CROSS Purposes

Areopagus Hill

through a glass

Issue 12

March 2008

Peter Sellick
on the decline of Protestantism

Ken Dempsey
revisits flags and funerals

Judith Watkins

…and more!

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CROSS Purposes

A forum for theological dialogue

A NEW liturgical year has begun, and with it we deliver a series of thought-provoking reflections upon the "new" in this 11th edition of *Cross Purposes*.

The main article, from Grant Finlay, looks for a new way to do Christian theology within Australian indigenous communities. Finlay argues that it is not Aboriginal communities alone that are seeking for a more post-colonial way of enacting the Christian gospel, but the Spirit of Christ, also—who seeks earnestly for indigenous pathways towards incarnation in this land. Much of the article is then taken up with the theological "exegesis" of a song written for the UAICC community in Hobart, which speaks of the "new" Christ this community is coming to know.

Randall Prior responds to Andrew Dutney's article in *CP* 10, which advocated a new approach to the training of ministers. Prior agrees that a new

In this Issue

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approach is indeed needed, but that Dutney's cannot deliver what it promises. What is required is a complete break from the bifurcations of human life into categories like "intellect" and "emotion", "academic" and "experiential", "theoretical" and "practical" bequeathed to us by the so-called "Enlightenment". Prior claims that, by pleading for a reversal of the power-relations between these traditional terms, Dutney yet remains in thrall to them. What we need instead is a new (more faithfully Christian) integration of each and every dimension of human knowledge and enquiry into the process of forming ministers.

Garry Deverell then seeks to model the kind of integration Prior is talking about by attempting to think theologically about his own, very personal, experience of racism. Deverell, an Aboriginal minister of the Uniting Church, asks why the dominant cultures of the West are so double-minded on the question of race, and goes on to claim that it is only a transforming engagement with the resources of the Christian tradition that is able to finally overcome this double-mindedness.

This edition's biblical meditation is provided by another of our editors, Martin Wright, who encourages Christians to think of their "saintliness" not in terms of personal, self-generated holiness, but rather as something given us by virtue of our calling an election to become part of the new community of Christ... which itself functions only as a sign of the true holiness that shall arrive with God's coming reign of peace with justice.

We are sure that you will enjoy these articles as much as we have.

CROSS Purposes

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cal education and the church ever since the late nineteenth century. This problem is well identified in the recent publication by John Paver, *Theological Reflection And Education for Ministry: The Search for Integration in Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2006).

[5]It is expected in my own Theological College (and I expect in others) that all Faculty members supervise occasions of preaching and worship leadership of candidates for ministry; in part, this is to ensure that what is being learned in the classroom is faithfully translated into the role of worship leader and preacher.

[6]The evolution of what is called "Post-modernism" can be understood as a predictable protest against the inadequacies of post-enlightenment era of modernism, giving priority to the very things which were negated or suppressed by modernism, namely experience, community, emotions, transcendence.

[7]It is surely notable that the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, at its Synod in 2000, in response to the recognized challenges facing the church in our time, adopted a vision for education for ministry which committed the Synod to giving priority to what it called "life-long education for ministry for the whole people of God". In pursuing this vision, it has brought together, into a new Centre for Theology and Ministry, the previously dis-integrated arms of education for ministry, into one place. The Theological College is now located as a discrete part of a wider community which includes lay education, youth ministry, children's and family ministries. This has provided the valuable opportunity for the Faculty to contribute to the wider theological education of the church, a development which has been welcomed by the church itself. In fact, a program which is titled "Scholar on the Road" where scholars resource regional events of theological learning, has captured the imagination of the church and has cemented itself as a routine requirement of all Faculty members. At the same time, the move into the new Centre for Theology and Ministry has led to a reaffirmation that, for the Theological College, a commitment to research and to academic excellence, is central to its responsibilities to the church.

[8]Notable in my own Faculty's 2007 end-of-year meeting was the suggestion that the topic "Prayer and Spirituality" which is a required unit of study for all candidates in 2008 will use the *Basis of Union* as its primary focus.

[9]Some people may consider that I have not tackled the pressing issue of the serious decline in the numbers of people who are applying to become candidates for ministry and the corresponding growing dependence on lay people to lead worship in their own congregations week by week. In my view, this situation heightens the need for those who are ordained to be well resourced to offer theological leadership to the church and to assist in the theological formation of this generation of lay leaders.

[10]The impressive publication *Educating Clergy* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass 2006), based on substantial research into current trends in theological education for both Christian and Jewish seminaries in the United States, indicates similar issues and directions in the United States.

