenous person with whom I spoke, referred to themselves and others as Aboriginal. This does not mean that all Aboriginal people argue this way but it was certainly my experience. Anne Pattel-Gray explains the validity of the term Aboriginal as opposed to Aborigine,

“The indigenous people of Australia are best described categorically and distinctively as ‘the Aborigines’. Similarly the aborigines of Canada are ‘the Eskimos’ or ‘the Inuits,’ and the aborigines of Europe are ‘the Lapps’. Therefore ... we will use the word ‘Aboriginal’ as a proper noun, ‘Aborigines’ as a plural noun, and Aborigine as an adjective”.

She goes on later in her book to deal with the significance of the title and its validity in relation to government legislation<sup>6</sup>.

### Aboriginal identity

For the people who stand outside the Aboriginal community and make arbitrary judgments, this is a contentious issue, but the individuals being judged probably have a keen sense of identity, although there may be deep struggles on a corporate or community level. The question of Aboriginality becomes significant when Europeans assume the right to control funds which they believe are only for Aboriginals by virtue of the good graces of the European community.<sup>7</sup> Aboriginals are then forced to justify their racial identity. This is the reverse of what was required only as recently as the mid- 1960’s when the Aboriginal people were required to prove their ability to live as white people.

There is another level at which the issue of Aboriginality needs to be considered and that has to do with anthropology and essentialism<sup>8</sup>; which deals with a peoples intrinsic self-identity. What does it mean for an Aboriginal to be Aboriginal? and is Aboriginality a concept rooted in the traditional past?

It is the intention of this work to show that the identity of humanity generally, and each individual specifically, is bound up with the cultural expression given by, and reflective of, the Triune God of grace and that therefore the issue of essentialism is primarily theological and not anthropological.

The Church among Aboriginal people. In 1967 and 1970 secular authorities stated:

“For all the effort and money that has been devoted to the conversion of Aborigines, whether in the city or outback, there have in fact been very few converts.”<sup>9</sup>

“There is little evidence to show that its objects of the conversion of Aboriginal people to Christianity

---

<sup>6</sup> Pattel-Gray. *Through Aboriginal Eyes*. pp. xvi, and 48.

<sup>7</sup> Kraemer. *Religion and the Christian Faith*. Kraemer gives wise counsel to Western mission bodies on the issue of their financial obligations to fledgling churches. He explains that since the Western cultural structures which the West imports with its Gospel are portrayed as essential components of the Gospel therefore it has an obligation to provide Western support to maintain them. Kraemer also explains that, lack of financial stability and autonomy in so called, Third-World churches, must not be made a measure of spiritual maturity.

<sup>8</sup> Essentialism is dealt with at greater length in chapter on Salvation history.

<sup>9</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 242.

has been achieved.”<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that such assessments are wrong.<sup>11</sup> The Christian Gospel has born, and is bearing, much fruit in the form of a robust Church among the Aboriginal people. However the term “Aboriginal Church” needs some clarification. If it refers to the body of Christ as it pertains to Aboriginal people (meaning the whole of Australia’s indigenous race) then it is valid, however it is not an accurate term if used in any other way; there is no “Aboriginal Church” per se. The body of Christ among Aboriginal people reveals the same diversity as it does among non-Aboriginal people - both inter and intra-denominationally. The same fundamental realities which assure the one of its identity in Christ are present in the omen lle same variety of secondary beliefs and practises which form the pluriformity of the church are present in both. Although such diversity is readily evident, the abundance of similarities, is more so. This fact forces one to acknowledge the reality of the Church among Aboriginal people which is obviously and necessarily Aboriginal.<sup>12</sup>

## Anthropological Terms

There are several terms in use which have various and limited degrees of acceptance among Aboriginal leaders. Terms such as such as tribes, tribal confederacy groups, clans, moities, myalls and “hordes” will appear from time to time in this work, however I have attempted to avoid them because there is an increasing movement away from their use by the Aboriginal people and the anthropological community is beginning to question their validity. The people are beginning to realise their inherent unity as Aboriginals and so concepts like Aboriginal nations and language groups are gaining acceptance. Terms like “ancient” and “primitive” are discouraged because of the associated ideas of static and unchanging and unchangeable, semi-evolved or simple

Terms like “dreamtime” or “the dreaming” have been used regularly by Europeans and Aboriginals in the past but are now losing their acceptability. Terms like spear, wommera, corroboree, kangaroo have been applied universally by Europeans but in fact they belonged to specific Aboriginal people who lived in the immediate vicinity of the first settlers. Many terms are used by Europeans when talking to or about Aboriginal people and often they are used by Aboriginal people when talking to Europeans but when taking amongst themselves they would use the terms of their own language.

There are several European terms which have significantly different nuances when used in reference to traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practises, such as singing or song-lines, trade roots, and several familial terms such as father, mother, sister etc.

---

<sup>10</sup> Davies. *Australian Society: Sociological Introduction*. p. 384.

<sup>11</sup> Harris. *One Blood* Harris shows that such assessments were incorrect even when they were written. On page 658 he states that by the 1930's the proportion of Aboriginal Christians was greater by far than that of the whites. and on page 660, by the 1950's most Banjalang of NSW were Christians.

<sup>12</sup> Eliacuna. Ignacio. “Liberation, Mission and Charism,” in *Theological Foundations For Ministry*. p. 606. Ellacuria argues in the same way in reference to the Church in Latin America.

## STUDY TWO.

### Culture and Christian Theology

The cultures of previous centuries have played an immeasurable part in the formation of our own culture and faith.<sup>1</sup> For example, the western world's Judaeo-Christian beliefs and the "protestant work ethic" are a legacy of the Reformation, or the western world's view of the individual which is an emphasis from the Swiss arm of the Reformation. The notion of personhood has come to us from the great minds and hearts of the Greek Fathers.<sup>2</sup>

Down through history, this interaction and interdependence of faith and culture has meant that theologians have contributed to the richness of the Church by drawing (consciously or otherwise) on their own cultural framework. This contribution continued in its effect to assisted in the development of cultures in other areas of the world, such as England through the work of Cranmer and America through the Founding Fathers. The same principle can be seen in the Catholic world via the work of the Jesuits, who, through their view of Christendom, played a major part in the formation of present-day Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural involvement in theological thinking can be seen in terms like "German Theology" or "American Theology". W. H. Horton wrote of the tensions between different cultural theologies in the introduction to his book entitled "Contemporary Continental Theology".

"In our world of rampant nationalism, to praise and recommend the work of any nation in any field, even theology, and to compare it with the work of other nations is evidently the equivalent to throwing out the apple of discord ... Americans ask why American theology was not good enough for Americans; Scotsmen, why I had chosen to write on 'English' rather than 'British' theology; Continentals accused me of having a 'theological foreign policy' dictated more by political sympathies than by genuinely theological considerations."<sup>4</sup>

Cultural idiosyncracies cannot be isolated from the process or fruits of theological thinking;<sup>5</sup> however to allow theology to continue to speak to, and sometimes confront, culture they must be seen as distinct entities,<sup>6</sup> to confuse them results in "Civil Religion" warns James Torrance.<sup>7</sup> When confusion does occur to the point of civil

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicholls. *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*. Outreach and Identity Paper 3. World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. p. 39. Our Own Culture and Faith determine our 'Pre - understandings' and this is what Nicholls refers to when he says "It is essential to distinguish between our pre-understandings or prior assumptions and life-relationships of the nature of the Bible's authority and our pre-understanding of our own culture and the culture of those to whom we communicate the gospel".

<sup>2</sup> Torrance. *The Mediation of Christ*. p. 48 and Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered*. p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> A similar principle is conveyed by terms like Antiochene Theology, Alexandrian Theology, and Tubingen School.

<sup>4</sup> Horton. *Contemporary Continental Theology*. p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Tham. *Christianity and Culture*. p. 8. "We see Christianity through cultural glasses and the Christ that we come to know may have been a product of our culture".

<sup>6</sup> Bockmuehl. *Evangelicals and Social Ethics*. Paper 4 World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. p. 8. Bockmuehl severely criticizes North American Cultural Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> This is a term used by James Torrance to refer to the marrying of politics, romantic nationalism and religion. This results in claiming divine mandate for propogating cultural values and practices.

religion the missionaries claim a divine mandate for their own cultural values (laws).<sup>8</sup> Instead of a church, a compound is established, instead of gossellers they become lawyers, instead of pastors, they become police. and instead of proclaiming good news, they dispense legislation. Missionary activity is debased to social religion and often results in genocide (ethnocide<sup>9</sup>).

Torrance elaborates on his warning by pointing out that we need to distinguish between transient and permanent structures of thought, and that

“there are structures of biblical thought and speech found in the Old Testament which have permanent value, both for the New Testament and for the Christian Church”.

These structures are denied or discarded at our peril and are a necessary means of understanding the biblical message and enriching one’s own culturally appropriate worship. But these structures are not to be thought of as legal or constitutional forms by which one group or individual can police another. Torrance goes on to explain what he refers to as “structures”,

“the Word, Name of God, Revelation, Mercy, Truth, Holiness, to Messiah, Saviour, to Prophet, Priest and King, father, son, servant, to covenant, sacrifice, forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, atonement and those basic patterns of worship that we find set out in the ancient liturgy or the Psalms.”<sup>10</sup>

## The Gospel’s own intrinsic Culture

We will now consider culture as it relates to the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom’s of humankind. The Gospel is God’s initiative, and can only be understood in the context of God’s Kingdom.

“If Jesus, therefore is in any sense the Messiah, then he has come to make actual the victorious rule of God over his people which Israel’s faith had long awaited.”<sup>11</sup>

This victorious rule is not limited to God’s people, it transcends creation and is immanent within creation generally, and the hearts and lives of men and women particularly, as Paul says in Acts 17:28, “in Christ we live and move and have our being”, (see also Psalm 145:11, 13; 103:19; Luke 17:21). To receive the Gospel of the Kingdom is to be transferred by God, from the Kingdom of Darkness to “the Kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1: 13). It is to be reborn of the Spirit and to come joyfully into (or under) God’s reign (John 3:3).

This is the Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed. It enables humanity to participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 13) since Jesus himself is the Gospel. To come into saving grace is to receive the living and abiding Spirit of Christ who writes God’s law on the heart and unites the believer to the righteousness, holiness, grace, truth, faith, hope, love and power of God, these are the cultural characteristics of the Kingdom to which Paul alludes when he speaks of the fruit of the Spirit against which there is no law (Galatians 5:22).

Romans 14:17 “Me Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

2 Peter 3:13, “we wait for a new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells”.

1 Corinthians 13:13, “faith, hope and love abide, these three; the greatest of these is love.”

---

<sup>8</sup> Bockmuehl. *Evangelicals and Social Ethics*. p. 8. “The effect of accommodating Christianity to its surrounding culture is that while we may still be able to see individual sins, we cannot see the sins and evil of society. This is so, precisely because we have adapted to it.”

<sup>9</sup> Pattel-Gray. p. 32 and n. 44., p. 31, n. 30, and pp 18 and 22.

<sup>10</sup> Torrance *Mediation of Christ*. p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Bright. *The Kingdom of God*. p. 215f.

I Peter 1: 15-16, "as he who has called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written "you shall be holy for I am holy".

I Corinthians 4:20, "for the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in-power."

John 1: 14-16, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth .... and from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace."

Ephesians 2:12-19, "We are no longer aliens to the covenants of promise but are members of the covenant community, fellow-citizens and members of the household of God."

The communal life and cultural values which dominated life when we were members of the Kingdom of Darkness and dead in our sin, have been (are being) supplanted by the communal life and cultural values of the Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup> We have been transferred from one membership to another, one community to another, one culture to another. By grace we have been placed within the cultural context, and given an orientation toward the cultural values of God in such a way that does not deny the ontological aspects of the prevailing culture. The cultural expressions which reflect the ontology of covenant, vocation and sabbath rest are enriched and sanctioned by the new cultural life of the gospel so that fallen culture is no longer the focal point of life but becomes the means of equipping the people to reach out to other groups with the gospel message. The redeemed cultures of humanity become the spring-board for the proclamation of the redeeming culture of the kingdom of God.

"The crucial point is that being in one's own people should be subordinated to being under the divine command."<sup>13</sup>

However the divine command comes to a person and people via their culture and although it confronts that culture, it will also reflect the culture. This is because God's blessing is always a cultural experience, therefore different groups will rejoice in different aspects of the creational blessing. For example, when a European community is revived there will be a noticeable improvement in such things as work out-put, property maintenance and application to studies, because these things are the culturally determined norms by which we assess a person's moral standard. In other words they owe the things that our culture says are moral and good and are the values by which we measure spirituality (or humanity). But is this ethnocentrism a godly practise, are our values, God given norms or simply personal and cultural prejudices to which we give divine sanction. (for example we have elevated the old phrase "cleanliness is next to godliness" to a papal Bull).

Europeans tend to interpret the image of God as contradistinction to the rest of creation, rather than stress humanity's more essential affinity with creation ("the image of God" rather than "the image of God"). Even when humanity's relationship to the creator is under consideration, it is for pragmatic reasons and not relational ones (in other words, we try to solve the problems that we experience in this life rather than discover the unity of which the Godhead speaks). For the European mind, humanity, as higher than the rest of creation, is more important than humanity as one with creation. And because we want to break free from our bondage to time and space, our theology emphasizes the things that separate us from it, such as the fall and the subsequent alienation. This manifests itself in an emphasis on production as opposed to relationships, and creation (the garden) becomes a property to be utilized like a

---

<sup>12</sup> Niebuhr. *Christ and Culture*. p. 228. "The kingdom of God is transformed culture because it is first of all the conversion of the human spirit from faithlessness and self-service to the knowledge and the service of God."

<sup>13</sup> CD 3:4 p. 293.

paddock. The command to, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” (Genesis 1:28, is stressed at the expense of the command to care and replenish.

But now the Aboriginal people confront us with decisions which are made on the basis of a totally different criteria. Non-Aboriginal Australia can no longer stress the command to go, multiply and subdue without giving thought to the equally relevant command to guard and care. The paddock can no longer be commercialised as a property to be used without restraint because the Aboriginal people confront us with its creation as a garden to be a home to be lived in.

## **Culture and the Cross**

If God did not act in a unilateral manner in Christ, humanity would continue in its selfdeceptive, self-centered, self-securing cultures and would not sacrifice itself to the sovereign claims of the Kingdom of God. Apart from redemption, human society <sup>14</sup> which is given for fullness of life as the expression of the image of God, becomes the judgment of God whereby humanity is affirmed in its separation from God and relational death. This manifests itself as guilt, shame, rebellion and lack of peace. Humankind seeks to atone for these failings by idolatry rather than by repenting under God's judgments and gaining peace by Christ's atonement (or covering). The idolatrous worship through which humankind attempts to appease the conscience by works of atonement or silence it by amusement and/or constant activity is expressed as cultural endeavour (the cultus). The principles, practises, values and qualities of the Gospel of Kingdom of God, clash with the cultic practises of the world. The faithfulness of God clashes with the unfaithfulness of humanity, the purpose of God clashes with the purposes of humanity, the peace of God with the anguish of humanity, the holiness of God with the unholiness of humanity, the righteousness of God with the self-righteousness of humanity, the grace of God with the rebellion of humanity. The degree of offence caused by the clash is inversely proportionate to the degree of rebellion and depravity in a given society, people or person. Because of this offence, the cross is not received as God's final word of judgment on all human endeavour. Its potency must be ameliorated by the proclaimer or destroyed by the hearer. This results in God's completed work of cosmic, uni-cultural and trans-cultural proportions being reduced to moralism as determined by the cultural bias of the “evangelist”. Conversion becomes conformity to the evangelist's cultural values and at least a partial submission of the receiver's culture to that of the proclaimer. This amounts to a sanctioning of one cultural system and a denial of another.

But the word of the Apostle Paul in Romans 3: 23, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” is a cultural charge as much as an individual one and therefore it is all humanity-in-community and all cultural endeavour which stands under the judgment of God. This is not a denial of the validity of the cultural mandate given at creation, but it recognises that the original human endeavour or cultural mandate was in the context of authentic worship and not apart from it. In the fall, worship and the cultural mandate were corrupted at their base and all subsequent activity has been directed toward the idols which humankind has established. It is this endeavour that is judged in the cross.

## **Christ Assumed Culture**

Exodus 19: 5-6 shows Israel to be the chosen and priestly nation, with a specific role in God's economy. It's purpose was to act vicariously in worship as a representative

---

<sup>14</sup> For an understanding of the relationship between 'society' and 'culture' see Niebuhr. *Christ and Culture*. p. 32ff.

community such that God dealt with the world according to its relationship to Israel (Genesis 12:3, Deuteronomy 32:8, Isaiah 61:6, Ephesians 2:12). When Jesus was given as the Son of humanity the total vicarious humanity of Israel was concentrated in Israel's greatest Son. We therefore have the following formula; the cultural entities of the world were focused in Israel, the cultural entity of Israel was focused in Christ; therefore the cultural entities of the world were focused in Christ. He who was the true expression of the culture of the Kingdom of God, assumed the culture of rebellious Israel and through Israel the cultural frameworks of rebellious humanity. This universal vicarage<sup>15</sup> begun at Calvary assures the nations of the world of their own involvement in Calvary and enables the proclamation that Christ died for the sin of the world (I John 2:2, John 1:29). He became, in Israel's place, the representative of God to the nations and in his assumption of the likeness of Israel's sinful flesh, he assumed the sinful flesh of all humanity. All human endeavour (culture) found its nemesis; He both cleansed and sanctified these cultures. He assumed the fulness of humanity in its breadth and depth, qualitatively and quantitatively. Whatever He assumed, He healed, <sup>16</sup> reconciling it to the fulness of God. In this one atoning act, Christ judged and sanctified cultural endeavour making it fit for the master's use. The person, act and declaration of Christ's completed, salvific work for humanity in the midst of its cultural diversity, is the Gospel which continues to cause universal offence and flies in the face of the cultural values held dear by fallen humanity.

When the Gospel intrudes as a work of God the Spirit brings conviction and judgment. He offers to draw humanity out of a culture of rebellion and into the culture of the Kingdom of God - it is ethnocide on a universal scale in so far as a culture reflects or expresses humankind's rebellion. But those aspects of the culture which reflect the kingdom of God ensure that it is not the death-knell of the culture but the means of its full realisation. It enriches the culture as a gift of God since what is overcome is never the less preserved. This is what it means to be Aboriginal and Christian, or European and Christian, when both are free to be who and what they are in Christ.

"If the sanctification of man by the divine command is not also the sanctification of his historical existence, if his obedience does not also include his historical responsibility as a member of his people, it is not his sanctification ... as the command of the holy God sees and meets a man and calls him to obedience, there is a sanctification of this man and therefore of his particular geographical determination, of his outlook, background and origin in accordance with home and country and people."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Vicarage, vicar and vicarious are of the same root and mean representative or substitute.

<sup>16</sup> Torrance. *The Mediation of Christ*, pp. 39ff.

<sup>17</sup> CD. 3:4 pp. 292-295.

## STUDY-THREE

### THE PAST: PART I

#### The Aboriginal Environment

The climate of pre-colonial Australia, was similar to that of today and the people were subjected to the same extremes in the form of rain, drought, wind, cold and heat without the building materials, heating, cooling techniques or clothing which technology has made available to the West.<sup>1</sup> Although the climate differed greatly from one area of the continent to the other a large percentage of the continent was prone to droughts and when water-holes dried up across vast stretches of land, some groups turned to their neighbours for assistance and temporary assimilation and if the drought was prolonged their identity would be absorbed by the host group.<sup>2</sup> The loss of an identifiable group due to the environment, was not a common occurrence because the people understood their environment so well. An example of this is their ingenuity in finding water in the desert.<sup>3</sup> An elder member of Walmarrjarri tribe of the Great Sandy Desert explained that in the old days his people died because of inter-group fighting, then, after white people came, they died because of illness and fighting, but it was never due to drought. During times of severe water shortage his people had access to wells which their ancestors had dug so that they could walk down into the ground and get water.<sup>4</sup>

Josephine Flood states;

“Not only did Aboriginal men and women living a traditional life have more leisure than is available for the average farmer or office worker, but they also generally ate better. The diet of those groups whose economy has been recorded in detail emerges as more balanced, varied and nutritious than that of many white people. The Anbara (of Arnhem Land) have an average intake of about 2400 kilocalories a day, of which 40 to 50 per cent comes from the flesh of fish, shellfish, crustaceans, and about fifty species of land animals and birds. Since the recommended energy intake for adults is about 2000 kilocalories, the Anbara are feeding well.”<sup>5</sup>

This is confirmed by James Cook's observations in 1770,

---

<sup>1</sup> Flood, Josephine. 1983. *Archeology of the Dreamtime*. Collins. Sydney. p. 205. The following points are given to dispell the stereotype that Europeans have of traditional Aboriginal people. Not all Aboriginal people lived in “wurlies”, in 1981 a field survey uncovered approximately 146 stone “houses” in one paddock by Lake Condah in South West Victoria. The dwellings were as stable as necessary for the people to stay in an area while the food supply was good. The people were not always naked, but utilized clothing made from skins and finely woven mats, for warmth when needed. They planned ahead, sometimes months in advance, for water and food storage, for food supplies for inter tribal gatherings, such as fresh water muscles, eels, cycad nuts, moths. They devised fish traps, elaborate water chattels and controlled water courses.

<sup>2</sup> Meggitt. *Desert People* pp. 24, 27, 38. Swaine, T. *Aboriginal Australia and Christian Missions* p. 279. The Wailpi, Kuyani, Jadliaura and Piladapa, became known as the Adnyamathanha, or Hills people.

<sup>3</sup> Magarey, A. T. 1895. “Aborigines' Water-Quest in Arid Australia”. Art' in *Australian Association For The Advancement of Science*. Vol vi, Edited by John Shirley. Brisbane. In relation to and Australia, the author lists eleven trees which are a ready supply of water. Trees, animals and birds which are known as water finders, collecting dew with a grass sponge, man made rock holes, dams and wells, water carrying techniques.

<sup>4</sup> Magarey, 1895. “Aborigines' Water-Quest in Arid Australia”. Magarey shows how adept the Aboriginal people were to living in the harsh conditions of Australian Outback.

<sup>5</sup> Flood, *Archeology of the Dreamtime*. p. 233. see also Attwood, Bain. In *The Age Of Mabo*. p. 63. quoting M. Sahlins. *Stone Age Economics*

"They are far happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but with the necessary conveniences they are happy in not knowing the use of them ... they live in a tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition; the earth and sea of their own accord furnish them with all things necessary to life; they covet not magnificent houses, household stuff &c; they sleep as sound in a small hovel or even in the open as the king in his palace on a bed of down."<sup>6</sup>

Around Oldea in 1941, the Berndts listed 18 varieties of mammals and marsupials; 19 birds; 11 reptiles; 8 insects; 6 water roots; 17 varieties of seed; 3 vegetables; 10 fruits and berries; 4 other plants and fungi, as well as a variety of eggs. They spoke of these as easily obtained and a conservative estimate.<sup>7</sup> For the Walbiri people of central Australia, Meggitt lists 81 species of fauna and 30 species of flora which comprise their diet<sup>8</sup> In this desert environment archaeologist, Josephine Flood estimates that the food quest occupied less than six or seven hours of work a day for a woman.<sup>9</sup> in an area where the average annual rainfall is between 25 mm and 127 mm and the ground temperature ranges between 0 and 71 degrees celcius.

The people's apparent "communion" with the land was dealt a fatal blow by colonization. The environment changed dramatically and permanently. Fences that were erected, either restricted or prevented access to traditional land and/or water holes. The introduced animals often polluted the water supplies. The addition of sheep, cattle, rabbits<sup>10</sup>, water buffalo, camels, horses, foxes, cats, dogs and sparrows as well as land-clearing and the European concept of property ownership, caused extreme hardship and deprivation for Aboriginal people. Introduced plants such as Salvation Jane, Bathurst Burr, Prickly Pear, St John's Wort, Onion Weed, Skeleton Weed, Box Thom, Cape Weed, Cape Tulip, Lantana, Water Hyacinth, Blackberries, changed the appearance of the country-side, and destroyed natural vegetation - and therefore the food source -of the Aboriginal people. Significant ecological deterioration was recorded by settlers in 1851 after only twenty years of farming. Explorer and natural scientist, Strzeleki, spoke with prophetic insight circa- 1845 that the flocks and axes, by destroying the forests and undergrowth, were actually making the climate hotter and dryer.<sup>11</sup>

Within one hundred years of European settlement, the destruction of traditional lands and the breakdown of the established inter- and intra-tribal relationships meant the disintegration of the cultures as cohesive entities. This occurred at a faster pace than the founding of official European settlements and resulted in demoralised Aboriginal communities called "black's camps" or "fringe camps" being present prior to, or developing with, the towns. These camps were normally one or two kilometers from town and often close to the rubbish dump affording the Aboriginal people an ample supply of building materials for wurlies (called wiltjas by the Pitjantjatjara people) and discarded furniture and clothing but it also increased the negative stereotyping by the white population.

---

<sup>6</sup> Rienits, Rex and Thea. 1968. *The Voyage Of Captain Cook*, Paul Hamlyn. London. p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Berndt. *The World of the First Australians*. p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Meggitt. *Desert People*. pp 7-15.

<sup>9</sup> Flood, Josephine. 1983. *Archeology of the Dreamtime*. p. 233.

<sup>10</sup> Blainey. p. 307ff. Twenty-four rabbits and five hares were introduced formally and with intent west of Geelong in 1859, but other importations occurred in SA and Victoria prior to this. Less than twenty years later they were in plague proportions along the River Murray in SA.

<sup>11</sup> Blainey. p. 305f.

## Aboriginal Health

“It was a medical practitioner, George Worgan, who made the important observation during the first few months of white settlement that the Aborigines ‘seemingly enjoyed uninterrupted health and live to a great age’.”<sup>12</sup>

The good health that the people enjoyed as subject to the weather and the subsequent availability of water and daily food while open-air living, plenty of sun and frequent moving helped to avoid the circumstances which precipitate disease. The following diseases were probably experienced by Aboriginal people prior to colonisation, leprosy<sup>13</sup>, rickets, trachoma, yaws<sup>14</sup>, salmonella<sup>15</sup>, gum diseases, tinea, tetanus, problems associated with intestinal worms such as hook worm, tape worm, thread worm, famine<sup>16</sup> (diet was literally on a “catch and carry” basis where supply controlled the demand, sickness due to poor hygiene, Parkinson’s disease, dementia, and mental illness were present among the peoples (lung diseases, skin diseases, smallpox, venereal diseases. Diseases spread by flies and mosquitoes and diseases related to alcohol abuse can be added to the list, with many new ones added immediately after European settlement). There was little chance of recovery from injuries caused by conflict and misadventure due to snake bite, shark or alligator attack. In times of great community stress the severely aged, injured or sick would be left behind to die alone.<sup>17</sup>

It was thought that pregnancy was the result of spirit-beings visiting a woman as much as sexual activity.<sup>18</sup> A woman was not owned by her husband for him to do with as he pleased (tribal retribution would result if he treated her unfairly).<sup>19</sup> Infanticide (via exposure<sup>20</sup>) was not a normal means of population control<sup>21</sup> but the infant mortality rate was very high. However it is obvious

---

<sup>12</sup> Harris. *One Blood* p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Berndt, RM and CM. 1981. *The World of the First Australians* revised edition. Lansdowne Press. Sydney, pp 15-16. Leprosy was probably present.

<sup>14</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 71. Yaws seems to be an endemic form of syphilis spread by lack of hygiene, not by sexual relations ... Yaws does occasionally cause more serious bone damage.

<sup>15</sup> Linn. *Frail. Flesh and Blood*. p. 5. Salmonella infection rates, for example, are quoted as high as ninety percent in snakes, sixty three percent in lizards, forty percent in marsupials, and six percent in birds all of these creatures were part of the diet of the people.

<sup>16</sup> Linn. *Frail. Flesh and Blood*. p. 1-19.

<sup>17</sup> Generally however it appeared that the communities of 1996 had great compassion for the infirmed and I have noticed several instances where the developmentally delayed, physically handicapped, the blind or me aged enjoy greater acceptance and involvement in the community than in European society.

<sup>18</sup> Mead Greg. 1995. *A Royal Omission*. Greg Mead South Australia. This was the traditional belief which caused the resistance to the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission. The arguments put forward were based on a belief that fertility was linked to spirit beings and totemic sites. Ellis, Caherine J. and Tur, Mona. ‘The Song Is The Message’. 1975. *Cultures In Colision*. Edited by Issy Pilowsky. Australian National Association for Mental Health. Adelaide. pp 30-35. Pitjantjatjara women took for granted a detailed knowledge of anatomy which few untrained white women would have. The anatomical names showed an understanding of the process of conception. “There was unanimity regarding the association between copulation and conception but division of opinion as to how the babies life began”. Meggitt suggest similar thoughts in relation to the Walbiri although he then advises that Aborigines’ answer to questions about conception depend on who is asked and in what circumstances”.

<sup>19</sup> White, Isobel, ‘-Aboriginal Women’s Status’. *Social Change in Australia*. p. 210. Women are partners rather than pawns or chattels of the men, but that their status is everywhere that of junior partner. See also Gale, Fay. *Woman’s Role In Aboriginal Society*.

<sup>20</sup> Willshire. *The Aborigines of Central Australia*. p. 13. Willshire was the officer in charge of Native Police at Alice Springs during the 1880’s. He records the means used for destroying unwanted infants. However his arrogance, intolerance and ignorance of Aboriginal culture make his record of value only because it shows the persecution suffered by the people. Harris. *One Blood* p. 534. states that the practice was rare but not unknown in Traditional society.

<sup>21</sup> As terrible as this practise is, it must be seen in the historical context of the eighteenth century. “In England .... between 1855 and 1860, in London, out of 3,900 dead children, some 1,120 were found to

that children born with serious defects had half or no chance of survival.

There is little evidence of cannibalism among Aboriginal people<sup>22</sup> although some tribes ate the kidney fat of an enemy as part of a victor's ritual to ward off reprisal attacks, and some tribes cut the body fat from a deceased person and distributed it amongst the relatives in a prescribed manner to be eaten "that they may no longer be sad".<sup>23</sup>

Superstition and fear were characteristics of traditional life. They were a constant cause of stress, and rarely, if ever, pleasant modes of control.

## Aboriginal Religion

Traditional Aboriginal religion was expressed in the "Law" which formed an intricate oversight for life by which individuals knew their place in society. But as the fruit of humanity in rebellion, Aboriginal Law (as indeed all human laws and cultures) is a defense and attack against the true Law of God.<sup>24</sup> (refer to chapter "Culture and theology").

Traditional Aboriginal culture was unique in many ways,<sup>25</sup> not the least in its religious concepts. Stanner said of Aboriginal religion,

"It may not have 'magnified goodness' as Bacon said of Christianity, but it did magnify life".<sup>26</sup>

The following points can be made:

- 1) There is strong debate as to whether traditional beliefs included a sovereign spirit figure.
- 2) There are many mythological stories which have similar ideas as the biblical narratives but the differences are also very great and at best only careful parallels can be drawn.
- 3) There are similarities to gnosticism with the gradual progression of initiates through a series of secrets.
- 4) There are similarities to the occult and "black magic" with "spells", "pointing the bone" and "singing".
- 5) Some argue that Animism dominates the whole of Aboriginal religion.<sup>27</sup>
- 6) Death involves the release of a spirit from the body. This spirit must be appeased to make it go away. Whole families move immediately after a death and the name of the deceased (and anything sounding like it) will not be spoken for fear of the spirit returning to cause trouble (anybody or thing which has a name similar in sound to the deceased is known as

---

have been murdered and 940 to have been 'accidentally' smothered. A Middlesex coroner revealed, in 1862, that the police thought no more of finding a dead infant than they did a dead cat. In the following year, the Morning Star claimed that infanticide was 'positively becoming a national institution and the Morning Post believed it to be the commonest of all crimes." Linn. Frail. Flesh and Blood. p. 1ff.

<sup>22</sup> Willshire. The Aborigines of Central Australia, p. 13. Contrary to Willshire's comments. Abbie.

The Original Australians. p.146. Daisy Bates is wrong in her assertions that women had babies simply to eat them. Harris. One Blood. p. 535. "cannibalism was abnormal but not completely unknown"

<sup>23</sup> Howitt. AW. "Burial Practices of Native Tribes in South-East Australia" in Religion in Aboriginal Australia. Ed' Charlesworth, Max. pp 221-240.

<sup>24</sup> Relationships: Divine-Human. p. 85f. 'There is always ontological pressure upon him (Mankind) to go the true way of nature so he must devise the law which he would call 'natural' and then distribute that in his ways of culture, religion, ethics and so on, believing he is keeping what is authentic Law.'

<sup>25</sup> Abbie. The Original Australians. As an example Abbie states on p. 149 that the Aboriginal language seems to have no clear links with any other that is known.

<sup>26</sup> Berndt, R.M. and C.H. Aboriginal Man in Australia. p. 217.

<sup>27</sup> Abbie. The Original Australians. p.116. Lindsay. Fire In The Spinifex. p. 33. Cf. Nida, E.A. Customs. Culture and Christianity. p. 290, n. 3.

“kumunara” (in the languages of the Western desert area) and this continues for a length of time according to the importance of the deceased).

- 7) Traditional Aboriginal religion did not have an after-life. Death was cessation of existence for the individual. The individual received a “patri -spirit” and “matri-spirit”, the former returned to its totemic home and the latter simply dissipated immediately after the death.<sup>28</sup>
- 8) In the Kimberleys area “voodoo effigies” were used.
- 9) Gudatji men (Western desert) were believed to be spirit/human beings with evil powers that could kill in judgment. They wore special sandals and were often known by Europeans as “Feather Foot”. They were official executioners who enjoyed anonymity.
- 10) “The Dreaming” is unique.<sup>29</sup> It is almost a personification of the Judaeo-Christian concept of “Eternity”.<sup>30</sup> Pastor Cecil Grant explained that the term “Dreamtime” is a white man’s word. The Wiradjuri term is “Balanda” and accurately translated means “in (i.e., already there) the beginning” before the “nurkenbu” or “creation period”. For the Warlpiri people, in the centre of Australia, the Dreaming was a concept of “nowness” rather than “pastness”. “Dreaming is a reality outside of, and qualitatively distinct from, a chronology of succeeding generations of living people”.<sup>31</sup>
- 11) The notion of the ultimate in Aboriginal religion; the expression “All Father’ which has been used so frequently in the earlier literature on south-eastern Australia” is to misrepresent Aboriginal opinion.<sup>32</sup>

“In our present knowledge of Aboriginal religion it would seem out of character to speak of any mythic being ... as supreme beings.”<sup>33</sup>

The “ultimate” for the traditional Aboriginal was the notion of “the eternal Dreamtime” in the realm of which existed the mythical deities.<sup>34</sup>

- 12) Religious life was site-based.<sup>35</sup>

13) “The totemic beliefs of the people are evidenced in the numerous points/locations of religious

---

<sup>28</sup> Meggitt. *Desert People*. p. 207. “when the elder brother presses the lad against the lodge pattern on the string cross, some of the lodge bilirba enters him. As this has already happened to the elder brother, father, father’s brother, father’s father, etc., all of them share the one lodge dreaming or patri-spirit. They all call the dreaming “father” and are therefore spiritual “brothers”. When each lodge member dies, his share of the patri-spirit returns to the lodge dreaming-sites to be reincorporated in the generalised lodge-spirit.”

<sup>29</sup> It is helpful to remember that this term is European and that each tribal group has their own term by which they refer to the basis and source of existence.

<sup>30</sup> Meggitt p. 364. ‘The Aborigines identified themselves with nature and saw in the natural order a system with human properties. All around them were the animals and plants, the unalterable stars and the natural features of the scenery that they explained as having been created in some far away time by beings with human characteristics. Only the land itself had not been created; it had always existed. The travels and actions of the anthropomorphic beings who created the Aboriginal world were retained in songs accompanied by rituals, many of which were concerned with ensuring and maintaining the natural order and particularly the fertility of animals and humans. The events of the myths and songs took place at a time usually called the dreamtime.’

<sup>31</sup> Swain. *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*. p. 454. Berndt. *The World of the First Australians*. p. 229. A list of twelve different terms used respective tribes for the idea of “the dreaming”.

<sup>32</sup> Berndt. *The World of the First Australians*. p. 301.

<sup>33</sup> Berndt. *The World of the First Australians*. p. 302.

<sup>34</sup> Berndt *The World of the First Australians*. pp. DOAK

<sup>35</sup> Swain. *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, p. 460.

significance; a rock, a waterhole, a hilly knoll, a river or a clump of trees may all serve as focus for worship. The totemic site relates to the comings and goings of various spirit-beings who originally adopted human form but later took on the guise of familiar animals. Spirits give rise to all life both plant and animal ... on the one hand and all humans on the other; at one time they bound every Aboriginal indissolubly to their own living totemic counterpart and its proper totemic site"<sup>36</sup>

It is self-evident that all false worship is idolatry however not all artefacts of a cultus are idols. This was a common mistake of the missionaries who thought that the totems of Aboriginal religion were idols and therefore prohibited their use. This meant that significant cohesive foci of the culture were denied to the people and this resulted in unimaginable trauma and cultural confusion.

14) The cultic rituals did not need to be performed in the location of the totem involved. A representative could be appointed to "sing at a distance".

15) The work of medicine men is almost entirely spiritual.<sup>37</sup>

16) The Cult ceremonies (e.g., Kunapipi), Totemic ceremonies and "playabout" ceremonies (social corroborees) are all essential parts of Aboriginal community life.<sup>38</sup> While it is easy to be horrified at some of the customs of the people (such as the moving of one's genitals across the palm of another's hand as a sign of friendship, see also Genesis 24:2, 9), it must be remembered that the traditional people were perpetually naked and hence all parts of the body were given equal significance both personally and tribally.

17) Initiation ceremonies involve circumcision and subincision practices<sup>39</sup> (for the Walbiri male this began at about age twelve and continued until he reached his highest ritual status by about age thirty and highest social status at age forty to fiftyfive). Meggitt points out that circumcision was a ritual death.<sup>40</sup>

"Circumcision is far more than just a physical token...the operation has deep spiritual significance. 'Me ... ceremony leads to a rebirth that is far more than mere convention. The initiate is really reborn into an entirely new life: he finds himself in an esoteric world of secrets hidden from women and children and strangers; he acquires a secret name and talks with fellow initiates in a secret tongue; he learns some of the sacred story of creation and plays his own part in ceremonies for the prosperity of the tribe. In short he is on his way to becoming en rapport with the supernatural, and people on that course are the ... priests of the more sophisticated religions".<sup>41</sup>

Subincision was practised by several central Australian groups covering a large portion of the continent. It is another uniquely Aboriginal practise and its origin and purpose are unknown. Life and religion of the traditional Aboriginal people was a cohesive entity and not compartmentalised such as in western society.<sup>42</sup> However this fact did not protect the people from fear, ignorance, pain and anguish. As a people they were at the mercy of the elements and evil spirits. Their concept of the after-life was similar to reincarnation and it offered little comfort.<sup>43</sup> However there were also many positive factors which need to be understood and

---

<sup>36</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 111.

<sup>37</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. pp. 117, 126.

<sup>39</sup> Introcision was practised on girls of puberty age as a preparation for marriage but it did not have significant religious connotations. It involved the rupture of the hymen using a foreign body. Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 136.

<sup>40</sup> Meggitt p. 263.

<sup>41</sup> Abbie. *The Original Australians*. p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> VanTill Henry. - *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. p. 33. It is especially true of primitives that culture for them is a sacred activity, an exercise in the sphere of religion.

<sup>43</sup> Refer to extended quote in conclusion.

one significant one was the concept of a stand in for punishment (a kinsman-redeemer).

## Bi-Cultural Australia

When we consider the histories of the Aboriginal and European peoples, the differences (which have always existed) between them are easier to explain - even if not appreciated.<sup>44</sup> In fact it is essential that we understand and acknowledge the nation's true history to fully appreciate the tensions and frustrations which are currently felt by the Aboriginal people generally and the Christian Church among Aboriginal people specifically.

The conflict which has resulted in the decimation of the Aboriginal culture has continued since the beginning of colonisation. It is not extremist to say that the things we have seen in Bosnia and Rwanda are part of our own, very recent history. We cannot be horrified at the ethnic cleansing of one country without denouncing that of our own. Extermination of Aborigines became the defacto policy among the colonisers as the easiest way to dispose of a "nuisance".<sup>45</sup>

The following quotes are gleaned from Davies. *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*. Second Edition. pp. 362 - 412.

"In one hundred and eighty years of European occupation more than eighty percent of the Aboriginal population was gone." "The only complete act of genocide ever achieved by the human race in the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines." p. 368.<sup>46</sup> "Aborigines were literally slaughtered in their thousands" p. 368. Shot, poisoned, battered or herded off a cliff, 'Whatever the cause, be it ignorance, stupidity or intent, within one hundred years of the arrival of the first fleet, the Aboriginal population of Australia had been decimated" p. 371. "It was alleged that in 1965 the then government representative to the Northern Territory subscribed to the view of pastoralist Alfred Giles of 1899 in regards to the numerous murders attributable to white men violating the moral law of tribes, that this was impossible since such laws did not exist," p. 370. In 1892 the secretary of the Aboriginal Protection Board stated that "the long learned experience led inevitably to the conclusion that the European must efface We Black race; the only question was with how little violence to humanity this effacement could be attended," p. 370. The Chief Protector said in 1899, "that we must not forget that they are savages ... they can never hope to have the same status as the white man". As recently as the late 1960's, "All traditional guarrantees of personal freedom in British society have been removed from the Aboriginal community...'protected' Aborigines have no freedom of movement or association nor security in their places of residence. Neither do they have any right, per so of access to their property or estate", p. 385. In 1969 "A 'protected' Aborigine in Queensland has no existence at law except in the person of his protector", p. 385.