Ministries of Word and of Deacon) need to live theological lives. If this is to be achieved, it will require a wholehearted commitment by theological educators to "tradition, reason and experience/emotion" as an integrated whole.

I have responded to Dutney in a particular way, namely by expressing my own observations and experiences of the current and future directions of the life of the church in our time. I have not attended in detail to some aspects of the article which need further attention. Among these is the questionable reliance of Dutney on the sociological analysis of Bouma as the basis for setting the agenda for theological education, the dubious framing of "scholarly" over against "evangelical" as the focus for the church's recent leadership development, the suggestion that the *Basis of Union* envisages ordained ministry in a scholarly task,[8] or the description of the "model of ministry" represented by ordination in the Uniting Church.[9]

What I have sought to do is to set out what I think is important in theological education in response to the context within which the church finds itself, directions which are already being pursued with some momentum in theological colleges both within and beyond Australia.[10] In doing so, it ought to be clear that I have significant difficulty in affirming the presuppositions, the framework of argument, and the conclusions reached by Dutney.

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Notes

[1]The consultation was attended by good representation from Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria/Tasmania. It was unfortunate that Andrew Dutney was unable to participate in the gathering due to the pressure of other commitments; he withdrew at the last minute, leaving only one South Australian representative. Andrew's own publication, *A Genuinely Educated Ministry* (Sydney: UCA, 2007) was released around the time of the consultation and it would have been of great value to us all if his own particular thesis were presented for discussion at the gathering.

[2]Among many contemporary scholars in theology and missiology, Lesslie Newbigin has raised the question as to whether the western world, which for so long considered itself as a Christian civilization with a mandate for taking the gospel to all nations, can itself now undergo its own conversion to the Christian faith. This question is premised on the reality that the era of Christendom in the western world has almost disintegrated, leaving behind a post-Christendom, and perhaps a post-Christian culture.

[3]A report from the consultation is available on request to randall.prior@ctm.uca.edu.au.

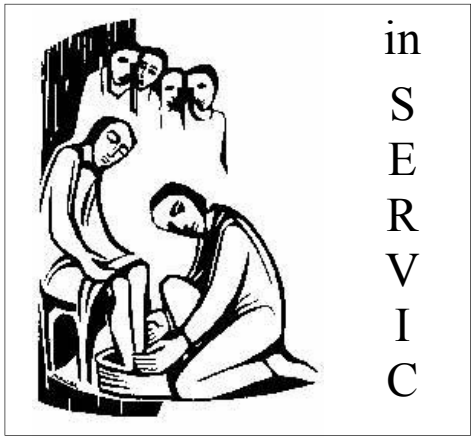
[4]The duality which is suggested in the use of these two terms has plagued theologi-

Fellow Heirs
Through the Gospel

Garry Deverell

WE LIVE in a world in which it is difficult to regard people of a different ethnicity than our own as human beings worthy of our love and care. We live in a world, in other words, that is racist to its very core. Two personal stories will suffice to illustrate that contention. In August 2006 I spent a day riding the trains and buses of Los Angeles in California, and in doing so learned two things about that city that I hadn't known before. The first is that the population of Los Angeles is mostly Hispanic. That was surprising to me, because most of the LA-based TV shows and movies I've seen are full of Anglo-Saxons, with an occasional smattering of African-Americans. The second thing I learned about Los Angeles is that it fosters a segregated society. The white minority seems to confine itself to living in the hills or by the sea, and to the suited professions for work, and to cars as a mode of transport. I think that in the whole time I spent riding the trains and buses, I saw two Anglo faces, and they were tourists from New York. I came away with the distinct impression that despite the enormously multicultural profile of contemporary American life, the enormous prosperity of the United States is still controlled by and for one particular ethnic enclave: white Europeans.

A second story. At lunch last year with a group of intelligent, sophisticated, Uniting Church ministers, the talk turned towards the role of Aboriginal people in our church. Suddenly the talk became less intelligent and less sophisticated. These people, whom I knew and respected, suddenly started to caricature, stereotype, and make fun of Aboriginal people in a way that seemed to contradict everything else they believed in. Now, most of you know already that I am a blackfella with a white face, a native of Tasmania from long before the Dutch, the French or the English arrived. So the apparent fun of this turn in the conversation was far from fun for me. Indeed, I felt deeply wounded by what was said. So wounded that I was stunned into a tumultuous silence so confusing that I found myself unable to say anything to them about either how I was feeling or about the substance of what they were



doing. Now, you also know that I am rarely short of things to say, especially if I catch a whiff of injustice somewhere. So this was a really strange and bewildering experience for me. It had been a very long time since I had felt that fearful, that powerless, and that small. But that is what racist taunts do to a person. They makes you feel as though you are not a human being. They bring home to you the tragic fact that there are people in the world who believe that you are unworthy of the respect they would normally extend to other human beings—simply because you belong, in some way, to an ethnic group that is other than their own.