---

<sup>44</sup> Stevens. *Australian Society*. p. 326. "consideration of the historical background to the present situation is necessary to fully appreciate the difficulties in adjustment being faced by Aborigines and Europeans".

<sup>45</sup> Davies. *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*. third edition. p. 364. The following works we among the many which deal with the atrocities committed against Aboriginal people by Europeans. Harris. *One Blood*; Mattingley. *Survival in Our Own Land*; Miller. *Thomas Dove and the Tasmanian Aborigines* Pattel-Gray. *Through Aboriginal Eyes*; Reynolds. *Fate of a Free People*; Reynolds. *Frontier*; Reynolds. *With the White People*; Rowley. *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*; Stone. *Aborigines in White Australia*. Elder. *Blood on the Wattle*.

<sup>46</sup> Quoting Turnbull, Clive. 1956. *Black War Chesire*. Melbourne. p. 236. If, as Pattel-Grey argues, the definition of genocide used by the United Nations then despite the fact that there are descendants of the Tasmanian people still living the term genocide is appropriate.

## Outsider's Assessment

An objective look (if such a thing is possible<sup>47</sup>) at the pre-contact history of the Aboriginal peoples, whether it be the environment, culture or religion, reveals a plethora of individual working cultural units across the continent (possibly up to seven hundred groups<sup>48</sup>). Geographic limitations to their own sovereignty was accepted and the boundaries acknowledged by neighbouring groups. Often the individual groups were very ethnocentric as is shown by the following quote from the Warlpiri people

“There are two kinds of blackfellows ... we who are the Walbiri and those unfortunate people who are not. Our laws are the true laws”.<sup>49</sup>

Sometimes malicious myths were propagated to prevent inter-tribal contact.<sup>50</sup> However despite these tendencies this was the closest the continent of Australia has ever come to true multiculturalism.

Traditional life was experienced in various divisions which anthropologists labelled variously as tribal confederacy groups, tribes, clans, moities, myalls and “hordes”.<sup>51</sup> Life was not always pleasant or idealic for the participants. As with all cultural groups they practised positive and negative rituals, understood moral and immoral behaviour, passed right and wrong sanctions and prohibitions and accepted tensions and ambiguities within their value systems as the norm. In common with all cultures in the “post-fall” world, Aboriginal culture reflected the sinfulness of its people and was far from ideal.

The world-view of all the Aboriginal peoples involved a net-work of interrelated and interdependent beliefs and practises based on a deeply held conviction that the land was eternal, that they owed it their existence and that as a distinct group they featured significantly in an “ecosystem” of the eternities (the Dreamings). Pattel-Gray makes the following statement in relation to traditional culture,

“the land and all its creatures, including humans are one and inseparable. Any of the component parts in this total relationship is at risk if separated from its contact with the others”.<sup>52</sup>

In view of this “relatedness”<sup>53</sup> it is not hard to understand that the Aboriginal way of life would be destroyed and the culture disintegrate once European cultural values were introduced especially when it meant the speedy acquisition of good usable land.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> In dealing with issues relating to another culture we must be aware of our own ‘cultural blinkers. We tend to attribute maximum worth to our own values while denigrating the values of others (and the greater the divergence the greater the denigration); this is a type of ‘cultural myopia’.

<sup>48</sup> Pattel-Gray Through Aboriginal Eyes, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> The Warlpiri of NT had a recognised “evolutionary chart” which placed themselves at the top and neighbouring tribes in various positions on the chart.

<sup>50</sup> Meggitt. Desert People p. 43. “Warlpiri men speak with manifest disgust of the huge and ugly genital organs that lunga men are reputed to possess.” Quoting Berndt, “desert natives at Ooldea, in SA., attributed cannibalism, lechery and long penes to the alien Kukata”.

<sup>51</sup> Davies. Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction. third edition. p. 362. “What have been called ‘tribes’ were never political units in the sense of having an accepted multi-purpose and hierarchical leadership structure. They were really language units ... The fundamental social unit in Aboriginal society was the local group, a land owning and using unit”.

<sup>52</sup> Pattel-Gray. Through Aboriginal Eyes. p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Luzbetak. The Church and Cultures. P. 171.

<sup>54</sup> Linn. Frail Flesh and Blood. p. 22. and Attwood. In The Age Of Mabo. p. 6. Linn refers to the influence of the theoretician, John E. Wakefield and Attwood refers to that of the Swiss Jurist, Vattel. Both these authorities believed in the significance of good usable land in the process of colonisation.



## STUDY FOUR

### THE PRESENT: PART 1.

There has always been great diversity within the indigenous peoples of Australia. In many cases, tribal groups denied the humanity of other groups, or fostered derogatory rumours about neighbouring groups, or waged wars against them. In other instances, the same tribes shared mythological storylines and genealogies and participated in corroborees and bartering. These tensions and the interactions show that there were many autonomous groups and these groups shared a common Aboriginality. Since contact,<sup>1</sup> the distinctions between the groups have been constantly under threat and in many cases with the total destruction of some tribes it has been destroyed altogether. In other situations the tribal distinctions were temporarily overlooked by the people because of forced compliance on mission stations and government reserves and the destruction of tribal lands and languages. But in many instances they re-emerge when the European controls were lifted and the people were free to exercise their own cultural values. However, in more recent times there has been a definite move toward the formation of a "pan Australian" Aboriginality<sup>2</sup> or a "new Aboriginality"<sup>3</sup> This tendency is evident in the Aboriginal Christian movement as much as in the secular field. For example, the theological colleges run by Aboriginal people do not formally provide for the prohibited relationships of tribal law. The move toward a pan-Aboriginal identity is related to the "common origins, a shared history, a collective experience of oppression and a corporate sense of distinctiveness."<sup>4</sup> In this context Aboriginal theology has been a unifying influence.<sup>5</sup> One example is the desire of the Yarrabah people to see their Church as the centre for Aboriginal missionaries to be sent out to Aboriginal and European Australia. Evangelistic movements around Aboriginal Australia is the out come of a growing Aboriginal confidence, "fed by the progress made in Aboriginal self management and leading to a sense of greater control over their lives in the post-paternalistic era."<sup>6</sup>

### Recent Significant Events

God has recently blessed Australia when He revived the Aboriginal people. This began when the Gospel was first revealed to the people by the Holy Spirit about twenty to thirty years after white settlement began. But until recent times revival was on an individual basis and always under European oversight. Since the 1960s, however, autonomy and the idiosyncratic nature of the Aboriginal Church has grown. This began in 1963, when the Yirrkala Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, campaigned for control of their own land.<sup>7</sup>

In 1974 a document was produced by Aboriginal Christian leaders, missionaries and Methodist officials, called "Free to Decide".<sup>8</sup> This was the beginning of the truly indigenous church. Soon

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a short hand reference to the arrival of the first fleet and the subsequent period of oppression and destruction of Aboriginal culture.

<sup>2</sup> Berndt. The World of the First Australians. p. 528. "pan-Aboriginality, seeks to establish a common socio-cultural heritage".

<sup>3</sup> Harris One Blood. 347, 607-610

<sup>4</sup> Harris One Blood p. 608. See also Mudrooroo. Us Mob pp 3154.

<sup>5</sup> Berndt. The World of the First Australians. p. 243 The Dreaming tracks of the spirit ancestors provided at least potentially a net work of intercommunications across the continent. Because no one group owned the full myth but only the section which related to their own area of oversight, they were dependent on the other tribal groups to fulfil their obligations to their totem.

<sup>6</sup> Swain and Rose. Aboriginal Australia and Christian Missions. P70.

<sup>7</sup> Harris. One Blood p.832. & Wells, E. "The Missions and Race Prejudice". Racism. The Australian Experience Vol 2. Chapter 17.

<sup>8</sup> Harris. One Blood p 898.

after this the Whitlam Government established the Land Rights Commission which resulted in the Aborigines Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of December 1976.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1981, an initiative of Premier Don Dunstan's came to fruition in South Australia in the form of the Pitjantjatjara Lands Trust.<sup>10</sup> This development, and a related growth in the Church among the Pitjantjatjara people, began in the 1950s with a strong Christian leadership emerging in the 1960s. By the 1980s Church membership was approximately 50%.<sup>11</sup>

## Cultural Conflict.

That cultural differences do exist within the Australian Christian Church generally and within the Church among Aboriginal people specifically, is readily acknowledged. However, that is where agreement stops. From then on there is ignorance, arrogance, bigotry and confusion.<sup>12</sup> For this reason cultural conflict is a complex issue to define. There is cultural tension between a) humanity in Christ and humanity in Adam, b) the Spirit of God in the believer within any cultural context and his or her own flesh, and c) individuals (believers or not) of any given cultural group. Among Aboriginal Australians there are cultural tensions, d) within specific language identities as well as, e) between different language groups. Each of these areas of tension seem to have a significant impact on the presentation of the gospel to, and by, the people. Finally there is cultural tension 0 between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christianity. The first three of the above points affect everyone whether they be Aboriginal or not while the other three points appear to affect only the Aboriginal section of the church.

I say "appear to affect only the Aboriginal section of the Church" because in fact Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:26 "If one member suffers we all suffer" must be accepted as fact. All who are "in Christ" are members one of another no matter what our colour or race. This unity of humanity is the truth of which Paul speaks in both personal and corporate terms. In personal terms he says in Romans 12:3 "to every one among you" and in corporate terms, from Romans 9:1-11:36 he shows that God deals with the nations in the same way, and at the same time, as he deals with Israel. For this reason it is necessary to understand Romans 12:5 "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another", in both its immediate personal context and its extended national context. It is significant to note that the Aboriginal leaders feel the division between the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal believers and it troubles them but, generally the non-Aboriginal Church does not feel the division and therefore is not troubled by it. The resources, capability and competency which the non-Aboriginal Church has, are the result of, and lead to, a false sense of autonomy from God and manifest themselves in complacency and arrogance. These apparent strengths are the greatest weaknesses of the non-Aboriginal Church and reliance on them reveals the European Church's wretchedness before God. This is real poverty in the midst of apparent wealth, that prevents the non-Aboriginal Church from seeing its unity with the Aboriginal Church whose problems are perhaps more easily seen.

## Cultural Romanticism

Some would have us believe that Australia was a virtual "Garden of Eden" prior to European settlement and that the early settlers introduced the first negative aspects to the Australian

---

<sup>9</sup> Mattingley. *Survival In Our Own Land*. p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Mattingley. *Survival In Our Own Land*. p. 80-88.

<sup>11</sup> Harris. *One Blood* p. 884.

<sup>12</sup> One example of this tension and confusion was shown when a white adviser on Elcho Island accused an Aboriginal leader of laziness. He shared with me that his people have not yet adjusted in their culture to the white man's way of working; start work by nine and knock off at four or five after applying yourself to one task is not the Aboriginal way. "We are not lazy, we are just lazy white man's way'.

continent. It is implied, if not directly stated, that the Aboriginal people, as the “noble savage”, lived a utopian existence, without a care or concern in the world. It does appear that, living off the “fat of the land” they were in almost perfect harmony with nature. However all was not comfort and joy for the Aboriginal people any more than it is for any other group of people.

People of all cultures selectively recall and exaggerate aspects of history which suit their agenda and this results in a distorted picture.<sup>13</sup> When this involves a social underclass, it often results in a greater alienation from the group considered responsible for the destruction of the imagined idyllic past and an unreasonable push to resurrect the historic culture - a “return” to one’s roots. The cultural group long for the strength and identity of their mythology while denying, forgetting or overlooking the negative aspects of its history. This form of striving for cultural identity extracts a great cost,

"Many Aborigines have sought to adopt the ideal of the 'traditional' Aboriginal past (or some valorised past such as 'heroic' resistance) and incorporate it into their sense of self and community as the essence of their Aboriginality. But a sense of self ideally springs from a true dialectic between past and present, simple ideals and complex reality, and is not constant but contingent upon circumstances, fluid and changing, and it would seem...that some Aborigines are invoking a reified past which is so remote from their everyday conditions of existence that it is unlikely to provide the basis for a stable and vital identity."<sup>14</sup>

This "cultural romanticism" is fundamentally flawed. Because it is based on the faulty premise that a culture can be resurrected, it retards social development. The "Homelands movement" in its present form, may be a contemporary example of "cultural romanticism". While it provides a buffer for adults to make cultural adjustments at a healthier pace, it robs the younger generation of opportunities to gain language and work skills necessary for integration into mainstream society. At best it can provide only partial cultural resurrection and the advocates would be better advised to consider the reasons for a lack of satisfying cultural identity which the people currently experience and which lies behind the push for a return to the old culture.

The primary aspects of traditional Aboriginal cultures were land, relationship structures and initiation. Of these, land and initiation continue to hold the greatest influence. However, initiation is not practised in its true form (as a process) and the land does not have its original power over the people's lives (tribal people travel to and across each others traditional land and the totem ceremonies are not practised to the degree which was previously believed essential). The principles of relationship are still significant, but not to the same extent. In its place is a form of diminished traditional prohibitions and an extended family network. These changes signify in varying degrees that a breakdown of the traditional culture has occurred. However, when it is realised that the unimaginable pressure which has been brought to bear on the traditional culture for two hundred years, has not been able to blot it out, then perhaps these changes can be seen, not as its devolution but its evolution. A culture, that has shown such tenacity against overwhelming odds, can be confident that the Lord of the nations has not completed his program for its sanctification.

## Cultural Vestiges

Cultural vestiges are the aspects of a culture which are rooted in a by-gone era and which can only be argued for on a culturally idiosyncratic basis. They are present in every society and are often more easily identified in the conservative as distinct from the radical elements of a society. There is some justification for arguing that vestiges are necessary for a culture to give it an historical anchor and that to destroy them is to cut the people from its social anchor and destroy

---

<sup>13</sup> Attwood, Bain. 1996. In *The Age Of Mabo*. pp. xiv, 5. An eminent Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner accused European historians of the pre 1960s of a “cult of forgetfulness” or ‘disremembering’ that had been ‘practised on a national scale’. Consider the attitude shown in Ex 15:2ff.

<sup>14</sup> Attwood, Bain. 1996. In *The Age Of Mabo*. p. xxxvi.

its cohesion. The negative aspects of a culture often hold on with the greatest tenacity, and when their expression is outlawed they can re-emerge as vestiges. Example of vestiges in European Australia are Church organ music, dry land farming techniques, hot Christmas dinner, academic gowns, wigs for magistrates, much of the tradition relating to parliament, charging glasses for a toast, saying "bless you" after some one sneezes (all remnants of superstition in a non-superstitious community). We refer to "the deceased" rather than mention the name.

The following examples of cultural vestiges in the Aboriginal communities are based on observations made during my ministry as pastor for an Aboriginal Church. They are not criticisms but a layman's explanations of community practices and I accept that the conclusions I draw are simplistic and on their own do not do justice to the complexities of contemporary Aboriginal society. I offer them in an effort to understand the relationship between present day phenomena and the communities' recent past.

**Sictricing:** This was related to the traditional initiation ceremony. It was a visible expression of an individual's social status. When the original form of the tribal initiation structure was destroyed or when the individuals were prevented from participating in it, the children matured without scar identification. Government and/or mission control prevented the first generation from participating in ceremonies which would result in any scarring. When the official control was removed the adults no longer had the traditions in tact however they did have "romanticised" memories of the status of the scarred bodies of their parents. Under the influence of alcohol (later drugs) and suffering a form of cultural "persona non grata" because they were denied their cultural base, some young adults cut their forearms arms causing obvious scars. While it did not have the same validity as the ceremonial cutting of the past, it was not frowned upon by the community and their peers. I suggest that this lack of social stigma reveals the possible association with the past.<sup>15</sup>

**Gaol:** This is a common experience for young Aboriginal males, in their early teens they begin to get into trouble and very soon end up in reform or penal institutions. They often see their time through without problems. It parallels the path of initiation in a tribal setting when young men were sent out from the camp for several months and forbidden to have contact with their people. They would return to the camp after a period of time specified by the tribal elders. The lack of social stigma reveals the probable relationship to the past. This has a dual effect of strengthening alignment within the racial group and increasing the sense of persecution by the Europeans.<sup>16</sup>

**Dental hygiene:** It was common to see young men with front teeth missing. In a European society with specialised dental treatment they would be replaced, whether they had been damaged by decay or injury. The dental service available to European society was also available to Aboriginal society. This suggests that there are other factors involved in the loss of front teeth. The lack of social stigma suggests a possible link to the traditional past when a front tooth was removed as part of the initiation process. This practice may have begun and been justified by tribal elders as a means of enabling people to drink if they contracted tetanus.<sup>17</sup> These three examples suggest that young men have scarring and dental appearance similar to young initiates of the traditional culture and have experienced forced extended periods away

---

<sup>15</sup> I am not denying the probable relationship of the masochistic phenomena to anger, frustration, social unrest, unemployment and a sense of hopelessness which it shows. I am simply attempting to explain why it is socially accepted rather than stigmatised.

<sup>16</sup> Whether this understanding is correct or not it must be recognised that gaol is a European form of punishment and has minimal benefits even in European society. It has not been assimilated even today into the cultural cognitive framework of the Aboriginals and as the Aboriginal deaths in custody, the extremely high recidivity rate and the disproportionate percentage of Aboriginals in custody show it needs to be asked whether gaol has any valid place for the majority of those interned.

<sup>17</sup> Comments made in conversation with Mr. Max Hart.

from family similar to traditional culture. By the time they are in their early twenties they have shown themselves to be men.

**Promiscuity:** This is a significant problem for the community because of the risk of disease but it too has parallels in tribal culture where multiple sex partners were common for young males and was socially encouraged both inside and outside the society's concept of marriage.<sup>18</sup>

**Domestic over crowding:** The lack of distinction between nuclear families, allows a single house to be shared by various people which European society separates into individual units. In such circumstances the house becomes the equivalent of a tribal camp rather than a wiltja.

**Vacating premises:** Even among urban Aboriginal people there is a need to vacate a home after a loved one has died. However unlike European practices, the home may never be reoccupied by another family. This relates to the traditional belief of the danger posed by departed spirits and is akin to the use of "Kumunura" in Pitjatjara language, as a replacement name for any one whose name sounds like that of the deceased.

**Sharing:** Traditional society did not have an equivalent of European laws of private property. Material benefits were apportioned according to relationships and not wealth or social status. This meant that an individual had only minimal possessions which he or she considered their own. Food was apportioned according to culturally predetermined regulations.

**Sickness:** Traditionally a sick person often suffered alone because of a lack of medicine or understanding of sickness and/or anatomy. Aboriginal people today make every effort to care for the sick and infirmed but when hospitalisation is required they are often overwhelmed by the technology and terminology of the artificial environment with the result that the sick often suffer alone.

**Lack of emphasis on material things:** Aboriginal culture had the bare minimum of material possessions. These included totemic objects, weapons, minimal domestic tools and repair kits, fire stick, two or three spears, woomera, waddis, multi-purpose carry dishes, boomerangs, digging stick and sometimes a string basket. The quantity of possessions depended on the locality and conditions of the tribal lands. If the lands were very fertile with abundant water and wildlife then the people were less nomadic and so accumulated more material goods. Where the environment was not as conducive to settled life, the people kept fewer possessions so they could travel lighter.

## Cultural Anecdotes

The following stories reveal the confusion and tension within Aboriginal communities as God speaks his word into their cultural setting.

- 1) Folk at Gerard shared with me the frustrations and hurts their parents and grandparents suffered because the missionaries did not accept their faith as legitimate because they smoked or chewed tobacco or because they did not put in a full eight hours a day, six day a week work commitment (for the mission and for no pay). When I asked the people who taught them the Gospel or Bible stories and Bible verses, and who taught them to sing and play the guitar, gum leaf, the comb, the spoons, the tea chest base, the "squeeze Box" for hymns and choruses, the missionaries were often mentioned but it was always the parents and grandparents that the missionaries denied, who were given the full credit.
- 2) An Aboriginal man who was born in the early 1940s and raised on Gerard Reserve has told me of a heated conversation he overheard between UAM mission personnel from Adelaide

---

<sup>18</sup> Meggitt, *The Desert People* speaks frequently of the sexual activity of the women of the Desert tribes.

and senior Aboriginal Christian leaders, The Aboriginal leaders were fighting for their right to minister in their own Church and to their own people but the mission authorities were unwilling to allow it to happen.<sup>19</sup>

- 3) After my family and I left Gerard, we were invited back when Pastor Ben Mason was asked by the people to take a series of ministry meetings. A retired white man who had some previous experience with the people had been accepted by UAM to be our replacement and he was at the meetings. He was annoyed because he had not been told of Ben Mason's visit. He expressed his concerns outside the Church building and Pastor Ben became very irate at his manner. The argument ended when Ben forcefully proclaimed "You whites have had your turn and you blew it, now it's our turn, so get out of the way". The old white fella was quite shocked at the confrontation, he tripped over and fell as he tried to back away. Everybody laughed and this released the tension in the air.
- 4) I learnt of the following events from a mission pastor. A senior Christian Elder in a central Australian Church offered to help at a funeral service when the family could not procure a minister. Because the elder was of the wrong moiety he offered through a third party to fill the vacuum. This action put him at great risk. His offer was accepted and the funeral went ahead. The Widow had two brothers, one who was out of fellowship, had gone "law way" and another who -was a leader in a fellowship in the homelands. A short time after the funeral the elder was physically attacked by one of the widow's brothers because he had openly offended the family. His life was spared only because he was blind. When the older brother learned of the younger brother's attack, he was confronted and severely rebuked.
- 5) As a guest of the traditional owners of an "outstation" in the eastern Arnhem land district I felt accepted enough in the community to ask some questions but didn't know who I could approach. I was eventually directed to a particular elderly man. In the process I discovered what it means to be given a "skin name", to be adopted by a senior member of a community and to receive all the social privileges and responsibilities of that relationship. There are arguments for and against a missionary becoming a part of the system which prevents certain relationships, but when the corporate nature of proclamation and evangelism is considered, most of not all) concerns dissipate.
- 6) I was able to interview a young missionary couple in Queensland and learnt of their frustrations in not being able to get the Aboriginal people to take any responsibility for the Church and ministry. I was then able (at the missionaries suggestion) to interview one of the Aboriginal leaders, he told me of his conversion and love for the Lord and then shared his frustration because the missionary would not get out of the way and allow them to minister to their people.

These examples show the theological development as the Aboriginal people are guided by the Holy Spirit through the various life issues. The Holy Spirit deals with the people's culture from within. He takes them from idolatry (whether it be totemism or more contemporary forms of a European nature) and places them on the true foundation of the will and program of God. He revives them so that they no longer perpetuate the myths of the spirit-beings but in God's grace they can serve him, All this happens in his time.

---

<sup>19</sup> He believes it was Brother Samuels and Tom and Ruby Bateman arguing with Ammi Mason (Auntie Bubba), Jerry Mason, Janet Karpeny (Auntie Pun), Jack and Anni Koolmatie.

## STUDY FIVE

### THE PRESENT: PART 2.

#### Reconciliation in Humanity.

The Triune God, who eternally exists in communion, created humanity in His image, in communion. This common bond of humanity, is given by virtue of creation and is not contrived by humankind, therefore reconciliation to bring about union (communion) is a theological rather than anthropological or sociological issue. It has to do with the essence of humanity rather than simply its social expression. If humanity is comprised of an innumerable collection of individual monads then reconciliation on an individual, societal or cultural basis must be worked out pragmatically on the horizontal level. However if humanity is a creational unity which is only true to its nature and itself when in community, then we are not monads but interdependent members one of another (Ephesians 4:25).<sup>1</sup> This applies whether considering humanity on a personal or cultural level.

“Society itself is an expression of the desire of the many for oneness; As ills are all form, of dissension; peace is another name for social health. The union of church and state, of state with state and class with class, and the union of all these with the supernatural Lord and companion is the ineluctable desire of the believer. Synthesis seems required above all by the demand of God, not only as he operates in human nature, reason, and society by his unifying Spirit, but as he reveals himself through his words and Word. To the New Testament and the Old Testament Church the great proclamation is made, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord”<sup>2</sup>

Paul Mich sees a difference between human experience and essential being as individuals and he refers to the “Fall” not as an historic event but as,

a symbol for me human situation universally. Estrangement is an ever present factor distorting his essential being in his actual existance”.<sup>3</sup>

Reconciliation is to be “re-conciled” with an individual or party with whom we are living out. of fellowship but with whom we were once united. In theological terms, reconciliation presupposes an ontological union of the estranged parties, apart from which it has no meaning. The union was replaced by estrangement at the Fall when humankind rebelled against God and rejected His fellowship. Subsequently, each person has sought autonomy by attempting to elevate his or her self to the position of deity.<sup>4</sup> This has meant a focus on self and a denial of others and resulted in the destruction of unity, community and communion and made reconciliation unattainable. This can be overcome only when we recognise the same infinite destiny that is at work in us is also at work in the other.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Torrance, James B. 1996. Worship. Community and the Triune God of Grace, In the chapter entitled “The Trinity and the Human Person”, pp 26f Torrance demonstrates the relationship between wrong views of God and wrong views of humanity. “The counterpart of the rugged individualism of Western culture is the concept of a sovereign individual Monad ‘out there”.

<sup>2</sup> Neibuhr. Christ and Culture. p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson. Critical Issues in Modern Religion. p. 414. Tillich’s weakness is that he only sees the fall as a symbol of human estrangement instead of its cause.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson. Critical Issues in Modern Religion. p. 414. Paul Tillich sees three main types of estrangement : hubris concupiscence, and unbelief. Hubris, a Greek term usually translated as ‘pride’, is expanded by Tillich to include all human attempts to overleap the limits of finitude, to make oneself the centre of reality, to elevate oneself to the divine sphere.

<sup>5</sup> Pannenberg. What is Man. p. 84 f.

Our essential union and communion is contingent upon our status as creatures so to deny one is to deny the other. Thus, when humanity rebelled and sought autonomy, we were not only separated from God but also from each other. Therefore to be reconciled with each other we need first to be reconciled to God and acknowledge him as creator and ourselves as creatures.

"We are created, redeemed, judged as members of a race or of a Church. Salvation is personal, but it is not individual... It is personal in its appropriation but collective in its nature"<sup>6</sup>

## Reconciliation in Christ

It is necessary to consider the person and work of Christ before one can understand the significance of reconciliation. He came as the promised, conquering seed of Eve and the promised seed of Abraham and therefore to and from humanity. He came as the promised seed of David and therefore to, and from, Israel. He came through, and to Israel, for the purpose of coming to all peoples. Hence in reference to the incarnation John says, "He came unto his own", by which he spoke of both Israel and humanity<sup>7</sup> and Matthew records that his name shall be called "Emmanuel, which means God with us". He "took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh". He assumed, crucified, purged and raised the flesh of fallen humanity. This was the revelation confirmed at Pentecost and which motivated the Church in its early days and especially Paul in his ministry to the nations. This means that Aboriginal humanity was assumed by Christ.

To what do we refer when we speak of humanity? It would be wrong to use the term for the whole of Adamic humanity up to and including the present world population as though it could be isolated from real, practical existence. When we speak of humanity we refer to human beings in a complex of relationships, circumstances, locations. We think not of a mass of flesh and bones but of people in society; civilisation - cultures.

"The notion of the world (i.e. 'humanity') contains that of culture"<sup>8</sup>

This means that to speak of humanity we speak not only of flesh and bones but total community existence - humankind in society - we speak of his culture. Christ redeemed humanity while it was dead in trespasses and sin so that the corruptible will one day put on incorruptible. This is a cultural transformation because it is a corporate transformation. This is the transfer from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

The Aboriginal and European sections of the Church must know their mutual reconciliation with God in Christ, as members of fallen humanity before anything but token reconciliation will be achieved. When this is understood our unity in Christ cannot be questioned. Failure to appreciate this mutual reconciliation results in pragmatic attempts to use whatever means at our disposal to achieve a visible result. This makes reconciliation a work of the flesh and not an issue of faith (Ephesians 2:15-22). It is nothing more than an Australian Babel experience.<sup>9</sup>

"His union with us must be such that there remains no area of our racial history or personal

---

<sup>6</sup> Mikolaski. The Creative Theology of P. T. Forsyth. p103.

<sup>7</sup> This is in conformity to the well accepted practise of John to write on two or more levels of thought.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas. Creation. Christ and Culture. Art' on 'The Problem of Defining a Theology of Culture with reference to the Theology of Paul Tillich'. p. 281.

<sup>9</sup> In Genesis 11 the account of the Tower of Babel is about humanity's attempt to secure itself via political unity. V 4 "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The disunity which prevails in Australia today, and political insecurity which it engenders, are expressions of the judgement of God on sin and rebellion just as the state of insecurity was for the post-deluvian people as they migrated eastward onto the plain of Shinar. If we seek to short circuit this judgement by political manoeuvring as they did then as a nation we are destined for further judgement just as they were.

experience that remains unvisited or unchanged. We can be sure that because Christ has come to stand in our place, there is nothing of our sinful humanity that has been overlooked or not taken to judgment."<sup>10</sup>

## Reconciliation in life.

Reconciliation is an issue on the hearts of most Aboriginal leaders as current published works testify. The thrust of government policy as with Church policy is "reconciliation" and the Christian leaders see it as relating to denominational and racial issues. Reconciliation surfaced as the motive of the "dissident" women in the Hindmarsh Island dispute<sup>11</sup> and it repeatedly surfaced during my research. It is understandable that each mission area will reflect the character of its parent organisation, however when the separatist and exclusivist attitude of a denominational group is transferred and practised with greater fervour than the gospel itself, there is cause for concern. Denominational distinctions may be important but it is essential that theology, and not prejudices, be conveyed in missionary activity.

In the interviews I frequently asked "What relationship or involvement, if any, do you see for the non-Aboriginal Church in or with the Aboriginal Church?" The answers that I was given do not appear to be related to denominational affiliation, tribal or geographical background and therefore seemed to be personal and more meaningful. Two leaders, one in the Uniting Church and the other in the Anglican Church recognised the point of my question as reconciliation with the following response; Uniting Church leader said, "well it depends entirely on the Whites who have caused the offence, are they willing to give to the Aboriginal Church, not as charity but as payment of their debt", while the Anglican leader said; "really it depends on the Aboriginals because we were the ones offended by white Churches in previous generations so we must be willing to be reconciled". A community leader from Tennant Creek said "We are all part of Christ; you must accept us as your brothers". A number of lay leaders said simply "fellowship with us".

I had the privilege of meeting Rev. Bill Bird of the Anglican Church whose article on "Reconciliation" <sup>12</sup> gave me great blessing in January 1994 and so I was keen to talk with him regarding his ministry and life. Bill had only recently suffered a stroke which left him with significant physical problems which he had no doubt God could and would overcome. The revelations he was given, regarding the sinfulness of his own heart and his need to be reconciled with his white brothers and sisters, have not abated. They spawned a work and calling of God which will lead to many more experiences of reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australian Christians. Bill contacts several Aboriginal people either individually or through their churches and arranges bus trips to neighbouring suburbs, towns, cities or states. The travellers are billeted in homes of non Aboriginal Christians. This enables relationships to develop as ignorance and prejudice are overcome. The people are then able to share in ministry and worship before returning home.<sup>13</sup>

## Reconciliation in Faith - A Practical Experience.

At this point I am referring to the inter-personal relationships which believers can and should enjoy which best reflects the multi-cultural character of the Body of Christ - the Church. This requires no formal structures and no intimidating laws of protocol.<sup>14</sup> But simply one believer

---

<sup>10</sup> Relationship: Divine-Human. n. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Advertiser 23/12/95 p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> On Being. Dec 1993. p. 22. See also Hart, Max. A Story of Fire. Continued.

<sup>13</sup> On Being. May 1995. p 21. A similar ministry is being provided by Denise Champion at Pt Augusta.

<sup>14</sup> 14 Griffith Thomas speaks of true unity as distinct from ecumenical union. The former essential and the latter unnecessary. Thomas. The Holy Spirit of God P. 260. "Unity has also sometimes been confused being one in every other respect should be institutionally divided, and even rival, on a rite, as is the case

accepting and valuing another in love. It is in the realm of interpersonal relationships that we learn of the reality of our justifier. As we live in his will and conform to the promptings of the Spirit, we are confronted with our own inconsistencies, such as intolerance, impatience and arrogance. We stand against these by constantly turning to Christ to be refreshed in the fact that He took upon Himself the totality of human sinfulness and on the basis of His judgment of acquittal and forgiveness He accepted Aboriginal as well as European believers into His own fellowship which He enjoys with the Father and the Spirit. This is the practical experience of reconciliation.

However, Europeans have difficulty in accepting Aboriginal people and culture because of the negative stereotypes which have formed our understandings. We have come to know far more of what, to Europeans, is the dark side of Aboriginal culture, than the light, or positive side.<sup>15</sup> We have never appreciated the degree to which Aboriginal people have understood love, fidelity, trust, patience, quietness, long-suffering, tolerance, contentment, ready acceptance of others, close community life and respect for elders. We have not appreciated that they excelled in artistic and musical skill,<sup>16</sup> sound teaching methods, and that their affinity with creation was not dualistic. As well as these things most (if not all) traditional Aboriginal cultures understood the principle of the shedding of blood for atonement and the concept of the "kinsman redeemer". Nor have we appreciated that when Aboriginal people are renewed in the Spirit, their theological interest tends to be on those things that unite person to person and people to creation. They stress relationships and human identity.

### **Reconciliation in Structure - An Unnecessary Stress.**

Structural or organisational unity of the Church may sound like the best way to achieve the goal of union but in fact it often accompanies a denial of the union which we already have in Christ and substitutes in its place a contrived union. It often has as the basis for such efforts the belief that the ultimate promise of the experience of unity is to be achieved here on earth during our life time and by human effort.

The concept also suffers from the fact that formal reconciliation, even when there is minimal cultural diversity (e.g., the formation of the Uniting Church of Australia) always requires compromise of previously held principles, this may be a good thing if the principles involved are not worthy of being held but who decides which principles are to be sacrificed. When the formal and institutional reconciliation is attempted at a level of great cultural diversity (e.g., forming one

---

between Baptists and all other churches. It is erecting into a primary place something which in the genius of Christianity is but secondary." with unanimity of doctrine. But here again, unanimity on fundamentals has been found compatible with remarkable variety in non-essentials without any breach of unity. Unanimity of opinion on every point is as impossible as it would be intolerable and unnecessary, and yet essential unity can exist under a great deal of doctrinal variety".

P. T. Forsyth's thought is not as different as it first appears when he speaks of the "temporary" nature of institutionary division in the face of doctrinal unity on essentials. Forsyth. *Justification of God*. p. 93. "It is a position too incongruous to be permanent, that churches which are one upon their fundamental theology should be out of communion with each other upon its institutional aspect-or that

<sup>15</sup> Hoff. Rev C. 1926. Koonibba Lutheran Publ'. Adelaide. p. 8. Hoff speaks of the tribal peoples as "a community loving people...they are good natured, kind, carefree and always ready to share". R. M. Williams wrote in his autobiography *Beneath Whose Hand*. that the western desert people lived in a state of mental contentment p. 29. He arrived at this conclusion after living and travelling with the people over a prolong period. Harris. *One Blood*, p. 41. Harris records comments of the surgeon of the first fleet "Aborigines seemingly enjoyed uninterrupted health and live to a great age". see also Flood, Josephine. *Archeology of the Dreamtime*. It appears that food and water were in ample supply even in the harshest of desert conditions.

<sup>16</sup> In traditional Aboriginal singing the melody, rhythm, text, form, location, setting and the ritual status of the observer all determine the message and meaning of the song. By changing the combination and/or altering the pitch and/or intensity of any or all of the constituent parts the performers influence the message conveyed.

Church out of the Aboriginal and European worshippers) the demand for compromise for the sake of union touches the individuals at a far deeper level and the risk of misunderstanding, and subsequent hostility is far greater. Perhaps the most significant aspect of structural reconciliation is that it shifts the Churches' focus of attention from the great eternities<sup>17</sup> of the faith to organisational and institutional issues. To emphasise structural reconciliation is to deny the reality of our reconciliation in Christ which is the Church's reason for being. Such a focus depends on one of the very things the Gospel is called on to confront, that is, human structures.

"Despite and due to the structural renewals, a world is being built which has no structural room for the priority of God, conversion and salvation. There are times when this does not seem to matter either ecclesiastically or culturally. But sooner or later this second basic decision on which our culture is being built, that of its own autonomy, makes itself clearly, painfully felt."<sup>18</sup>

## Dignity: Social justice and Land Rights

The Church became overtly involved in the issue of land rights in 1963, when the Methodist Church missionary Edgar Wells, championed the rights of the Yirrkala Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, to control their own land.<sup>19</sup> Soon after the Mapoon people of North Queensland fought a similar battle against the government and mining companies, but were disappointed when the Presbyterian mission failed to support them. The battle ended in November 1963 when armed police entered Mapoon, arrested the whole community and set fire to the people's homes, the school, the store and the church. The Presbyterians were in trouble again in the early 1970s, at Aurukun in the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>20</sup>

These events are closely aligned to spiritual revival which includes a revival in self-image or dignity.<sup>21</sup> This self image is determined by the value system and world-view of the people. This means that the change which occurs in the people of one culture will be different from that of another culture. For example, when Europeans are revived they may focus less on real estate while Aboriginals may focus more on land rights. Aboriginal people suffer greatly when the different ideas of what gives them dignity are not recognised. The following quote from an Aboriginal Christian lady demonstrates this,

"How can we obey God if you take away our land? ... How can we be good stewards of it if we only half own A and someone else can make decisions about it?"<sup>22</sup>

When land rights become a reality Aboriginal dignity begins to return.

Issues of land stir great emotions in both Aboriginal and European communities because of our idolatrous relationships with it. There can be no doubt that this is wrong but the fact that we relate to the land is not wrong but is creational; it has to do with humanity being made from the dust and placed in the garden of Eden and with the view of ultimate inheritance in paradise of God. Aboriginal land rights are the visible tip of this far greater human issue; the desire to return to the garden Eden, (this desire is itself an aspect of the innate human need to return to

---

<sup>17</sup> By this I am referring to the eternal truths such as glory, justification, sanctification, atonement and propitiation.

<sup>18</sup> Berkhof. *Christian Faith*. p. 514.

<sup>19</sup> Harris. *One Blood*, p.832. & Wells, E. "The Missions and Race Prejudice". *Racism, The Australian Experience*. Vol 2. Chapter 17.

<sup>20</sup> After the Australian courts failed to provide justice for the people and the Federal Whitlam Government which discouraged investment from overseas, had collapsed, five Aurukun elders appeared before the Privy Council in London to plead, but lose, their case.

<sup>21</sup> This is because humanity's inherent depravity can not destroy the ontological majesty. To be revived in Christ is to be revived in an awareness of our due status as human beings.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *One Blood*. p. 860.

fellowship with God). As such the desire relates to a person's identity, security, dignity and a sense of value and belonging. While in traditional Aboriginal religion this is understood in the environmental/ law terms of the Dreaming, in fact as the ontological bond with the land, it has to do with the "Dreaming" of all humanity and foreshadows the ultimate inheritance that is promised to all who eagerly await Christ's return. At which time humanity in Christ will say with Yahweh "The land is mine" (Exodus 19:5).

"If there is an honour and therefore a worth, a dignity; a distinction, importance and basis for the recognition of man, it is only before and from the God who has all this originally and fully in himself, only in the form of the general grace of his creation and providence addressed to man, and only in the form of the special grace of the renewal, liberation and exaltation of man decreed and executed by Him"<sup>23</sup>

The extent to which Europeans fail to treat Aboriginal people with dignity and honour is that to which they fail to attain their own dignity and honour. The honour to be shown to every human being as made in the image of God must be shown to each particular person,

"not merely as a specimen of the race, but directly personally and exclusively'. Dignity has to do with worth, merit, grandeur, rank or power. It belongs to the character indelebilis of man's existence by virtue of his creation and vocation but not as an inherent attribute."<sup>24</sup>

This is the significance of social justice and land rights. This issue informs most of the Aboriginal /European interaction and dominates the theological works upon which the fledgling Church among Aboriginal people is building. It is not an issue of raw power (as in status) or property ownership as it is for Europeans, but identity, worth and empowerment.

The traditional Christian leaders who argue for it (and this is by no means universal) see land rights as enabling the tribal people to gain a sense of stability and security. The leaders of the more westernised people saw it as a means of gaining a sense of acceptance and participation in their own affairs and the affairs of the community at large. This insight was crystallised for me while sharing with the leader from Meningie in S.A. He explained how the self-value of the Aboriginal community in the area had improved since they had been able to identify certain areas of land as their own. These areas are now fenced off and only accessible to non-Aboriginals with a permit from the Aboriginal Community. This resulted in the Aboriginal people being afforded ongoing official recognition and opportunities for constructive dialogue between the two sections of the community resulting in a higher and more valued profile in the area.

Some leaders submitted themselves to initiation so that they could gain access to the tribal land of the forebears. Others argued that it is wrong to return to the ways of the Devil (i.e., the ceremonial law) and that the land can be purchased without causing undue tension by using the Aboriginal grants available for that purpose.

The desire for land is universal and is reflected in Aboriginal and European culture. In Aboriginal culture the emphasis is on the command to tend and care or guard the garden (creation) while in European culture the emphasis is on the command to go into all the world and subdue it. The desire itself reflects humanity's inner awareness of the promised inheritance, but how we fulfil the desire reflects the fall, the desire for control of the creation apart from submission to the creator who alone has the right to give to mankind what is in fact his. Whether it be the Aboriginal or European concept there is a certain ontology in the human/land relationship. It is wrong to imagine that the land did not suffer abuse within the limitations of tribal life and beliefs. However there was a relationship (an affinity) with creation which the people understood that limited the abuse and served to remind the people of their obligation to and dependence on the

---

<sup>23</sup> CD. Vol. 3:4. p. 654.