So now I want to ask the ethical question, "Why is racism wrong?". The usual way of answering the question, in contemporary Australia, is that racism is wrong because human beings are equally deserving of respect and care, whatever their ethnicity. Which I agree with. But what if one were to then ask, "But *why* are human beings equally deserving of respect and care"? Now that is a question that Australians find much more difficult to answer, I suspect (not that we ask ourselves the question very much at all). I know this because we Australians seem to so easily put our prohibition of racism aside, when it suits us—which says to me that deep down we don't really know why racism is so very wrong. Why did the Cronulla rioters chant racist slogans and beat each other up? Why did the Aussie cricket fans at last year's Melbourne and Sydney tests make racist remarks towards the South African bowler Makhaya Ntini? Why did our Department of Immigration deport three non-Anglo Australian citizens last year, when there was no evidence of their having committed any crime against the state? Because, deep down, many Australians do not believe that the ethical injunction against racism is absolute. We believe, rather, that the prohibition can be put aside when it suits us, when something more important comes along, like wanting to defeat or belittle a person or a group or a team that we perceive, for one reason or another, to be a threat.

Let me suggest to you that there is, in point of fact, a reason why racism is wrong, why it is always wrong, and why the prohibition against racism should never be put aside for any reason whatsoever. The reason is revealed to us in the event of the Epiphany, when Christ appeared in the world to show us that God loves and cares for everyone, without distinction, no matter what their ethnicity. For that is the message Matthew wants to communicate in the story of the visit of the Magi to the Christ-child in Bethlehem. He writes to a predominantly Jewish audience in one of the most multicultural areas of the Roman Empire—the province of Galilee. Most Jews had traditionally believed that God had chosen them, exclusively, to be the recipients of his love and care, and

inadequacy of the very framework which separates human life into such discrete categories as "reason" and "experience". The approach taken by Dutney suggests a cultural pragmatism shaped by a desire for relevance in a post-modern culture, but will surely prove, in essence, to be no different from what he sees to be a past commitment to scholarship and the neglect of "experience".

Perhaps, more pertinently, my concern about Dutney's proposal for the future of theological education, is that it flies in the face of my own observation and experience in ministry over nearly three decades. Over that period, I became convinced that the most fundamental need for the church was to rediscover the centrality of the Christian gospel, (in *head* and in *heart*, so to speak), such that insights of understanding might define experience and experience might deepen understanding. Teaching the faith, as *reasoned* and *experiential*, evolved as a compelling priority in my ministry. It became clear to me that the congregations among whom I ministered had little comprehension of the faith of the Gospel, and lacked confidence in being able to share that faith with others. This, I came to understand, was the legacy of a (rapidly dying) Christendom era of the church's life during which it was happily assumed that everyone was Christian. In such a context, Christian education was focused on the need for children to be taught the faith to the point when they became confirmed adult members of the church, at which stage any serious or systematic education in the faith came to an end, and this, at the very moment (through teenage years) when important issues of human life begin to bite. As a result of the neglect of any serious adult learning, people were left to deal with the profound ambiguities of human experience with a simplistic Sunday School faith; little wonder then that many left the church and looked elsewhere for a more adult understanding of the meaning of life. For those who remained within the church, they form part of a generation of church people who are not clear about the meaning of the faith and not confident to share this faith with others. It became clear to me in my ministry that giving serious attention to the teaching of the faith to adults tackled a basic need of congregational life.[7] Indeed, it was the role of minister as "a teaching elder" which emerged as the most important.