<sup>24</sup> CD. Vol 3:4. p. 652f.

land. Technological development allows a culture to disregard its affinity to the environment so much so that the natural environment is sacrificed for the sake of the a new "improved" technological environment.

When we understand humanity as Paul did we see a unified creation separated only on the basis of the fall and then only according to the representative head under which each person comes. In other words whether one is of Adamic Humanity (outside of Christ) or Redeemed Humanity (those in Christ) (according to Romans 5:12-21). The unity of humanity is due to the unity of the Godhead and therefore the distinction between the saved and unsaved is not an ontological one. Paul shows in Romans 3:30 and 1 Timothy 2:4-5 that the outreach to the nations is based on God's own essential unity.

Humankind is made in the image of God and this fact alone is sufficient to proclaim with authority the true dignity of humanity.

However it is a concept which can only find full depth in those who are obedient in God's service.<sup>25</sup> The 'Kinsman - Redeemer' (Christ) who makes perpetual intercession for His redeemed<sup>26</sup> is the kinsman of both Aboriginal and European humanity and all the fruits of His atoning work apply to all humanity (1 John 2:2). Aboriginal humanity is part of the essential unity of humanity and therefore partakes with all humankind in the image of God. Christ is the representative "'kinsman - redeemer" who intercedes to the Father on their, as much as any other ethnic group's, behalf.

The dignity of the image of God could not be offered to an ethnic group if it is thought to be the "missing link" or in anyway inferior before God. If Darwinian Theory be allowed to diminish the humanity of an ethnic group then to that extent it denies that group the image of God. It has diminished its worth and true dignity. The Church and individual. believers among Aboriginal people must be accepted as one with all believers in the Body of Christ. Their humanity was incorporated in and by Christ on the same basis as European humanity which is by grace through the ministry of reconciliation. It is in Christ that Aboriginal humanity reaches its full measure and stature. The true grandeur and worth of Aboriginal humanity is determined by its purchase price and this was the death of the Son of God. This is the basis of Paul's words "henceforth know we no man after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Such universal human grandeur does not allow for cultural bigotry. To state with Paul that we know no body after the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16f), is a denial of the validity of the flesh in Adam, what-ever the cultural dress, while at the same time affirming all cultural flesh that is washed and redeemed in Christ. Paul goes on to say as a Jew to Gentiles, that God has given the ministry of reconciliation to the Church because God was in Christ reconciling the world (i.e., all cultures) to himself and on this basis he and they are ambassadors. The great significance of this passage is its inter-racial and Intercultural thrust; the Jews and gentiles ( or nations) of the world are reconciled to God.

---

<sup>25</sup> CD. Vol 3:4. p. 657f. The reality of the honour of man is that God wills to need him. He does not will to be God without man in his limitation rendering the service of his witness.

<sup>26</sup> This sentence is based on the story of Ruth and Hebrews 7:25.

## STUDY SIX

### THE PRESENT: PART 3

#### Cross-cultural Ecclesiology

It could be argued that most sections of the Christian Church are in existence because of issues of authority.<sup>1</sup> So when we consider the matter of church structure and oversight we do so, not only from our own personal antipathy to authority, but from the denominational bias under which we have been trained. Each particular ecclesiological form such as Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational, modes of government, physical apostolic succession, spiritual apostolic succession, individual pastoral ministry or a college of elders, liturgical and non-liturgical forms of worship, open and closed membership, claims Biblical support. Such diverse conclusions from the one authority reveal the probability of a lack of definite, specific structural form. It needs to be asked whether biblical necessarily means commanded. Perhaps a fluidity of church structure determined more by social and cultural context than biblical precedence, is necessary.

“The New Testament does not point to the idea of a Spirit-bearing structure. The Spirit is not bound; and therefore we must reject, on the one hand, discussion on ecclesiastical structure in terms of validity: we must reject the theory of a single, determinate structure as decisive for the presence of the Spirit and the being of the Church. We must reject on the other hand discussions of ecclesiastical structure in terms of utility; we must reject the theory of comparative evaluation of various structural forms in terms of their effectiveness in mediating the fruits of the Spirit. We are led by the New Testament to discuss the problem of structure in terms neither of validity, nor of utility, but of meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

The issue of ecclesiology relates to that of authority and will, if allowed, take as its paradigm the hierarchical expressions of the surrounding society. Traditional Aboriginal society held elders, and the principle of corporate eldership, in high regard. Even today, after two hundred years of European denigration, there is still a high regard for communal elders. This fact shows a closer affinity to New Testament times than does the European tendency to elevate youth. The presbyterian style of oversight by tribal elders was the only method of government. In many areas this is still the case and possibly explains why so much ministry which has not acknowledged the existing authority structure in Aboriginal communities has failed.

#### Training for Ministry

When one looks to the scriptures for an understanding of teaching forms or techniques they appear only incidentally. For example children were taught at home by the parents through both act and word. People gained an understanding of Israel's history from the Pharisees. Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus and in the Temple court-yards. The sacrificial system had a teaching

---

<sup>1</sup> The original Catholic Church developed its structure around tensions and conflicts that required or resulted in a stronger authority and this led ultimately to the strengthening of the Episcopacy and then the Papacy. The Anglican Church grew from the conflict between the King of England and the Pope of Rome, the transfer of taxes from England to the Vatican and the authority of the Pope over the King's marital affairs. The Methodist Church began because the authority of the Church of England would not accept the ministry of the Evangelical pastors under Wesley's influence. The Reformation and the multiplicity of denominations which resulted from it were the result of issues of authority (i.e., the Church, tradition, or the Scriptures).

<sup>2</sup> Torrance. Royal Priesthood. A Theology of Ordained Ministry. p. 73. Quoting W. H. Vanstone. The Historic Episcopate. (Edited by K. Carey).

purpose. In the early Church, teaching was done by elders, deacons and particular individuals appointed by God and recognised by the Church for the ministry. All of this was in the context of life. Even those trained as Pharisees were to exercise their role as tradesmen in other fields such as tentmaking. All of this would appear to have many parallels with traditional Aboriginal culture. However in a European setting it is vastly different because the western Church has adopted the Greek educational system which divorces education from its life setting. This means that people can be leaders in the European Church and yet lack qualifications and experience in other areas of life so their christian faith can be largely academic and divorced from life and the ministry which they exercise is understood apart from a living situation and outside the local community context. Rather than coming from the community it looks to the community for sanction as a *fait accompli*. The community is called on to support the ministry rather than the ministry support the community and where the community cannot support the alien form of training then it is often unable to benefit from it without submitting itself to ongoing dependence on another culture.

As the Aboriginal Church matures and it will look for teaching and leadership, to, for and then from its own people. This is as it should be. However it has inadvertently received from the European Church far more of European culture than it realises and when it has sought for teaching it has done so in European and not Aboriginal ways. This is not necessarily wrong and if it springs from within the people, then the fact that it is similar to European methodology may mean nothing more than our common humanity. However if the form of the Church is arrived at because it is erroneously thought to be normative on the basis that it is in the Biblical record as interpreted, taught and practised by the Western Church, then there are problems. It locks the Church into a culturally biased system, it elevates one culture over another, encourages ethnocentrism and necessitates paternalism. It needs to be asked if this is not one reason that the Aboriginal people have struggled to accept the church scene. One example is the form of leadership training used to teach Aboriginal leaders in seminaries, theological colleges and Bible colleges.

The concept of biblical or theological training as an entity in itself, and a theological college as a social institution, are European. Although various individuals may be capable of temporarily adjusting from one cultural setting to another for educational purposes it is far more difficult to assume a position of leadership in a social institution that is totally alien, and be able to appreciate all that that institution stands for and practises.<sup>3</sup> The result of dependence on European styles of theological training is that the Aboriginal Church continues to be powerfully influenced by Europeans and European thought forms.

There is no doubt that Nungalingya, the Aboriginal Theological college in Darwin, has gone a long way towards a recognised Aboriginal expression of the Christian Church; Anglican Aboriginal Christians can be Anglican in a distinctively Aboriginal way and Uniting church Aboriginal Christians can be Uniting church in a distinctively Aboriginal way.<sup>4</sup> However the European involvement remains dominant and the students (future leaders) remain dependent on European structures, theological expression and college staff. This means that even though the theological courses are culturally orientated, the students are still absorbing rather than formulating much of their theology. The risk which the Nungalingya oversight faces is the same as that which missions throughout history have faced and that is when, how and to whom, should they hand over control. With these thoughts in mind, the question of European influence in the development of Aboriginal theology cannot be avoided.

---

<sup>3</sup> These tensions are seen in the fact that it took twenty five years before Nungalingya College in Darwin appointed an Aboriginal man to the principalship. Other Aboriginal Christian Training Institutes such as; Perth Bible College, Bimbadeen Bible College, Wiradjuri Christian Development Ministries, and Kimberley Christian Leadership Training and Resource Centre, the leaders and/or founders are second or third generation from traditional situations and therefore distinctly urban or "Europeanised".

<sup>4</sup> Harris. *One Blood*. p. 889.

It could be argued that European influence in the academic or theological arena is a positive thing and is to be encouraged or even that it cannot be avoided. However European financial influence is even more insidious resulting in discrepancies that are not incidental. In the European setting, students are generally supported during studies by their own cultural network such as a denomination or Church, and when their studies stop the student goes on to a salaried (stipended) position within his own cultural framework. However if an Aboriginal Student goes to a European College (even a college run by Aboriginal leaders is still a European, and not Aboriginal concept) he is dependent on European funding to do European type training and then return to an Aboriginal setting where there is no Aboriginal funding. This means that the student continues to depend on European support which sets him apart from his fellows. Alternatively the student does the same training with a fraction of the support and so under a great deal more stress than his European peers in the ministry. It is not my intention to pass judgment on the issue but simply to raise it as something that needs to be thought through. It needs to be asked whether the method of training is the best one. The European Church's dependence on "professional" ministry places an unhealthy burden on the Aboriginal Church, it equates the ordained ministry with an occupation. This tends to set the ministry apart from the people rather than within or for the people It must be asked whether a 'Tent Making Ministry' would not better serve many economically poor Churches.<sup>5</sup>

Aboriginal theology is biased towards the practical issues that the people face, such as, land rights, culture and racism. These interests in "worldly" things coupled with a lack of understanding and appreciation of European management practises were seen by the European leaders as a lack of spiritual maturity and therefore a justification for not ordaining Aboriginal people to the ministry.

"The problem was partly related to the fear that Aboriginal people were unready and that they would need lengthy and concentrated training if ever they were to be fit for the task. The problem was also related to an inadequate model of the ministry or priesthood. The Anglican Church's own model is that it is the ministry of word and sacrament, but much more has since accrued to it. Clergy are parish administrators. To be ordained, Aboriginal Christian leaders had to fit in to the Western model of the church administrator. They had to show themselves capable of dealing with synods, keeping the finances, handling correspondence, producing parish papers and all the other myriad tasks that fill a clergy day. They did not show themselves capable of these things, so none were ordained."<sup>6</sup>

European concepts of the eldership, diaconate, church administrator, church secretary, may be appropriate in a sophisticated urban Aboriginal Church setting where Europeanisation by way of attitudes, properties and salaries, has already occurred but how appropriate can they be where the people are still traditional and tribal in their thinking and practices. Rather than enforcing a cultural expression of the Church it would be wiser to assist the Aboriginal church to understand how their own cultural setting can be adapted to teach, train and formulate Church structure and leaders.

Pastor Cecil Grant of the Wiradjuri Christian Church, Wagga, spoke of a "white Church" peopled by Aboriginals as distinct from an Aboriginal Church, sharing, reflecting and utilising Aboriginal culture. This distinction must apply whether it be at a local or national level or the local Church or the 'Church as the Body of Christ among the Aboriginal People' across Australia.

The Church born of the Holy Spirit is not an institution or organisation but the body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit. Its character is not institutional but familial, whose authority is not a president but the Father, and whose modus operandi is not expedience but love. From this reality, of organism and not organisation, will spring structures reflecting the culture of the people to assist its worship and ministry. These structures do not belong to the essence of the Church,

---

<sup>5</sup> Anderson. *Theological Foundations for Ministry*. p. 437C

<sup>6</sup> Harris *One Blood*. 1885.

but its expression and therefore their form will not be universal, they will vary from age to age and culture to culture. Because the structures are not of the essence of the Church their relevance can not be taken for granted but will be determined by the Holy Spirit who works through the surrounding cultural environment.

The scriptures speak of the Love of God in man issuing in love for others and that this moved men and women to both share the word and be concerned for the physical well-being of the people - this love is of the essence of the church because it is the essence of the triune God who is love. However the way that the love was expressed in Acts 6:3 (for example) was cultural<sup>7</sup> (as was the form of the record and the way we read and apply the record). This must be so because cultures that don't have tables cannot appoint people to wait on them. And for some "laying on of hands" is done to identify a guilty party.

In Acts 6 the appointment of Spirit-filled men to serve on tables was in response to particular needs (no doubt their appointment was to cover more than the initial purpose). Luke recorded the event and the Church valued and later canonised the record. The early Church sought to follow the example and so established and later formalised an office called the "Diaconate". However this process resulted in the office being divorced from the charism.<sup>8</sup>

The Aboriginal Church suffers many difficulties because of the European ecclesiological structures under which it labours. It assumes that they are biblical structures and although they are now significantly adapted to the Aboriginal culture they remain alien machinery, and maintaining them commits the indigenous Church to generations of financial dependence.<sup>9</sup>

## Expression of Aboriginality

The Aboriginal Christian leaders desire to see that the Church among their people reflects their own cultural values. This is not intended as a denial of the exclusive character of Christian worship but simply that it be Aboriginal Christian worship and not European worship performed by Aboriginals.<sup>10</sup>

Pastor Cecil Grant of Wagga NSW explained that he recognises that the mission trained and "brained" the Aboriginal people. They trained them in the gospel but 'brained' them in the culture. If the people have received the Gospel then they have heard it in the context of their own cultural thought-forms and it will be on this basis that they express their new-found faith. In this way the Gospel intrudes into their community life and brings about its own transforming influence and finds its own forms of expression by way of institutions, icons, anecdotes, taboos, encouragements and liturgical practises.

---

<sup>7</sup> Calvin. John. Institutes of Christian Religion. Vol 2. p. 322. I cannot agree with Calvin when, reference to Acts 6:3 he states, "their origin, institution and office is described by Luke". Calvin insists that a formal "office" was instituted when the appointed men were identified "to whom the office might be committed." On the basis of this assumption he argues that the Church should acknowledge the same office positions "Such deacons as the Apostolic Church had, it becomes us to have after her example".

<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, J. 1987. A New Eusebius. SPCK. London. p. 7f. In the first letter of Clement to the Corinthians c. 96 and the Didache c. 100 pp. 9-12. the appointment to the ministry of serving was related to the spiritual life of the individual, however the beginning of the process of formalisation of the role is evident. One of the charges that Tertullian (c. 160-280) lays against the heretics is that they have no office positions in the Church. See also Kraemer, Hendrik. 1958. A Theology of The Laity. Lutterworth Press. London.

<sup>9</sup> Kraemer. p. 425.

<sup>10</sup> It was interesting to see how this translated into practise at St Luke's Anglican Church in Cairns. The community there were already significantly Europeanised but definitely Aboriginal/Islander. The people were obviously Aboriginal in their expression of worship and their cultic practise reflected European Anglican, Western and Aboriginal traits. There was no mistaking its Aboriginality. The language, the singing, the musical instruments, the icons, altar furnishings and mural on the wall, the atmosphere and attitude of the Aboriginal liturgist and bishop were all unmistakably Aboriginal.

The Gospel always finds expression within the culture and slowly transforms that culture without leaving it behind. The Australian Church of the nineteenth century is still the Australian Church today all-but-it greatly changed. The church will tend to reflect the culture in which it exists. It will find expression in the institutions and forms relevant to and already in that culture. The meetings will reflect an indigenous meeting format, catechising methods will be those already used in the training of young people in existing cultural pursuits, the style of leadership will reflect those already in existence and the style of worship and its expression will reflect the character of the cultural group. This is necessary to enable it to reach the people among whom the Father has placed it. In other words; cultural affinity is an essential component for missions. This may cause concern for many believers of another culture who cannot see that their form of worship probably reflects their culture more than Biblical theology but it needs to be remembered that historically the European Church was led by God to work through these issues and that the Church has inherited the fruit of their labours (for example, the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity show the different emphasis of the Greek and Latin Fathers). This same privilege must now be offered to the Aboriginal Church as it works through issues under God's providential care.

One issue which the European Church was taken through relates to worship; some argued that whatever the scriptures did not prohibit, should be allowed in worship (Luther) <sup>11</sup> while others argued that only what the scriptures taught should be allowed in worship (Calvin). The former encouraged cultural divergence in expressions of worship while the latter (particularly under the missionary) discouraged cultural expression. The European Church had the opportunity to work these issues through and for the most part has come to a point of mutual co-existence and a greater understanding of Biblical truth. While we need to make available the rich inheritance into which the Aboriginal Church has been born, we also need to allow it the opportunity under God to come to whatever insights God may have for it via its own cultural pathway. If we accept that it is not our Church, but the Church of the Living God then we can know that he will faithfully oversee its growth while we humbly stand back to be available when called on by the Father through his (the Aboriginal) people.

## Natural Theology

The circumstances in which the Aboriginal people suffer are those into which the Christian leaders must speak and act as well as being the circumstances out of which they are called to lead the people. This means that cultural settings play a dominant role in informing the theology. The ease with which some sections of the Aboriginal Church have adopted a syncretistic understanding of the faith is largely due to the application of Natural theology. Can it be said that Aboriginal, or any other culture, reveals or points to Christ. Is it possible to know God via one's culture?<sup>12</sup> It is not my intention to pass judgement on the wisdom or otherwise of Natural Theology,<sup>13</sup> but simply to raise it as an issue that appears to need further study by the Aboriginal

---

<sup>11</sup> Consider here the wearing of liturgical robes as an example, how much was their development and inclusion into Christian worship related to the climate and culture of the early European Church. Would such gowns have developed if the Church had had been cradled in the Phillipines or Equatorial Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Scott. Karl Barth's Theology of Missions. World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. p. 13. and 27. In his early writings, Barth denied any possibility of knowing God outside his self-revelation in Jesus Christ but in later work he acknowledged the potential for natural revelation.

Aboriginal Theology is in danger of thinking that an Aboriginal, because of his own 'natural' spirituality can find and understand God on the basis of the Dream-time. The Christian leaders argue for and against traditional culture and law. They draw lines of acceptability at different points of cultural participation. Some argue that initiation is out, some say its O.K. Some argue that the Law is O.K., some say it is totally out. Others argue that only if anything is required to be secret is it wrong. Some say if it spills blood it is wrong. One leader argues that the Law is able to give us an affinity with Christ because he was a Child of the Law and raised under the Law, therefore it is good for Aboriginal people to be raised the same. Of course if the analogy was followed through it can be seen that Jesus came not to bind people to the Law of man but to free them from it.

<sup>13</sup> The impact of Natural Theology is not limited to the Aboriginal Church but is being felt around the world where ever indigenous theologies are being encouraged. It raises questions of missiology as much

Christian leaders as they develop an appreciation of advanced theological teaching. Djininyini Gondara's words are an example of the confusion which can arise from insufficient thinking on the issues of syncretism,

"The Aboriginal Christians are convinced and believe that the God of the Bible was with us and our people in the dreamtime. He was very active in our history. He has come to us in many different ways and many different forms to reveal His presence. He spoke to us through creation, the beauty of the nature that cloths itself in God's glory that convinced us and made us believe that He is also the God of the Aboriginal race in Australia."<sup>14</sup>

He is correct in saying that God has always been with the people (with us ...in the dreamtime), that he has always been active in their history that he has come and spoken to the people in many different ways, however it cannot be said that these acts of God "convinced us and made us believe ...". Such a statement is historically inaccurate as well as theologically and exegetically wrong.

A reasonable knowledge of Bible stories or verses does not provide an understanding of historical, theological or biblical context. Without these tools the Gospel that is preached does not have an historical grounding or purpose. It is therefore without an objective base and consequently will be shallow, moralistic and human-centred. It will ultimately burn the people out and bring about their own condemnation. In such a theological setting, the Gospels are emphasised over the Epistles and Christ's death is understood as exemplary rather than substitutionary. The understanding of the faith is closer to the circumcision party, condemned by Paul, than the doctrine of grace given in the Gospel. This may be due to the traditional "Law" orientation of the culture or the fact that the Gospel that was presented through the years has been Arminian in character or simply because of the sinfulness of the individual heart that like all mankind everywhere it insists on having a say in its own salvation (it is probably a combination of all of these).

## Finke River Mission

The Lutheran work in the centre of Australia, known as the Finke River Mission (FRM) (formerly Hermannsburg Mission), deserves particular attention because of its success as an indigenous denominational ministry and the absorption of some ecclesiological structures despite the cultural difficulties. The work began in June 1877 as the first mission to bring the Christian faith to the Aborigines in the heart of the continent. For the first 16 years the Mission was owned and controlled from Hanover, Germany and supported by a local committee with a superintendent in South Australia. It became Australian owned and controlled in 1893.

From the beginning the Mission encouraged the use of the language of the people, which it developed in written form, and began to translate the scriptures. The missionaries encouraged the people to maintain their relationship with the bush rather than depend on Government rations and although the typical European compound mentality was evident from the earliest days they did not openly denounce the Aboriginal peoples' values as evil. The first Aboriginal evangelist appeared in 1920s and the first Aboriginal Pastor was ordained in 1964. By 1996 there were 12 ordained Aboriginal pastors and 15 evangelists ministering to 6,000 Aboriginal members of the Lutheran Church of Australia in the Finke River Mission area from eleven tribal groups.<sup>15</sup>

---

as theology, How accountable should a Church resulting from mission activity be to the country, culture or organisation that gave it birth? How much authority should the parent body have over the developing theological thought? How much theological freedom should be accepted before the Church is no longer expressing Christian doctrine and therefore no longer a Christian Church? In short how much syncretism should be accepted?

<sup>14</sup> Gondara, Rev. Dr. Djininyini. *Father You Gave Us the Dreaming*.

<sup>15</sup> Figures obtained from the Finke River Mission Newsletter of 1996 and personal interviews with Rev's. David Paech and Philipp Scherer in Adelaide.

The Finke River Mission is significant, not only for its history and contribution to the European settlement of central Australia, but for the current relationship between the Church among the Aboriginal people of the area and the mission organisation which founded it. The Aboriginal pastors and the baptised and confirmed people to whom they minister, are full members of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) to which the FRM belongs and is responsible.

As such the ministry receives support from the LCA for the support staff.<sup>16</sup> Increasingly the Aboriginal people are assuming responsibility for the support of their pastors and erection of church buildings.

The pastors are trained in their communities by experienced FRM personnel and are examined and ordained by the president of the Lutheran Church, SA-NT. Luther Seminary (the LCA institution responsible for training its pastors) conduct in-service training for Aboriginal pastors and evangelists and those in training.

The pastors are appointed to specific areas of ministry and the Churches under their care are expected to provide their support. The amount, method and form of the support is up to the people served by the pastor. The recent initiatives taken by the Kintore Community (450 Kilometres west of Alice Springs) show the effectiveness of the Lutheran ministry among the people. The community decided that they needed a church building and so they encouraged community members to donate a percentage of their weekly income to a building fund. In 1995 the Kintore church building was erected at a cost of sixty thousand dollars and paid for by the Aboriginal people. The building was erected by volunteers from South Australian congregations and the dedication service was led by Aboriginal pastors.

The present Lutheran church among the Aranda, Pitjantjatjara and Loritja peoples within the Finke River Mission area is the result of a spontaneous expansion. They do not have conventions nor has it sprung from an initial mass revival. The Church is growing as indigenous pastors, ordained by the Church and acknowledged by their own people, minister the means of God's grace by way of the proclamation of the word and the sacraments. European pastors assist in this process as well as training the Aboriginal pastor-candidates.

FRM showed great foresight in introducing local homelands initiatives before the government's land rights legislation was enforced. It also took steps to hand oversight of the mission affairs over to Aboriginal leadership and did this by research into the genealogical history of the people so that their own relationship structures would not be violated. This showed the people that the mission was serious about recognising their leaders.<sup>17</sup>

The FRM's involvement in the lives of the Central Australian Aboriginal people is valued by both the government and the Aboriginal people. This can be seen by the changes which have occurred in the Yirara College in Alice Springs. In 1993 the government owned and operated school for tribal Aboriginal young people between the ages of twelve and seventeen, was offered to FRM largely at the request of Aboriginal people concerned. The government had faced problems in operating the school and recognised the work of FRM in scores of communities in the Centre. FRM accepted the offer and became owners of the College on condition that no FRM money could be used for its operation. In a very short time Yirara has gone on from strength to strength and in 1996 had a boarding enrolment of two hundred with about fifty Christian staff. Tribal customs are respected and strong Christian teaching and care is provided. Yirara is now one of the eighteen colleges /secondary schools of the Lutheran Church of Australia.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> This support involves the salaries etc. for four ordained and seven non-ordained workers involved in the spiritual care, translation and linguistic work and support ministries.

<sup>17</sup> This information was given in a record interview with Rev. Philipp Scherer in 1996

<sup>18</sup> Information provided in correspondence from Rev. David Paech.

## The Revival.

The Church in the Finke River Mission area has enjoyed continued steady growth without big rallies, conventions or mass revivals. However this is not the normal means of growth in of the Church among Aboriginal people. On March 14th 1979 a revival began on Elcho Island in the Northern Territory and quickly moved across Arnhem Land. A similar and related experience occurred in August 1981, at Warburton Ranges in the central desert of Western Australia and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory in 1984, Meningie in South Australia in the early 1980s. An unrelated revival occurred at Yarrabah and surrounding Aboriginal communities in North Queensland in June 1983. The Elcho Island revival heralded a significant change for the Aboriginal/ European Christian Church. It was at this point that God's reviving process can be called the blessing of Pentecost for Aboriginal Australia.<sup>19</sup> They were able to say "the Holy Spirit came on us as it did on them at the beginning". By speaking to the people through their Aboriginality and giving the fullness of the Spirit, God showed that they were approved in Christ, they didn't need another cultural group to mediate the Gospel to them and their Aboriginality didn't need to be renounced. This acceptance gave the people great confidence because "if God be for them who could be against them" (Romans 8:31-33), "Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:6). The European Church would have been well advised to see the Elcho Island revival in light of the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2 and respond the way Peter and Paul did in Acts 8, 10 and 19. On these occasions in Acts, it was not the first time that a member of the particular racial group became a believer but it was the sign that God was now moving in a new way among the particular group. All barriers previously considered acceptable were no longer valid (Acts 10:34f) because God was making for himself one new people which would encompassed the cultural diversities of all peoples (as per Colossians 3:10).

The Elcho Island revival gave the general Aboriginal community, an increased self-confidence and political impetus. And as the subsequent movements came to maturity the Aboriginal people developed a growing awareness of their lack of control of their own land.<sup>20</sup> As their dignity and pride in their culture grew, so too did initiatives such as, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, (est' 1984), Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (1970), Bimbadeen Bible College (1979), Central Australian Convention (1985) and numerous other conventions. Plus many similar initiatives in the secular field. There was also a very significant change in the ministry of Aboriginal leaders. Prior to the revival they were nearly all evangelists but after the revival they were nearly all pastor and teachers for example Rev. Dr. Djininyini Gondara<sup>21</sup>, Bishop Arther Malcolm, Canon James Leftwich, Father Patrick Dodson, various ordained denominational leaders, commission chairpersons, directors of Church and government agencies. Missions were initiated by Aboriginal people. A great deal of international ministry began with Aboriginal people going to Israel, Europe, Africa, and Asia. For example Pastor Rodney Minniecon went on

<sup>19</sup> Gondara. *Let My People Go & Nungalinya College*. Occasional Paper Number 46.

<sup>20</sup> Harris. *One Blood* P. 82. "The Methodist missions began training local preachers in the mid 1960s. Some of the missionaries have told me that this was in part hastened by the land rights controversy at Yirrkala which had emphasized to the mission that Aboriginal leadership was emerging in the secular world and that the Church should not lag behind."

<sup>21</sup> Djininyini Gondara's formal theological training consisted of one year at the Methodist Bible College in Brisbane, two years at Malmaluan Training Centre where he studied Christian Education followed by three years at Raronga Theological College, Papua New Guinea. He graduated in 1975 and was ordained to the Uniting Church ministry at Galiwin'ku by the Arnhem Land Presbytery in 1976. Djininyini Gondara identifies himself as a "black theologian" 1. It is said that he has a "deep desire to produce a truly "Aboriginal" theology" 2 He has a reputation as a pastor, lecturer, author and Church official. 3 In 1985 Djininyini co-signed a document as Vice-president of UAICC in which he revealed his theology as pastoral and practical. In 1986 he wrote "Let My People Go" as a series of reflections of Aboriginal Theology. In it he deals with Indigenous theology, the relationship between the Aboriginal and white Churches and a Theology of the Land. In 1987 he wrote an article "Aboriginal Christianity" to deal with issues of contextualisation. In 1988 he wrote "Father You Gave Us the Dreaming" in which he dealt specifically with Aboriginality as a Gospel medium.

ten overseas evangelistic trips in a three year period from 1992 to 1995. The revival has given the Aboriginal people a new confidence and has forced the European Church in Australia to take notice of their existence. This has been a painful process<sup>22</sup> because it has often circumscribed the nation's unrestrained use of its resources. However this too must be understood in the light of God's redemptive program. The blessing of revival is always preceded and accompanied by the Father's acts of judgment and these need to be considered seriously if we are to understand God's salvation plan. When these judgments are felt on a national scale and are received in the light of God's sovereign dealings with all nations then all believers can take heart. This is Australia's experience. The country has been blessed with a revival that has impacted on our materialism and in this way God has reminded us that Australia is not ours to plunder at will. These reminders have often come as the judgments of God to bring his people back to Himself, the heart of the garden.

The revival has bought much blessing to the Aboriginal people, however rather than being accepted by white Australia and specifically the Christian community, they found themselves in the invidious position of having to justify their existence as people and as Christians and argue for their own culture.

This brief historical account shows the relationship between Aboriginal people generally, the Aboriginal Christians specifically, national politics and land rights. This is due to the fundamental relationship between Aboriginals and land.<sup>23</sup>

The revival did not occur in isolation but against a background of political change in Australia which saw Aboriginals stand up for their rightful claims on lands which had been taken from them for mining leases and government policies which resulted in Aboriginal people having the primary say over their own affairs. This motivated the Uniting Church of Australia to hand over control of its missions in the Arnhem Land area and in particular on Elcho Island to the traditional owners resulting in the appointment of an Aboriginal man to the ordained ministry among his own people. The stage was then set for the Elcho Island revival of 1979.

The Warburton Ranges/Mt Margaret revival was a fruit of the Elcho Island revival but of a different nature. The mission had not relinquished control of ministry although due to doctrinal tensions it had lost a large number of its workers and Warburton was one station without a representative. The community was about as low as human community life can go in regards to morality and morale. A Christian man from Warburton met a Christian leader from Elcho revival while both were at Nungalinga College in Darwin and he invited some Elcho Island people to Warburton to minister. When they were due a major initiation corroboree was scheduled by the traditional elders and several hundred tribal people were due to converge on the mission community. This formed the stage for the beginning of the Warburton Ranges revival in 1982. The Elcho Island revival had a strong emphasis on the manifestations of the gifts and the Mt Margaret had a strong emphasis on proclamation. However it has been the Elcho Island people who have enjoyed the fruits of revival the longest and whose evangelistic ministry has seen the greatest results.

- 1) Many of the leaders who were a part of the revival are on record expressing their concerns that the people need teaching.
- 2) In some areas the Church is visibly tired because of the attempts to maintain the revival atmosphere.

---

<sup>22</sup> On Being May 1995. Denise Champion of Port Augusta said, "Non-Aboriginal people go through a mourning period. They see the history of Aboriginal people and have to learn how to deal with it".

<sup>23</sup> For a summary of the Elcho Island and Warburton Ranges' Revivals read Harris, *One Blood*. pp871ff. Ian Lindsay. *Fire in the Spinifex*. Stewart Gill. *Revival Days at Mt Margaret*, in *Reviving Australia*. 1994.

- 3) The return to old life styles has occurred and this is often because the people could not maintain the pressure of religion and communities could not maintain the financial burden of mission outreach.
- 4) Sometimes the missions attempted to influence the proceedings by determining what manifestations were of the Lord and what weren't. Some times the missionaries themselves fell foul of this at the hands of their own organisations when they could not deny the obvious work of the Holy Spirit.
- 5) The revival appears to have been affective North, West and East of the central desert area but when the revival teams went south they met with European sophistication and hardness of hearts.
- 6) In 1995, the revival as a movement was not evident, however its fruits were. The gifts of God to his Church in the form of Godly men and Women who either attribute their salvation or renewal to the movement of God through the Revival. Several leaders are now qualified and ordained in nearly all denominational persuasions or are training for full time ministry in mainstream or Aboriginal Bible or Theological Colleges. There are also many strong Christian leaders in para-Church organisations and government bodies.
- 7) The revival made the Aboriginal people aware of their own position under God and had a major part to play in the current strengthening of their political voice.

## Aboriginal Theology.

The emergence of Aboriginal Theology coincides with the global development of Indigenous theologies. It utilises, and is prompted by, insight gained and promulgated by non-Aboriginal theologians via teachers, preachers, reading material, colleges, missionaries and personal contacts. This interaction has both a positive and negative significance, first, it reinforces the global unity of the Church and is therefore good but second, it also means that the developing theology is often informed from its inception, by politically motivated western theologians and is therefore not the fruit of pure theological enquiry.<sup>24</sup>

Aboriginal people (like all peoples) have always been religious and have always had a theology (or justification) for their religious beliefs and practises. However, when the Christian message was first received by the people, in the early nineteenth century, and they began to ponder its implications for their daily lives, an Aboriginal Christian theology began. Therefore this theology has been around for generations (at least covertly). But as Aboriginal people gained their freedom, their theology (which is their understanding of God) surfaced, and is now one overt expression, among many, of Australian Christian Theology.

In the early days spiritual leaders were rarely allowed to flourish as Aboriginals but were forced into an irrelevant and artificial, European mould. However, as mission authority diminished due to government policy, the leaders were free to develop their own leadership. The following are examples of the development of Aboriginal leadership which occurred apart from, and in direct opposition to, European oversight; an independent movement of the 1950s originating in the north west of NSW under the leadership of an Aboriginal elder called Dick Piety. A nativistic (or millenarian) movement (not very common among the Aboriginal people) at Jigalong in Western Australia.<sup>25</sup> The Jigalong people did not reject the Christian Gospel as can be seen in the fact that revival came to the community in 1983.

---

<sup>24</sup> This needs to be understood even if it is considered that the political agenda is good.

<sup>25</sup> The fact that the Jigalong people did not reject the Christian Gospel can be seen in the fact that revival came to Jigalong in 1983. It was preceded by a vision given to one of the leading elders and law men in the community and later resulted in conversions at neighbouring Wiluna.

## Significant Theological Issues.

Rightly or wrongly, the European form of Christian religion which has been presented to the people is often blamed for the destruction of Aboriginal culture. Therefore, when the people were free from European domination, some of the leaders embark on a theological “journey of discovery”. Others experimented with what they already had and learnt how that could be lived out according to their own, unsupervised, interests and needs. For others it provided an opportunity to exercise political influence. For some it may be a sincere desire to understand the Gospel in terms relevant to their own world view. Often the theological journey reflected a more fundamental search for identity.

On the horizontal level the greatest influence in the development of an indigenous theology is the world-view or cosmology of the people. This is because new information is always interpreted by existing understandings which are formed by the core assumptions of the culture.<sup>26</sup> If these core assumptions are not challenged in the communication of new knowledge then they become the interpretive principal for the new knowledge. This means that the Gospel message and the biblical record which supports it are understood syncretistically. The implications of this are seen in the following account,

“I sat with some old Warpiri men to discuss the activities of Adam, Moses and Jesus. I was, as usual, impressed by their accurate knowledge, although I secretly hoped for some slight shift from orthodoxy. Curious to know how well they could locate each of the events within an overall biblical chronology, I asked which of these men had lived first. The question was received with puzzlement. I was told quite simply that they all lived on the one day.

“God’s prophets and Son had been dislodged from a lineal history and incorporated into an a temporal Dreaming.”<sup>27</sup>

A Jesuit mission at Daly River was closed in 1899 after 13 years of ministry. Fifty six years later the Aboriginal people were interviewed by anthropologist R. M. Berndt, The people spoke well of the missionaries but their memories of the Christian message showed how little their core assumptions had been influenced.

“Jesus, Mary, Adam and Eve all lived in a confused contemporaneity, the stories arranged to explain the disparity between the abundant material possessions of the Europeans and the ‘nothing of the Aborigines’. Adam and Eve, driven from Paradise and cursed, forced to dig in the ground for food, were the Aborigines. Christ was European and celibate like the Jesuits. Their conclusions would have broken the hearts of the nineteen Jesuit missionaries: ‘This is the Christ of the white man’.”<sup>28</sup>

The missionary knows instinctively that the Gospel must deal with a people’s core assumptions, and yet it is at this level that the greatest damage is often done. The core assumptions are the cords of shared values and identity which hold a people together into a cultural entity and which give them a history, place and purpose in the creation as they understand it and so to attack them is to attack the people’s very being. This is the realm of the Holy Spirit and not humanity. He alone can take the truth of the Gospel into the cultural framework of the individual and/or community in such a way as to minister and not needlessly destroy (Isaiah 45:7), to build the culture on the basis of his own holy, trans-cultural and eschatological purpose.

As the Holy Spirit moves in the Aboriginal Church the people will deal with innumerable issues on which the western Church has already come to a settled opinion. In facing these issues each party involved will argue from their own particular point of view which in turn will reflect the

<sup>26</sup> Tham, *Christianity and Culture*. p. 2f

<sup>27</sup> Swaine, *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*. p. 452f.

<sup>28</sup> Harris, *One Blood* p. 475f.

theology gained directly, from, or in response to, that which the missionaries taught them. To a large degree therefore, the discussions will be governed by western thought-forms, but with the very significant difference of being free from the western oversight as to its direction. As the missionaries stand back and allow the Holy Spirit to direct his people in the ebb and flow of their rebellion, faithfulness, anger and love, they will be both thrilled and horrified as decisions are made and theological frameworks are developed. But at all times the indigenous leaders, and the missionary spectators, will only ever be able to view things through their own cultural framework. The fundamental assurance which the Church has, is that it is always under the loving hand of the heavenly Father. Decisions are made and unmade but the Father's will is always done.

There are some significant differences between how Aboriginal and European people view life and this will find expression in their respective theologies. For example, Aboriginal emphasis on relationships results in a "relational faith" whereas the European emphasis on materialism and consumerism results in a "commodified faith".<sup>29</sup> Such distinctions suggest that the Aboriginal Christian leaders will come to theological understandings that are culturally relevant to their people. Their theological reflection and emphasis will be different from that of their European counterpart. It is quite likely that the European Church will only be a spectator during this process of reflection and development and from this position it will be forced to rethink issues of syncretism (remembering the beam in our own eye before we consider the beam in our brother's eye, Matthew 7:3-5). But it is essential that the indigenous leaders be acknowledged and encouraged as early as possible so that the Spirit of God is not accredited with all the religious baggage of the western Church. This will require that the missionary proclaim only the bare essentials of the Gospel, beyond which a Church cannot go and still remain the Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> After this "evangelistic phase" of mission work the missionary should step back while the new converts, under the guidance of Holy Spirit, find their feet in Christ.

The work of God among the people of Elcho Island shows how the culture can be transformed from within, or to use the words of the Abrahamic covenant, the nation blesses itself. The leaders who are recognised by the people, face specific issues under God, they discard the practises of the culture which they deem inappropriate. For example, an elder of one tribe wore a particular article at his ordination<sup>31</sup> which an elder of a neighbouring tribe deemed satanic. Elcho Island has a long history of such self-analysis but the results are not always what the European onlooker thinks they should be.

"One example of misunderstood motives and intentions occurred when a leader took several secret objects and displayed them before the community then cemented them in the ground. He then used the area as his preferred preaching position. It looked like a solid and clear victory for the gospel. However he was motivated by the fact an American Anthropological team had filmed the objects and the film had been inadvertently shown at the community hall for all to see. He saw the only course of action open to him was to regain control of the objects and place them in such a position that it was both a defiance and a demonstration that the objects were not to be tampered with. The seriousness and sacrificial value of the sacred objects was reaffirmed each time the leader stood up to preach the very gospel which the missionary thought was their denunciation."<sup>32</sup>

The missionary onlooker is forced to reconsider Paul's words in Ephesians 5:25-27. The Church is the bride of Christ and He is preparing her to present her faultless to His Father.

---

<sup>29</sup> I first heard these terms during an interview with Ray Minniecon of World Vision.

<sup>30</sup> Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered*. p. 95. Donovan expresses his fear of going "beyond the 'bare essentials'. for fear of cultural encroachment." and p. vii. quoting Karl Rahner "the final and fundamental substance of the Christian message".

<sup>31</sup> Harris. *One Blood*. p 888. A picture is provided showing the 'Man's Bag' Which Harris refers to as 'The Warramura Dilly Bag'.

<sup>32</sup> Source of quote is unknown.

The Aboriginal people's striving for a theological identity and integrity has had various results<sup>33</sup> not the least of which is the development of "Kookaburra Theology". Pastor George Rosendale, spoke of the need to propound a theology which reflects the culture and values of Aboriginal people. When he discussed the issue with various people it was realised that a name was needed to identify this concept. One person spoke tongue-in-cheek and said that in traditional culture the Kookaburra laughed because it brought good news which lifted the spirits of the tribe and resulted in joy.