In other words, I have become convinced that what is needed in the church in our time is serious attention to the content of the faith in such a way that people can integrate their multi-faceted human experience and the content of the faith as it is informed by Scripture and tradition. My own way of expressing this is to say that those who are set apart as leaders of the church (in the ordered

which is witnessed in the Scriptures. This is especially important in an era of the church's life like our own when the understanding of Scripture in local Christian communities is lamentably uninformed.[5]

This agenda of integration is closely connected to the second of the words increasingly used in theological colleges, the word "formation". *Formation* for ministry, rather than "training for ministry" or "education for ministry" is now the preferred description of the task of theological colleges. The term "formation" initially referred to those aspects of preparation for ministry which students needed to develop in addition to their academic study requirements. Included in formation for ministry was the development of certain skills and attention to dimensions of personal maturity. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that formation well describes every aspect of theological education, and *formation for ministry* is an integrated approach to the whole person's development in readiness for ministry. It includes (what is referred to as) "academic", "spiritual", "personal", "pastoral", "social", and so on. It embraces the fullness of human identity – intellectual, personal, emotional – and it holds together the intellectual and the experiential.

Thus, the terms "integration" and "formation" are attempts to create a language which undermines and offers an alternative to the very familiar language of dis-integration represented in the discrete fields of study, and in the familiar dualities like "academic and practical", "theological and pastoral", "head and heart", "intellectual and experiential", "scholarly and evangelical". In this sense, it seeks to do justice to the Judaeo-Christian view of the human person as an integrated whole.

This brings me to a basic aspect of the thesis of Andrew Dutney's article. It seems to me to be decidedly unhelpful to operate within the three discrete categories of "tradition, reason and experience/emotion" as if they can and ought to be separated. The post-enlightenment preoccupation with reason and rationality has not only unhelpfully diminished the significance of experience/emotion but, from a Christian point of view, more unhelpfully, has denied the view of the human person as an integrated whole—rational, emotional, relational human beings. Such a distortion is not offset by a counter-distortion, represented in Dutney's proposal, which gives priority to experience/emotion. In fact, it is surely predictable that the society, in protest against the narrow post-enlightenment emphasis on reason, will tilt the balance in favour of what it sees to be the opposite direction, namely towards "experience".[6] The church's response, rather than falling into line with the cultural trend, ought to be to recognize the

there were apparently vestiges of precisely this kind of theological racism in Matthew's community. In reading the gospel carefully, it becomes clear that Matthew's predominantly Jewish constituency found it very difficult to accept that others—non-Jews, Romans, Greeks, Cretans, Arabs—might also be welcomed by God into the divine covenant of his love, peace and justice.

What Matthew says to his community, by way of a response, it this: "Who were the first to recognize the significance of the Jesus' birth? Who were they, who were first called by God through the rising of the star, to come and worship him? Who were they who were first called to be God's evangelists and prophets, those who tell the good news that Messiah is born? Are they Jews? Are they members of the 'chosen people'? Actually no. They are Easterlings, foreigners, infidels. What they understood, and you must learn to grasp yourselves, is that the Christ born in Bethlehem is a light not only for Israel and for the Jews, but for everyone. What he offers us, by his teaching, his way of life, and finally by his death and resurrection, is a light to guide the feet of all people into the loving embrace of God."

What Matthew says to his community was, of course, foreshadowed by the writer to the Ephesians. The mystery revealed in the gospel, he says, is simply this: that Christ has come to make all people, regardless of their history or ethnicity, fellow-heirs with the Jews, of all that God has promised. Crucially, he adds one more thing however. The church, he says, is the means by which this mystery of Christ's universal love is made known in the world, and especially to those who are most powerful, the rulers and authorities who control things. That means that we, the church, are called not only to preach the universal love of God and to oppose racism, but also to embody this gospel in our own communal life. Which the church, to its shame, has not always done.

And so I conclude my brief reflection with this. Racism is wrong for one reason, and one reason only: that in Christ we have learned that God loves and cares for all people without distinction. Such pan-ethnic love is absolute, because it is of the very nature of God, whom the first letter of St. John names Love itself. Therefore the prohibition against racism can never, under any circumstance or for any reason, be legitimately put aside. Let us praise the God who has made it so by the sending of his Son into the world. And let us pray that, by the power of the Spirit, racism shall wither away, both in our wider culture and society, but also within the dark seeding-places of our own hearts.

GARRY DEVERELL is the Vic-Tas Synod's only ordained Aboriginal minister, and an editor of *Cross Purposes*.

Holy People

A Sermon for All Saints Day

Martin Wright

Daniel 7:1-18; Ephesians 1:11-23

WHO AMONG US is truly holy? We Christians are supposed to be holy people. And one does meet Christians who are very obviously holy, whose charity and humility is an example to us all. But then again one meets Christians who are not quite like that, and the church in all its everyday pettiness does not often seem the most holy of places.

This week we celebrate All Saints, and it is a festival that confronts us with who we Christians truly are: a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, saints of God. And what an uncomfortable truth that is. But if the burden of sainthood seems great, the feast of All Saints also assures us that we do not have to bear it alone.

I made an interesting discovery preparing this sermon. The biblical word "holy", and the New Testament word "saint" (which is just the same as "holy" in Greek), are virtually never applied to individuals. We don't read about a "holy person" or a "saint of God", but about "holy people" and "the saints", always in the collective. It's not a personal property or a matter of good conduct; these things may be evidence of holiness, but they do not make us holy. In fact it's not really about our choice at all. We are holy simply because we are part of God's holy people. We are holy because Jesus Christ has claimed us for his own, has marked each one of us with the seal of his promised Holy Spirit, and has appointed us as a body to be his body in the world. We are saints whether we like it or not.

The history of God's holy people begins with the calling of Israel, which is illuminated for us in the most unlikely of places: in the middle of the book of Leviticus, which we never read. Between all the ritual prescriptions for slaughtering sacrifices and the legal codes of daily life, there is reiterated many times the phrase: "You shall be holy, for I your God am holy". This sums up the purpose of the whole law. God calls Israel to be a reflection of his holiness, to show the world that Israel's God is worthy of all worship and honour. They are set apart among the nations as a sign of the apartness of their God, with the ultimate object of drawing all nations together to worship the one God. This holiness occurs even in spite of

through a glass darkly

The word "integration" is double-edged. It refers first of all to the need in theological education to have an "integrated" approach to the various disciplines of study, so that, for example, the pursuit of Biblical Studies is not separated from the study of Systematic Theology which is not separate from the study of Church History, and so on. Perhaps the greatest challenge to such integration across disciplines is that between the fields of so-called *academic* study and those of so-called *practical* theology.[4] The very structure of contemporary theological education, operating as it does with discrete but artificially separated *fields* (viz. Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, Practical Theology), imposes on students a form of dis-integration. At best it feeds the destructive view that theological study comprises a series of educational pursuits in disconnected disciplines; at worst it so segregates the experience of theological education so that the task of integration for students (and subsequently leaders of the church) is never achieved. Such a structure of discrete fields of study also potentially sets up a framework of competition and mistrust between the various *field* educators as they fight for recognition of their own territory over against colleagues in other fields. Such rivalry is likely to find its most vivid expression during faculty conversations about curriculum. Properly understood however, the discrete fields cannot be so separated and are incomplete without each other.

The word "integration" has a second and more urgent agenda, namely the integration of theological studies with the exercise of ministry. For as long as I can remember, theological colleges have been considered as ivory-tower institutions separated from the actual life of the church, and with a singular focus on (obscure) academic study. I have never shared this view but have been acutely aware of its currency. In the corridors of theological colleges, and of local parish churches, the term "integration" in this context refers to the necessity of bringing together the disciplines of study with the practice of ministry for which students are being prepared. The desire to achieve this has heightened in recent years as the changes in the church have become more dramatic. The development of Supervised Field Education into the curriculum of theological colleges has been motivated by this integration agenda, but in fact, teachers of all topics of study are conscious of an agenda which integrates classroom teaching with the context of ministry of their students. It is not enough, for example, for the teacher in Biblical Studies to expose students to the principles of biblical interpretation; they must enable students to move from such insights into the vocation of preaching and teaching the faith

Integral and Essential

Randall Prior

ANDREW DUTNEY'S article on theological education and the Uniting Church's Model of Ministry ("Partial and Exhausted", *CP* 10) is a timely paper. It raises the important issue of the nature and purpose of theological education in the Uniting Church, and indicates what Dutney thinks is important as the Uniting Church seeks to form suitable leaders for a future church.

There is no doubt that this issue is current for the life of the church in our time, and as such, it requires serious attention. At its own national consultation convened in Melbourne in July 2007, the topic addressed by Uniting Church theological college faculties across Australia was precisely on this theme: "The changing face of theological education in the Uniting Church in Australia".[1] The topic was selected because of the obvious context within which theological education now finds itself, namely a period of significant change and challenge to the church in Australian society and therefore in the way in which the church prepares its leaders. It is not too grand a claim to make that the current period of church history across the western world (including profound turmoil necessitating redefinition of the church and its place in the culture.[2] It is inevitable, in such a context, that the ordered life of the church and the way in which the church forms its leaders will also come under close scrutiny.