The Church amongst Aboriginal people is no longer under the domination of European missionaries but is now free to ask questions such as, "What do we believe?" and "How do we express what we believe?" Many of the struggles that are now in the Church reflect the tensions between that which the Aboriginal people had been told to believe in the past, and to which they gave only forced compliance, and that which they actually did hear as being true and real. However because of the missionary's tight doctrinal control, these tensions were not free to come to the fore until the missionary was out of the way, then the tensions between the Gospel which the people had truly heard and loved, and the cultural expression of the Gospel to which the Aboriginal people had only reluctantly submitted, became evident.<sup>34</sup>

Aboriginal people were not rejecting the Gospel nor were they outside its divine embrace but they rejected the cultural trappings in which the Gospel was parcelled. The European cultural trappings were incomprehensible to Aboriginals and when the missionary could not distinguish between them and the Gospel it meant that one could not be accepted without the other. When the Aboriginal failed to accept the cultural trappings it meant also a failure in the area of the faith and hence one remained at best an immature believer and therefore unfit for leadership or at worst an infidel and outside the pail of the Church, unbaptised and unredeemed. The mission was deemed a failure and the Gospel inadequate. However when the missionaries finally gave up or were moved out, the Church was free to express itself in culturally appropriate ways and began to learn under the Father's guidance and in living situations (and often in pain), who they were in Christ and who Christ was in them.

## The Influence of Visions

The phenomenon of visions reveal a European influence. This may be all the more significant as an indicator because of subliminal context. The visions experienced by groups who have been influenced by fundamentalist, non-conformist mission groups reflect the autonomy and evangelical zeal of their parent group. For example, the Warburton people had visions during the time of revival which reflected the mind set of the

UAM in regards to missionary activity<sup>35</sup> The visions experienced by the Yarrabah people were part of Yarrabah's pre- and post European history.<sup>36</sup> The most influential visions had a distinctly Anglican character. The vision experienced by Mulinthin which led to the formation of the Catholic Mission at Port Keats of Western Australia had a distinctly Catholic slant.

---

<sup>33</sup> Other results of this striving can be seen in the theological divisions within the Aboriginal leadership and the attempts to balancing these differences with the desire for a united Aboriginal Church.

<sup>34</sup> Abbie, *The Original Australian*, p. 231 On some missions, food (and later tobacco) rations were withheld from backsliders in religious observance; so everybody conformed outwardly. Abbie observes 'for all the effort and money that has been devoted to the conversion of Aborigines, whether in the city or outback, there have in fact been very few converts. p 242. Davies. *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*. p. 384 There is halt! evidence to show that in objects of the conversion of Aboriginal people to Christianity has been achieved.

<sup>35</sup> The United Aborigines Mission statement of policy of 1975 began "The primal object of the Mission is the evangelisation of the Australian Aborigines".

<sup>36</sup> Swaine, Tony and Rose, Deborah Bird. Ed's 1988. *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*. Australian Association for the Study of Christian Religions. Adelaide.

“An angel pointed to “our brother alone, tall, straight and without blemish” (later identified with Jesus), and in another direction “our mother, the boss lady, treading on a snake”.<sup>37</sup>

The Church is growing within Aboriginal Australia and as a section of the Australian Church it must be encouraged to find its own place in the Body of Christ. This means that it will have to develop its own confidence in the Gospel and what it thinks are the most appropriate ways to articulate the Gospel to Aboriginal people.<sup>38</sup> It may seek accreditation or acceptance from As European counterpart or it may seek to disregard the European Church go its own way at least in the short term.<sup>39</sup>

### **Traditional Art forms.**

**Iconographs:** The gospel message is now shared among many groups by the people themselves using iconographs. This is a method which uses traditional art forms to teach biblical truth and was first designed by Europeans (I believe S.I.L. and A.B.M.S.) but quickly accepted by Aboriginal people as their own. However I was told by experienced mission workers who use the method that some tribal groups reject the iconographs because the symbols relate to an ungodly belief system.

**Corroborees:** these are not necessarily bad and the term is now used for Christian celebrations.

**Didgeridoo, clap sticks and Bull Roarers:** traditionally these instruments where used in the evil worship and celebrations (didgeridoos were limited to the northern areas of Australia) however that should not prevent their use in the service of God any more than the gold taken from the Israelites was used for the molten calf and the artefacts in the temple.

**Icons:** The missionaries generally believed that the people worshipped idols which they fashioned into totems, they were therefore forbidden. However the traditional art forms which represented the totem, and the totems themself, were not idols but icons and had a value similar to cross or liturgical colours in European Churches.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ungunerr, Miriam Rose. Dadirri. pp. 185ff. Stockton, E. “Mulinthin’s Dream”. Nelen Yubu. number 22. 1985. pp 3-11.

<sup>38</sup> One example of this which is largely attributed to the missionaries is the iconography which the Central Australian people use to share the gospel.

<sup>39</sup> Such as A.E.F. and its recent initiatives to become a denomination. Or the many Aboriginal leaders who feel their people’s need for teaching but are reluctant to call for help from qualified Europeans.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Humanity experiences God's covenant love as He moves in and through creation to bring it to His intended goal. It is God's superintendence of creation as it moves through time, that makes it HIS-story and ensures people's ultimate survival. The history of a culture, ancient or modern, is the history of God's dealings with, or programme for, that culture within His total program of salvation for creation. Therefore a culture's survival is not due to political or military force but God's righteousness worked out in accordance with His divine will. This righteousness comes to the culture by way of the Gospel (Romans 1:5, 9:17, 16:26) when God draws people into his Kingdom and by so doing works towards the full realisation of his purposes for creation.

### The Changing Face of Culture

Cultures change over time to such a degree that the one culture can be almost unrecognisable in a one hundred year period (Or example Australia of 1896 with Australia of 1996). This phenomenon of change makes the tendency to standardise culture more of a hindrance than a help. At what point in its history should a culture be standardised? Is it legitimate to make the expression of a culture in one era or area the norm against which all other cultural expressions are measured? At what point can we say it is the culture of that particular country or people? <sup>1</sup> Is it necessary or wise to consider culture in such a static fashion? And why does humanity seek to identify a culture (our own or others) in this way

The desire to fix and clearly define a culture, relates to humanity's need to have a name, an identity. But this cannot be just any name or identity. Our name or identity must satisfy the human longing for completeness and it must express- our origins, character and purpose (where we have come from, what we are now and where we are going, (or expressed another way, our name or identity, must express our past, present and future). As fallen creatures, this ontological drive within humanity for a name, seeks to fill the vacuum caused by the universal refusal to know God as our name or as our identity. We refused to know Him as our completeness, as our Alpha and Omega.

Such fixing of culture is Essentialism. It is inevitably dominated by a fixation on the past because only in the past can those responsible gain a manageable understanding of who they are. However, this denies the eschatological purpose of God in-the culture. It states that the ultimate for the culture has already been reached and that further change is not desirable. As a humanist construct, essentialism denies the inherent capacity of all cultures to move forward. In theological terms, essentialism does not allow for the culture's eschatology (or an awareness of its innate teleology.)<sup>2</sup> This forward movement is the outworking of God's program for creation and is therefore purposive, with the associated changes in culture, directed and not adhoc.

Therefore culture is determined by God to be the experience of a person or people which he uses to prepare them for glory. It is the forum in which people are enabled to build on the foundation of the Gospel with works that survive (ICorinthians 3:10-15, Revelations 14:13).

---

<sup>1</sup> Attwood, Bain. Ed' In The Age Of Mabo. p. 96C This is the issue of 'essentialism' and A is hotly disputed in anthropological circles. It maintains that as a result of some (deliberately undefined) 'natural' process, peoples (read 'races') have inborn ('essential') qualities which will never alter ... and there are inherent characteristics in groups of people ('races') which interpose barriers against harmonious co-existence, not least against inter-breeding of populations; there is an allegedly intrinsic characteristic to form 'a bounded community, a nation, aware of its differences from other nations'.

<sup>2</sup> Attwood, Bain. Ed' In The Age Of Mabo. p. 104.

## The Extinction of Nations

It is an axiom of Christian theology that God is the God of the nations, therefore Christians cannot surrender the belief that God is at work in the whole rich drama of human life, its productions and aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

Psalm 47:8f. "king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne." Psalm 2:4. "God sits in the heavens and does what He pleases."

Psalm 22:28. "He rules over the affairs of men."  
2 Chronicles 20:6, Job 12:23, Psalm 22:28, 82:8. He controls the rise and fall of nations.

The rebellion of the nations and the subsequent judgment of God causes Israel to cry out: Mal 1:4-5. "Great is the Lord, beyond the border of Israel".

Mal 1: 11. "my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations says the Lord of Hosts."

The term "Lord of Hosts" or "Yahweh Sebahoth", refers to God's sovereignty over all the affairs of creation and therefore of all nations in creation.

Daniel 7:14 "And to Him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples nations and languages should serve him"

In the light of these passages it must be said that when individuals or communities are angry and resent Aboriginality, Aboriginal history or contemporary circumstances, they are ultimately angry with God. He alone is the author of, and therefore the authority over, all history and this must be the determining factor when we consider the pain of history.

There are many examples of human pain on a nation scale, in biblical, world, and Aboriginal history, often these have been the result of ethnocide or genocide. The Old Testament record clearly commands the Israelites to totally destroy several ethnic groups (Exodus 23:23-33, Deuteronomy 20:17). World history records the Hittite, Babylonian and Aztec empires as well as North American Indian tribes, Tasmanian Aboriginal groups among many more both large and small, that have been conquered by both external and internal forces, military and environmental forces. These cultures died out because, for the reasons just given, they ceased to be expressed in the daily lives of the people. But the death of a culture, under the hand of God can also occur with,

"the introduction of alien and un-assimilable elements too strong to be resisted (which) lead(s) to its collapse."<sup>4</sup>

It is probable then, that for various reasons, military, environmental or sociological, the societal norms of specific peoples will dramatically change. This will result in the disappearance of more cultural expressions before the Lord returns. Normally when this occurs, it is the culture as distinct from the people of the culture, that disappears.<sup>5</sup> This causes tension for some people who seem to believe in culture as though it had an eternal nature and was somehow fixed in a time warp of history. Culture is by nature a phenomenon of change and is not static, even those

---

<sup>3</sup> Kraemer. p. 425.

<sup>4</sup> Ariarajah, S. Wesley. 1995. Gospel and Culture. W.W.C. publ'. Geneva. p. 25. Italics added.

<sup>5</sup> This distinction lies behind the United Nations preference for the term Ethnocide rather than genocide. Ethnocide refers to the cessation of the culture of a particular ethnic group and hence need not imply the shedding of blood. Genocide however refers to the death of a distinct genetic group and requires the mass destruction of life. It needs to be asked whether it is legitimate to confuse these two distinct concepts

aspects which show the greatest tenacity in resisting change, eventually succumb. It is better therefore to speak of a culture evolving than disappearing, and the people of those cultures adapting to new circumstances, pressures and environments rather than see them in some way as a-cultural or non-cultural. Because of the cultural destruction, the evolution and adaptation is often done reluctantly and accompanied by great pain, with social and community tension and dislocation, resulting in disenfranchisement, dislocation, poverty, violence, unemployment and poor housing. These cultural negatives are due to the people's loss of cultural identity as well as the perpetuating of the destructive forces which resulted in the original cultural overthrow. Forces like racism, greed, fear, arrogance, ignorance and bigotry.

Culture is influenced by, and in turn, influences, inter-tribal and/or inter-family tensions which in turn relate to the rise and fall of national affairs. But at all times they are under the superintendence of the God of the Christian Gospel. He oversees their rise and fall by way of inter-national hierarchies (as referred to in the chapter dealing with western materialism and Aboriginal culturalism). This means that not all cultures have the same purpose in God's program and that some may not be present in glorified form in the new heaven and new earth. Some are made for honour and some for dishonour (1 Timothy 2:20).<sup>6</sup> This does not justify one cultural group destroying another as a wilful act of genocide, but it does enable one to see that God is not obligated to sustain a cultural group forever. And when He uses one group to judge another, he holds the oppressing nation accountable for its actions (Isaiah 8,9 & 10).

## The Nations and Salvation History

Paul states in Acts 14:15-17,

“made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness”.

and also Acts 17:25-28,

“He gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us for in him we live and move and have our being... ‘for we are indeed his offspring”

In Matthew 5:45 Jesus states,

He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust

The history of the Aboriginal peoples runs concurrent with, and is closely aligned to that of all peoples. Israel's representative status (Exodus 19:6) before the nations of the world, has to do with the significance of each nation's national identity under God. “from whom every family on earth is named, Ephesians 3:15. Paul assures the gentile nations “You were once aliens to the commonwealth of Israel having no hope in the world” but now because of the work of Christ we are no longer separated and therefore no longer aliens to Israel. Ephesians 2: 11 ff. The

---

<sup>6</sup> There is a very significant issue here that is outside of the scope of this work but which does need a brief mention, and that is the place of missions in God's economy. Paul proclaimed that God's word had already gone out to all creation and that all creation had heard. God tells us that He has His witnesses in all places and that He has never left himself without a witness. therefore it is possible that even those cultures which ceased to exist before the coming of a missionary will be represented in glory. They had been saved by grace in the name (authority) of Jesus, even before incarnation, the atonement, Pentecost or the mission program of the west. This was so for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob along with all the other Old Testament saints, both Jew and Gentile.

relationship which exists between Israel and the gentile nations as expressed by Paul, is not a new innovation in the New Testament, but a fulfilling of the will of God for Israel and the nations since Israel's formation, Exodus 19:5-6. Isaiah 62, 66:12f speak (heady of the relationship of the nations of the world (who share in the faith of Abraham and are therefore his true descendants) to Israel. However in God's economy the relationship between Israel and the Gentile nations did not begin when members from either group considered themselves "in the faith". The relationship was primarily creational because all peoples shared a common heritage (the imago Dei, made from dust, descendants of Noah and the deluge) and second it was soteriological and by divine decree since God had appointed Israel to be His priestly nation among all nations when all the other nations were still alienated. This alienation itself was also evidence of the essential unity of humanity, because even though God had ordained that the nations of the world were to be aliens to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant, because of their rebellion, Israel was expected to remember that they had shared in this judgment. They were to remember that God called them into being as a nation through no intrinsic value of their own nor of any intrinsic value of Abraham their father. He called them into being to provide for the salvation of all nations which He now does through the Church (the true Israel) as it abides in Christ (the true high priest). In this way the Church, which exists in the nations of the world, including Aboriginal Australia, fulfills the priestly function of Israel.

The Holy Spirit continues to fulfill His international charter among the Aboriginal people, as Christ continues to draw the nations into His kingdom so that they can lay their glory at His feet. This is the ministry which the indigenous Church, along with the entire body of Christ, is called to take up. As Christ's crucified ones the believers are called to minister the word of the cross in love and grace, not only to their own people but to all peoples. Christ warns that if we love only our own, we are no better than the publicans, Matthew 5:47, This international charter is shown in great clarity by Karl Barth,

"We describe those to whom man seems to stand in this wider relationship as his near neighbours, i.e., those who, beyond the narrower sphere, are near to him by nature and in and with the fact of his historical existence, being closely known to him in their way of life. What we have in view, though we cannot guarantee the clarity or preciseness of the concept, is his own particular race or people. But this term presupposes that then: axe other races or peoples different from his, yet no less genuine peoples - groups of men which have a different natural and historical basis and form, to which he does not belong and is not directly bound and committed, and which individually and in their totality form the outermost circle by which he and his people are surrounded, so that indirectly and perhaps very directly he, too, stands in a relationship with it. Those with whom he seems to stand in this widest relationship we call his distant neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

Barth shows that both the intra-cultural and the inter-cultural affairs of humanity are integral components of God's purposes. They are not the result of a never ending cycle of cause and effect. To view cultures (and therefore people, both individually and corporately) as though their cultural affairs were nothing more than the result of cause and effect, leads to a fatalistic framework which allows humankind to excuse their own sin and rebellion because they couldn't be anything else but a product of their environment. This is deism. The following words need to be heard to oppose such notions.

"heredity fixes our trial not our fate"<sup>8</sup>

"His (mankinds) situation is not his grave; it is his cradle"<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> CD. Vol.3:4. p. 286

<sup>8</sup> James Denny.

<sup>9</sup> CD. Vol 3:4 p. 622.

“...According to this view, man is the product of his climate, family, class, century, social and other relations, education and upbringing, and the prevailing good or bad habits of his environment. But this is precisely what he is not.”<sup>10</sup>

“In the sight of God no situations are better or worse, more exalted or lowly, than others. For all their reciprocal differences, they are all equally good and promising. None is absolutely bad or hopeless. Hence, even though we may have occasional yearnings or desires for a very different external existence, we cannot with justice either criticise or resist the divine decree.”<sup>11</sup>

If the Christian Church generally, and the Aboriginal Christian people specifically do not understand history as the out-working of God’s judgements then the apparent hopelessness would leave no alternative but to resort to violence or politics as their salvation.<sup>12</sup> However God has kept a faithful remnant among the people and the Church will never be lost or plucked from His hand (John 10:28f, 17:12). He continues to show love in judgements upon the people and in the midst of the resultant darkness the people see a great light (this is the thought behind Luke 1:79 c.f. Isaiah 8:1-9:7). But this coming (or better, giving) of revelation to a people occurs as a person or people, appointed by God, stand apart and prophetically speaks into and against the rebellious cultural expressions of their own people. Such proclaimers act as the societies conscience and suffer the prophets reward of alienation placing them in a position of weakness in regards to their own culture. This weakness becomes their strength Psalm 4:1 “Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress” (this is what Luther refers to as the theology of the cross<sup>13</sup>). When the people hear God’s word coming to them through the proclamation of the prophet, and repent, then by virtue of God’s grace and in accordance with the Abrahamic covenant, the nation blesses itself.

On this evidence we must say that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), He loved, and sent His only Son to die, for the world (John 3:16) and it was the Father’s will that Christ should die as the propitiation for the sins of the world (I John 2:2).

So there can be no doubt that Aboriginal and European Australia are equally loved by God and stand all fall according to His covenantal program of blessings and cursings. This means that the pain that a people suffer is God’s judgment to turn His people from idolatry and bring them back to himself, when this occurs, the covenantal cursings become covenantal blessings.

“So it comes about, paradoxically, that the third world has the power to redeem the First World, women to redeem men, and Aboriginal Australians to redeem the white population of this country”.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> CD. Vol 3:4 p. 620.

<sup>11</sup> CD. Vol 3:4 p, 620.

<sup>12</sup> Donovan. p. 166. “Every time we take the gospel into the political game we have ended up betraying

<sup>13</sup> Zachmann, The Assurance of Faith, p. 9. God reveals himself under an appearance that contradicts the revealed truth. and Luther, Lectures in the Epistles to the Hebrews. pp. 233ff.

<sup>14</sup> Wilken, John. July 1993. The Australian Catholic Record. Art’ “Models of Catholic Theology”.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Culture and Eschatology

As the Imago Dei humanity has its origins, experience and future in the community of the Godhead. The trinitarian relationships from which we were formed are the basis of community and are the relationships to which we are being returned. It is in defining these relationships that we discover the ontological aspects of culture. In the human sphere these ontological aspects cannot be identified in any exact way because of the depth of human depravity, both in the researcher and in the culture under consideration. This limitation, coupled with the inadequacy of language, causes us to flounder when dealing with issues relating to the nature of the Trinity and the nature of culture.

There is no paradigm in creation by which we can understand God (He cannot be compared to anything) and it is not reasonable to assume that the finite can comprehend the infinite. This means that we cannot start with creation, either human nature or human culture and read back into the Triune community. However the universality of culture is an aspect of Imago Dei, and as such it must be an essential component of being created as the divine image bearer. This means that since the copy is cultural so to must be the original.<sup>1</sup> Culture, therefore, is not primarily anthropological or sociological, but theological and since it pertains to the Triune community and the ultimate kingdom of God, it is also eschatological. In other words, to understand the true nature of social beings (or being social) we look not at the copy but the original, not at the penultimate but the ultimate. If the life of the Triune community is in any way orderly and qualifies as the total life-way<sup>2</sup> and mentality of God then it is the culture of the Kingdom of God. As a postulate therefore, there can only be community life in glory if it is pre-existent in the Godhead and only on this basis are we free to speak of both the culture of the Godhead and the culture of the Kingdom of God. If it were not so, and if there is not in the Triune community an archetype of which all human cultures are in some degree, ectypes, then it follows that there is no ontological "culture" and the term would be inappropriate when discussing the ultimate kingdom of God. Without an eternal significance culture would cease to exist. It could not apply to redeemed and glorified humanity (as a corporate entity) made in the image of God. Concepts such as community and society, so central to our creaturely existence would not have a paradigm in the heavenlies. Without a future, cultures would have only a transitional purpose - no ontology. This would reduce the notion of unity of humanity in glory to a total absorption of the person in his or her discreetness into one giant amorphous conglomerate that does not relate, communicate, act, create, venture, decide, plan, love, worship or serve. In other words, redeemed and unified humanity in Christ Jesus and in the new heaven and new earth would not do any of the things which, when considered together, are referred to as culture.