The occasion of this consultation provided opportunity for the theological educators to discuss current issues, and to hear about the responses which are being made by their theological colleges. So that the participants might be informed by external input, there were presentations to the gathering from three other church traditions: Anglican, Jesuit and Baptist. What was immediately apparent was that other church traditions in Australia, in their own distinctive way, are engaged with issues the same as those being faced by the Uniting Church.

Certain insights emerged in the course of the gathering which gave rise to particular priorities being set for the future of theological education in the Uniting Church.[3] Principal among these priorities were resolutions around two specific words which are now increasingly used in the arenas of theological education: *integration* and *formation*.

The word "integration" is double-

op. cit.

holiness occurs even in spite of Israel's behaviour, for the many times that Israel decides they have had quite enough of being holy and would rather go back to a more easily manageable sort of god, the Lord just calls them back again; his calling is irrevocable. Once a holy people, always a holy people.

Another book of the bible that we don't much read is Daniel. The part of Daniel that gives us today's wonderful vision is written much later than the rest of the Old Testament, in fact only about 1½ centuries before Christ. It comes from a time in which the Jewish people were suffering terribly cruel persecution at the hands of their Greek overlords. The Greek king was determined that there would be no rival nations under his rule, and the Jews were forced to give up their religious practices; those who resisted were tortured and killed in the most gruesome ways. For the details read First and Second Maccabees.

Daniel's vision of the four beasts is about the passing away of earthly kingdoms and the establishment of the reign of God, a sign of hope to God's people that their suffering is not in vain. The four hideous beasts represent the four empires that in turn had authority over the Israelites, the last and most horrible being the arrogant Greek empire. When the Ancient One comes to take his throne, the beasts are killed or put aside, and the holy ones of God inherit the kingdom that is promised them.

This is an apocalyptic text, which tends to see good and evil in very black-and-white terms. So its view of earthly authority is stark: the kingdoms of humankind are simply evil. No ambiguity here; no reluctant co-operation with the authorities for the sake of the greater good. We may find this hard to stomach in the modern West, being used to a much more fuzzy line between good and evil, with several shades of grey. But the experience of persecution creates a wonderful clarity of vision. Daniel was able to see clearly that the holy people of God are inevitably involved in conflict: the principalities and powers that have this world in their grasp will not surrender it without a fight, and God's people will suffer.

It is vitally important for our comfortable, bourgeois church to keep reading these apocalyptic texts and keep this vision alive. Partly so that we might gain Daniel's clarity, to know the forces that enslave us when we meet them—and make no mistake, we do meet them every day, however subtly they may move in our age. And partly so that, when the time of testing comes to us, and we are called upon to stake our bodies on our faith, we might be equipped to stand fast.

Daniel is quite certain that the principalities and powers will pass away and give place to the kingdom of God. How striking it is, then, that the symbols of the kingdoms of

humanity are four hideous beasts, while the symbol for God's kingdom is a human person: "I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven". It's easy to see in this figure the sort of Messiah that we find in the other prophets, but that doesn't seem to be quite what Daniel means. Rather, the "one like a human being" is a representative figure, a symbol of all the holy ones of God who will inherit the promised kingdom. He stands before the throne of the Ancient One on our behalf, and we are all taken up in him. He is also a representative before God's people of the grace and mercy that is offered to them.

In view of this, it is rather unfortunate that the NRSV translates the phrase as "one like a human being". The Aramaic actually says, "one like a son of man". It means the same thing in context, but it does make a difference, because the title "Son of Man" is adopted by Jesus Christ for himself. Christ understands himself to be the one who represents us before God, the one in whose holiness we share, and who holds out to us share, and who holds out to us the promises of God. And it is no accident that when he uses this title of himself, he is usually talking about his suffering.

We are holy because Christ our God is holy. We are holy because we share in his suffering, and shall surely share also in his glory. We are holy because we are being transformed into his image, from one degree of glory to the next. We are holy because he has marked us as his own with the seal of his promised Holy Spirit.

So let us not lose heart. Whether we meet the principalities and powers in all their grim immensity, or more subtly in the ordinary grind of the world, let us keep before our eyes the vision of Daniel, the assurance that these kingdoms shall pass away and the kingdom of God shall come. And that we shall stand with Christ and in Christ, before the throne of the Ancient One, with saints we have never known, saints as yet unborn, and saints we have loved, singing: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord".

political) communion. I believe Christ yearns to be someone new in this place, where songs not heard by the trees for hundreds of years might be carried on the breeze again, where "Christ", and we and local saints from millennia ago and millennia to come might again break open food from the land and sea.

It invokes a hope that within our own selves, among us as community in creation, we too desire to be sung into being, into transformation, by our Creator in this land, with Christ, to sing Christ into being here in the immanence, the particularities, of our day, in our flesh and blood relationships with one another in our undeniable diversity.

Sometimes our conversations seem to, and actually do, go nowhere, or Indigenous and Christian stories/traditions conflict, even violate one another. Our community is fragmentary, there are disintegrative spirits among us, yet we yearn for wholeness, for union with our Spirit Creator. We hear this songline as a call to deeper relationship with one another, to deeply know our selves, particularly as part of creation's kinship, to open our selves hospitably, and our traditions fully, to one another, to the Spirit, to the One indwelling Christ.

This "Indigenous theology" expresses a number of dialectics. It is new and old, it is incarnationally eternal, evolving and restoring. It is being in places where the spiritual-cultural depths within a person are most readily evoked, where the silenced spirit murmurs, where genocided lives are resurrected. It is in the ambiguous space between culture/identity – faith/spirituality – church/community, between history/eternity, between Self and Other that we live and cultivate an Indigenous Christian Community. It is in the dynamic of honouring the "space between" and discerning the "union of" that we live and move and have our being.

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Great Spirit is a contrasting image/symbol. In this context, including this time in history, it seems to me preferable to distinguish Christ, at least to some extent, from the Spirit of this land, as well as from the colonizing church, including elements of the contemporary church.

It symbolizes a different kind of Christology, a different power dynamic in Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships. Rather than coming on the coat tails of colonial power with an Anglo/European church tradition, Christ comes in prayer, learning the Spirit-song of this place. It suggests a starting point of "not knowing", rather than an assumed knowledge. Hopefully it calls for respectful dialogue, for cultivating trust and relationship. Perhaps as Christ listens and learns, Christ's voice begins falteringly, and gradually sings in a new and different voice, a different language here from the voice, language, symbols, and liturgical colours of other lands. As this song learning and song-lining grows, new and different Christologies are more likely to emerge, thereby enriching the whole "body of Christ".

This symbol of Christ learning the "song of this land", singing the Spirit, has within it the mutual possibility of the Indigenous Spirit singing a "new" Christ into being who is markedly different, perhaps not even named as "Christ" at all, with that title's particular origins and ideology. This is the "pointy-end", the liminal threshold, where we potentially lose, or discard, any and all connection with the Jesus of history (and perhaps so-called orthodox theology), yet also where we potentially enter a far deeper, profound communion of Spirit, a being present here in this land, a communion we are not able to discern or enter in another way.

There is the potential that an emerging Australian Indigenous Christian theology may not look, sound, smell, taste or touch in a way familiar, or even recognisable, to non-Indigenous Christians. Not recognisable as "theology", nor, perhaps, as "Christian". Rather than tinker at the edges with an Indigenous voice reading Christian scripture, or a piecemeal pseudo-"smoking ceremony" in a church building, or even writing some words to a Christian gospel song, perhaps the millennia of spiritual practise in this land is a path through which Christ would like to be transformed in this day.

We sing as one today. This could be we people together and/or Great Spirit of this land and/or Christ singing as one, sharing. It is an invitation to continuing Indigenous culture in Christian praxis, to continuing Christian culture in Indigenous praxis; to living a deeper, growing Indigenous-Christian identity into further expression, to deepen our vulnerabilities with each other in the context of spiritual (and therefore social, economic,

Christ of the Mountains

Theological Reflection in an Indigenous Christian Community

Grant Finlay

This is an edited extract from a paper given to the NCCA's NATSIEC "Christ and Culture" Conference in July 2007.

I WRITE as a non-Indigenous ordained Minister who is part of the ministry of an Indigenous Christian community, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in Tasmania. In writing this paper, I don't believe that I personally am doing "Indigenous theology". To me, Indigenous theology is what the Indigenous people of our congregation, and other Indigenous Christians, engage in when they feel, think, reflect, test, listen, experiment, sing, talk and live as Indigenous Christians. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to share in some of those conversations and experiences.

The UAICC was established across Australia by the UCA Assembly in 1985, with a Tasmanian congregation forming from early 1987. Our Sunday gatherings comprise about 25 people, 8-10 of whom are Indigenous; our conversations, our "theology in the making", arises from a mixed group. Various Christian traditions have formed and shaped each itself a sacrament of reconciliation. It is a community where Indigenous voices are primary, or at least encouraged to be heard first of all.