This non-expressive, non-experiential, Casper-like view of glory portrays eternal life and therefore the new creation, minus the physical world and therefore it does not give true value to God's creation as the home for humanity made in His image. In contradiction to this Paul shows that the New Heaven and New Earth is a physical reality as much as a spiritual one. It is not an intangible and nonspecific spiritual state without physical dimension. Just as humanity awaits a physical resurrection and new life so too does the rest of creation. Paul shows the two to be interrelated,

---

<sup>1</sup> Berkhof, Hendrikus. *Christian Faith*. p. 539. "One day the relation between this entire cultural development and eternity will be disclosed and shown to be meaningful. But we are not able to look beyond the great leap. It is wonderful enough to know that all the true, the good, and the beautiful we receive and achieve in our cultural development is a distant foretaste of the fulness of life and the world which God has in store for us."

<sup>2</sup> Luzbetak. *The Church and Cultures*. p. 4.

Romans 8:15-25. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

The Spirit affirms the believers as heirs in Christ with whom the), will be glorified and shown glory. The creation (of which Paul and all believers partake in the flesh and in their present earthly life) eagerly waits for the time when it, with and for, the sons of God, will be released from the bondage of this present fallen state. At this point - the culmination and telos of history, all things will be made new (**kainos**) and the believers who have already been made new (**kainos**) creatures in Christ Jesus will discover the fullness of their new state.<sup>3</sup> Just as we await our adoption as sons which will involve the redemption of our physical bodies so too does creation wait with eager longing for a physical redemption.

When we recognise that glory involves a physical resurrection for humanity and a release and renewing of this present creation into the new heaven and new earth, we are able to appreciate the eternal significance of present human endeavour. We can hear John's words in Revelation 14:13 that those who die in the Lord may rest from their labours because their deeds follow them, and Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:13, each man's work will become manifest. Peter's argument accords with this in 2 Peter 3: 10 (the New American Standard Version follows the Nestle Text),

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.<sup>4</sup>

The works which become manifest are the expressions of culture and these will either be burnt up as mood hay or stubble, as dead works, on the day of His appearing, or they will be purified by the fire of God's judgement as works of righteousness. As expressions of pure worship in Christ they will be acceptable to God as a sweet smelling savour. These will be the works which have an eschatological thrust and so follow us into glory.

In this way culture, with its future orientation, acts as a medium for God's eschatological purposes. It participates in the inaugurating of the Kingdom of God on earth, when the King, who has always been present in and to His Kingdom, is unveiled for all to see.<sup>5</sup>

The degree of eschatological orientation varies from culture to culture. For some it is simply a desire for an unrealised good in the here and now. For others it is a pervading influence over all of life. The future orientation shows in the purposeful nature of cultural endeavour. It is expressed by the world as values seen in relation to the good to be achieved by an act or action.<sup>6</sup> It finds expression in concepts like "destiny" or a "hope for better days" a drive for

---

<sup>3</sup> In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:5, the greek word kainos, meaning renewed, rather than neos, meaning brand new, is used.

<sup>4</sup> Rietkerk, Wim. 1989. The Future Great Planet Earth. Nivedit Good Books. India. pp 17-23.

<sup>5</sup> Forsyth. The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ p. 93ff. It is this victory in eternity which must prescribe the conduct of the campaign in time.

<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr. Christ and Culture. p. 34f.

“utopia” or “paradise lost”. It is often expressed by way of “kingdom building”, “self-security”, “making a name for one’s self”, “finding fulfilment” or “dreaming of escape to a better life”. All these practices are of necessity, limited and temporal because in rebellion the world has denied the one true God who alone determines the fulness of human life and its ultimate realisation.

## Cultural Groups and glory

Because of the fall, culture is predominately insular, self-serving, autonomous and selfglorifying, but in glory all these traits will be done away with. Each culture will be free to give of its differentiations to the enrichment of humanity generally. From this it can be seen that human culture in relation to the kingdom of God is very significant.

The dominance of our own cultural framework, world view, values and orientations, makes it very difficult to explain our glorified state. We are born, raised and converted in particular cultural settings, and as, members of God’s covenant family we understand and are understood, from within this framework, but how much, or in what form is our cultural framework carried into glory?

Culture as we experience it depends on a community. If present experience is the criteria for understanding culture, then for people to retain their cultural identity in any meaningful way in glory, they would have to be capable of dwelling together as identifiable groups. This begs many questions about the state of glory, for example, do the Aboriginals have one area to express the redeemed aspects of their community life and the English have another area? Do the Pitjantjatjara have an area and the Warlpiri another area? However if we accept that there is a difference between what is and what should be, between the existential and ontological culture, then it is possible to consider that the divisions between cultures, maintained to sustain cultural purity will not be needed when humanity is returned to the ontological culture of the Kingdom of God.

Aboriginal people (along with all humanity) are essential components of the image of God and the Church among Aboriginal people is part of redeemed humanity as incorporated in the Body of Christ. This means that Aboriginal and European believers are members of a shared humanity by virtue of creation and redemption, without either being required to stop being true to their created nature. As specific racial groups we are to see our distinctions united in Christ. This is the meaning of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Romans 10: 12. Even those verses which seem to imply the denial of racial distinctions, such as Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3: 11 are not saying; that in Christ they are removed any more than all gender distinctions are removed.<sup>7</sup> In fact if this were so then both bondage and freedom would have to be removed, since there are no slaves or free. Clearly the lesson is not that differences should not (or will not) occur but that the differences are not significant in the Abrahamic covenant. This is the meaning of Abraham’s fatherhood of many nations in Romans 4:16 and 17.

The Biblical teaching on culture and the eschaton is not of

“a great big melting pot, big enough to take the world and all its got, stirred around for hundred years or more to turn out multi-colored people by the score”<sup>8</sup>

nor is it a “cultural disarmament” as Panikkar says. In the Corinthian passage Paul’s argument would be made void if it meant the cessation of cultural differentiations. The Colossian and Galatian passages refer to the cessation of the divisions and not the cessation of the essence of the groups defined. For it to be otherwise would destroy the discreteness of persons and the personal identity by which each person knows and expresses the image of God. In both the

---

<sup>7</sup> Remember there is one mediator between God and humanity, the -man Christ Jesus. 1Tim 2:5.

<sup>8</sup> The words of a popular song by the Beatle in the 1960s.

Galatian and Colossian passages the significance is in the fact that the differentiations of the groups are incorporated and not excluded in Christ. If anyone is in Christ whether they be Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, they are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise.

Another insight into the state of humanity in glory is given in the passages which speak of Christ as the glorified Son of Man. In glory He is identifiable as the historical Jewish man called Jesus. His discreteness, nationality and gender are all in tact and in identifiable form (Acts 11, 13, 17, 18, 26, 28, 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100). 1 Timothy 2:5 Revelations 1:7).

Cultural distinctions are also easier to attribute to glorified humanity when we acknowledge the physicality to the new heaven and new earth. This enables an image of glory where in the many cultural expressions of humanity find a legitimate place for their cultus/culture expression.

That there are distinct cultural groups within humanity is to state the obvious, but to attempt to explain the cause and purpose of their existence is very difficult. Many attempts have been made to explain the phenomena of culture, or the mechanics of sociology, on a human level and great insights have been gained by sociologists, anthropologists and missiologists. However by not firmly grounding sociology in the sociality of the Triune God we do not see its ontology, its origin and its goal. By basing research on the experience of fallen humanity we undermine the fundamental axioms of human existence such as creaturehood and image-bearers. For a Biblico-Trinitarian sociology, the phenomena of culture which all humanity since the fall, experiences, and the ontology of culture, are different and will not be one until glory. Society as we know it, is largely the result of tension between what should be, and what is; what should be relates to living as community as the image of God (being-in-communion) and what is, relates to the biblical record of the fall of humanity in Adam and the judgment of humanity at Babel and all subsequent human history. The existence of cultural groups, is not simply an anthropo-sociological phenomena, it is primarily theo-sociological. Culture, as it was intended, was a necessary component of the image of God, but culture as it became, and as humanity has and does, experience A, is the result of divine intervention when God dispersed the nations by introducing confusion of tongues and continuously gives humanity over to its rebellion. Cultural separation is the direct result of God's judgment and in this state each culture attempts to secure its own survival and minimise inter-cultural tension and confusion by numerous techniques and institutions which foster separation and encourage the identity of discreet cultural units or ethnic groups. The people choose to secure themselves in, and by, expressions of cultural rebellion because God has handed them over to it; their wickedness chastens them. Jeremiah 2:1ff gives an example of the dual aspects of judgment when in verse 19 God chastens Israel and says,

*"Your wickedness will chasten you and your apostasy will reprove you."*

In this rebellion, ethnic values and survival are thought to be safe-guarded. When rebellion and subsequent judgment have run their course and the purchased possession is finally redeemed and glorified (Ephesians 1: 14) then division, as a judgment of God, and as a means of deceptive self-security for humanity, will be overcome. Each culture, comprised of redeemed people, will be redeemed, and will know the joy of discreteness of persons and cultures in unity. Misunderstandings due to lack of living as justified and guilt-free people, will be no longer. In glory, perfect love will have cast out all fear and each will know as they are known. Cultures will be free to intermingle and provide mutual enrichment by their differentiations. This must be so for the ectype (humanity), if the persons of the archetype (Trinity) are mutually enriched by their differentiations.

If cultural diversity can enrich within a culture then it can also enrich across cultures. This is experienced in varying ways and capacities (but always with a certain degree of tension) even in the fallen state when people seek cultural interchange. In this way cultural differentiations, which in the sinful state, reflect false worship and cause so much misunderstanding, can be seen as an

essential aspect of humanity made in the image of God and giving expression to the panorama of his majesty. In glory, sin and all its divisiveness will be gone, individuals and cultures will be liberated into full communion and their kings will offer up their glories to the Father on behalf of the people (the ethnic group) they represent,

Psalm 86: 9 “All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name”.

Haggai 2:7 I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations will come in, and I will fill this house with splendour”.

See also Revelation 21:24-26, 22:2.

At this time redeemed humanity will be taken into the fulness of grace and will participate fully in the perichoretic activity of the Godhead.<sup>9</sup> There, love will be sacrificial and otherperson centred, priestly, protective, declaratory, purposive and creative. Humanity will be returned, not only to the garden, from whence it was cast, but to the goal to which the original garden pointed. This will not be primarily an experience of the individual but the experience of persons in full cultural expression, devoid of false worship. Humanity will be united in the desire to go to Zion and worship the true God. The Kings of the earth will offer the treasures of their people's to God's glory and the diversity, or differentiations of the nations, will be seen in holiness. There will be no tension between the focus of worship, cultic practice and culture. Unity of humanity will be the norm, nations around the world will live in peace and purpose. At this point the question posed by the catechism of the puritan, Thomas Watson, will be answered,

“What is the chief end of man? “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>10</sup>

This is an eternal vocation and relates to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:13,

“these three remain; faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”

Each of these realities are based on a “not yet”. Faith is faith while its object is not in hand (“the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not yet seen.” Hebrews 11: 1). Hope is only hope until its goal is realised (“for if we have it why do we yet hope for it.” Romans 8:24) and love by nature is that which always has more to give and always seeks to give it. This means that the culture of the eschatological Kingdom of God, to which all earthly cultures are being directed, is itself always moving toward the full attaining of the glory of the inexhaustible God.<sup>11</sup> Glory is not now and will not be then, a static, but dynamic reality,

In the eschaton, the richness of the Trinity will be evidenced in the cultural diversity of redeemed humanity and will be based on true cultic practice. Isaiah 66:18-23 speaks of this when the Lord will gather the peoples of the nations together and they will offer their brethren as offerings to God. Each will bring their offerings from whatever their culture provides and in whatever way it provides and from some of the people, God will appoint leaders of worship.

Isaiah 65:17-25, provides an insight into the community life of the eschaton. God and His people will know great joy without weeping, distress or futility of life. Humanity will live in intimate communion with God and His creation and enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Micah 4:1-7 speaks of the nature of the kingdom of God in regard to the redeemed cultures of the world. Isaiah 61 begins with the messianic promise fulfilled in Christ (Isaiah 61: 1: If and Luke

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of this term refer to chapter on *Culture and Theology*.

<sup>10</sup> Watson, Thomas. 1958. *A Body of Divinity*. Banner of Truth Trust. London. p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Glory is not like an elevator that is stuck on the top floor, it is like an escalator which is always taking us into the inexhaustible depths of the Triune God.

4:18) then in verse 5-7 Isaiah speaks of the shared communion and vocation of the redeemed people of God with the Gentile nations. It can be seen that the culture of Israel, as God's appointed representative nation, is closely bound to the cultures of the Gentiles. As Isaiah 61:9 says, at some point in the future, the descendents of the faithful shall be known among the nations.

The Sermon on the Mount deals with issues of the ultimate kingdom of God. The Beatitudes, for example, are a revelation into the quality of relationships which will apply in glory, they indicate the nature of true life. As we live in the blessings which Christ proclaims in the sermon, we come into, and under, the full reign of the King. These indicatives of the ultimate Kingdom and the imperatives which they contain, instruct the people in the true nature, or culture, of the Kingdom of God. This culture involves living in full enjoyment of the fruit of the Spirit against which there is no law (or cultural prohibitions), Galatians 5:22f.

## Language in Glory

Language and culture are closely linked but are they equally ontological? Is language of the same level of humanity as Culture? If language is essential to human ontology is it only the phenomenon of language or is every language as ontological as every culture? If sociological theory is developed from an anthropological base then it must be said that culture and the phenomenon of language are mutually dependent and therefore language has to do with human ontology as does culture. In such a case the following quote from Adam Muller in 1812 would be correct;

“speech is the divine seal which alone makes serious and genuine all the singular and diffuse thoughts of the individual. What the soul cherishes as its most precious possession remains mere vision and dream, without influence on the world and so without amicable impact, until it can be expressed, i.e., until it is confirmed by speech. Speech is an exuberant substance in which all ages and all generations, even the poorest, have handed down the most beautiful treasures of their lives. Thought becomes thought by the same token as man becomes man. In short, as with every other property, that of the soul cannot be secure until it has become common property - and it becomes this by speech.<sup>12</sup>

However if sociology is Trinitarian then it can be seen that the phenomenon of language is not part of Human ontology.<sup>13</sup> Language is the means of communication within humanity - it is a means to an end and the end (or goal) is communication, or better, communion. It is communion that gives “communi-cation” to language and it is communion and not language that has an archetype in the Trinity. Therefore it is communion and not language that has to do with human ontology. This is not to say that human language will not exist in glory but simply that it will not be the limiting force that it is for fallen humanity. There is a depth of communication which comes from communion and the manifestation of the Spirit of God, this utilises the language component of human relationships but operates at a deeper level than language alone. Evidence of this can be seen at Pentecost when the Apostles testified in their mother tongue and the people present heard in their own language of the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:5-11). God communicated to the hearers by utilising the language capacities of both the speakers and the hearers without being bound to the limitations of either. This personal involvement of God is not an interruption, intersection, interception nor interpretation of God in an otherwise effective dialogue between two parties, so as to give it added authority as though He used human words

<sup>12</sup> Thumeyssen, Eduard. 1961 A Theology of Pastoral Care. John Knox Press. Virginia. p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Attwood, Bain. Ed' In the Age of Mabo. Allen and Unwin. NSW. p. 74. “The core claim of archaeology that race, language and culture are intimately linked, and that this model of linkage powers most of the inferences of social and cultural process during pre-history. It is worth noting that even in 1933 this was a false assumption - indeed, in 1865 the philologist Max Mueller demonstrated that there is no necessary link between these elements”.

to give added value to his own communication, This would cause Him to be bound to the limitations of both the speaker and the hearer. When human beings hear God's word it is God personally addressing them that they hear. This is the meaning of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Ephesians 4:21, 2 Corinthians 5:20 and Romans 10: 17. To quote Karl Barth,

"The word of God on the lips of a man is an impossibility; it does not happen: no one will ever accomplish it or see it accomplished."<sup>14</sup>

God communicates with humankind but rarely does He do it via a movement of particles in the atmosphere causing a physical vibration on a person's tympanic membrane, to be transferred through the stapes and anvil of the middle ear so as to affect the sensory fibres and the cochlea in the inner ear. While He communicates with people by utilising the human capacity for speech so that the message is received in a language form with which the participants are familiar, he is not bound by the physical limitations of human communication.<sup>15</sup>

In glory, the manifestations of the Spirit, such as the gifts of understanding, communication and communion (or fellowship) given at Pentecost, will be experienced in fulness and so communication will be in ones own language and received in one's own language even when the language of speaker and receiver are different. The confusion of languages of Babel will be overcome.

Language is the cohesive force for fallen humanity because it is the ability to communicate that enables, sustains and secures community. It is this demand which is placed on language, and in the fulfilling of this requirement of language, that has enabled language to developed to the degree of intricacy that it has. Human beings need to know that they are understood and they need to know that they are covered for fear of being known as they really are. This apparent contradiction of needing to be understood and fearing to be known, is the result of the fall. When humanity is redeemed and in glory the damage of the fall will be overcome, we will know as we will be known and we will stand before each other and our God, naked and unashamed. Language will lose its confusing ambiguities, it will no longer be needed to explain or cover up our true selves. It will not be needed to express love since love will be known in full glory by all. The world of humanity will be of one tongue and few words in the midst of full language and cultural diversity.

## **Black and White and Red and Yellow**

In this section we can do little more than ask questions. Is it possible for us to know what the Aboriginal and European Church of Australia will be like as red from the blood of Christ (redeemed) purified like gold and seated in the heavenlies (glorified).

The question we ask then, is "how should we understand a contemporary culture, whether it be Aboriginal or European, if the Lord should return now?" We could put the question another way, "how will our contemporary cultures, correlate with the kingdom of God in the eschaton?" and how much of what I know about community and relationships, from whence I gain an appreciation of my own value and personhood, will be identifiable in glory? We are not in a position to speculate on what any culture, as it was, would be like in glory, because God has

---

<sup>14</sup> Theological Foundations For Ministry. p. 700.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, C. S. The Voyage of The Dawn Treader. Lions Books. p. 84ff. Lewis writes of the dragon meeting the lion, Aslan; I shut my eyes tight. But that wasn't any good because it told me to follow it.' 'You mean it spoke?' 'I don't know. Now that you mention it, I don't think it did. But it told me all the same. ..The lion told me I must undress first. Mind you, I don't know if he said any words out loud or not ... Then the lion said - but I don't know if he spoke -'You will have to let me undress you.'"

ordained that all current cultures should continue their process of change possibly right up to the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1: 13, 2:12) at which time He will fully redeem the purchased possession (Ephesians 1: 14 KJV).

In attempting to answer these questions we are confronted with our own cultural biases. These make it impossible to objectively appraise a culture so as to arrive at its ontological aspects. Personal beliefs and practices (or culture) play a major part in our efforts to discover those aspects of a culture which will continue on into glory. When ones bias remains unchecked it leads to arrogance and as such it has to do with our sinfulness. It does not allow for the fact That all human endeavour, whether it be within our own or another culture, is under God's judgment.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## Conclusion

In this work I have attempted to firmly base culture in the eternal council of God. To show that as an essential part of the imago dei the phenomenon of human culture (and therefore its multitudinous expressions) is an earthly ectype of the archetype which lies in the Triune community. This means that being made in the image of God is more than individualism and more even than the coming together of a man and a woman in marriage, it is a reference to corporate humanity. Just as God is a communal being so too is humanity made in His image. Therefore humanity is cultural by virtue of the creator and creation and not the fall and since it relates to our nature as the imago dei and original glory at creation it must relate to our promised glory and ultimate recreation.

With such a basis for culture and cultural diversity, cross-cultural communication becomes a delving into the Triune mystery. An adventure of discovery into the majesty of our creator God. The desire to see God's majesty in other cultures acts as a check to the otherwise inescapable tendency to see one's own humanity as closest to glorified humanity. This means that, contextualisation, as distinct from syncretism, is not simply an expedience of missiological practice it is an essential component of honouring God by dignifying his created image.

I began this work on the basis of a Biblico-Trinitarian sociology and argued that humanity made in the image of God must be societal and that culture is essential to humankind's created being. Humanity is in fact "being in communion". From the time of creation humanity was given a three-fold expression of God's covenantal nature in which they were to live and that was covenant, vocation and sabbath rest. This was the foundation of humanities worship (or cultus) and the cultus was the medium from which all cultural endeavour emanated. I attempted to demonstrate that culture was the outworking of a people's worship (culture came from cultus). The belief systems or cultus of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's of Australia are example of this principle.

Colin Gunton expresses the thought,

"what is needed is a theology which enables humankind and the world to be themselves, in the image of God and destined for the praise of God in their own ways, but as contingent and finite beings".<sup>1</sup>

I have endeavoured to provide the theology of which Gunton speaks by reflecting on the past, present and future relationships between the Aboriginal and European sections of the Australian Christian Church. But I have concluded the work with some unanswered questions because both humanity, and the cultural form which expresses worship, are mutually unfathomable. Who can know the heart of humanity? Who can fathom the plan and purposes of God? Who can plumb either the glory or deceptions of human endeavour.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. p. 174.