A couple of years ago we participated in an interfaith celebration as part of the Mountain Festival on Mt. Wellington on the edge of Hobart. The invitation to participate prompted some reflections in the preceding months on the theme of mountains.

First, to introduce the theme we reflected on personal experiences on, or involving mountains.

Second, we reflected on and shared stories of mountains in Tasmania that are important to Indigenous people and the Indigenous community collectively.

Third, we read several scripture passages in which mountains feature, particularly in Jesus' ministry, and we heard about mountains as they are present in the wider Christian tradition, particularly in song.

These three streams were shared

On Areopagus

over the course of two to three months and toward the end of our time focussing on mountains I wrote some new verses using the African-American gospel song, "Go tell it on the mountain":

> Go tell it on the mountain,
> over the hills and everywhere.
> Go tell it on the mountain,
> that Jesus Christ is born.
>
> In Preminghana country,
> I carved the rocks and stone,
> The circles of the Spirit,
> they are my guide and home.
>
> The hills alight at Christmas,
> tell us that Christ is born,
> The people sang the old times,
> today we hear their call.
>
> I walked the hard road higher,
> sometimes I thought I'd fall,
> But when we walked together,
> the promised land we saw.
>
> On a nearby mountain,
> came Christ one night and prayed,
> He sang this land's Great Spirit,
> and we sing as one today.

Each verse focuses on one or two of the streams in our conversation, and the following reflections are an "exegesis" of the song seeking to highlight some key issues in practising an Indigenous theology, some questions for an evolving Indigenous Christian community and some challenges for the Christian church more broadly. *[Space permits us to include only selected commentary on the first and last verses—Eds]*

In Preminghana country. *Preminghana* is a large hill/mountain in the north west of the state, colonially and commonly known as Mt. Cameron West. The naming of *preminghana* is a tentative beginning at using *palawa kani* (Tasmanian Aboriginal words/language) in an explicitly Christian song. The reclamation/regeneration of language is a sensitive experience among the community. Our Indigenous Christian Community has a number of non-Indigenous participants so the use of *palawa kani* is guided by Indigenous Elders, who hold a variety of views about it. There may come a time when a whole song from our Congress community may be written in *palawa kani*, but at this stage of the language development, and community sensitivities about who may speak, or sing, the language, the single reference to a place name is where we are up to.

The legal title to *preminghana* was transferred by the State Government to the Aboriginal community via a newly formed statutory body, the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania, in November 1995. The area near *preminghana* has been the site of a number of conflicts including pushing 30-40 people off a cliff now called Cape Grim. There have also been more recent conflict, but not as violent as that, since the early 1990s over "recreational access" to the foreshore and the protection of Indigenous heri-

The "Christ of faith" coming within the Christian witnesses, such as they were, in the nineteenth century when Christianity first came to this island, entangles Christ in the realities of the history of colonial expansion and the church's direct and indirect participation in that, including the brutality, friendships, racism, dispossession, betrayal, couplings, survival, &c. Some Indigenous people here have spoken of the church "'coming with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other", so to sing of Christ coming in prayer is to offer an alternative witness, not unlike the alternative "Jesus Christ Liberator" in a Latin American context. To sing of Christ "in prayer" is to sing of spiritual transformation. It is not to restrict or limit our interest to peoples' "souls for heaven". In an Indigenous context, and perhaps also an authentic Christian context, spirit-prayer is engagement in and with all of creation.

The pre-existent Word/post-resurrection Christ is not limited by incarnational particularities. This opens a way within Christian theology for saying the pre-existent Word was present here on this mountain from creation, indeed in the creation of this mountain (John 1:1-5), as well as post-resurrection Christ being read back into creation's beginning (Col. 1:15-20) or back into the story of Israel (1 Cor. 10:4; Heb. 5) or perhaps into the story of this group of islands.

If we restrict ourselves to speaking of Christ coming to, or being present in, this land exclusively within the witness of Christians, we both severely limit our Christology, and we are left with a dominant image of a colonizing Christ. To speak of the post-resurrection Christ present in this land for the 1800 or so years of history prior to the arrival of "Christians" in the last 200 or so years might open an alternative vision for Indigenous, and non-Indigenous, people to imagine Jesus Christ present here distinct from the story of the church here, or which at least puts the church in that larger and longer context.

He sang this land's Great Spirit. This is a theologically rich metaphor. It suggests communion, harmony, and dialogue between Christ and "this land's Great Spirit". The "Great Spirit" is a symbol, albeit interim, imperfect and incomplete, of Indigenous spiritualities present here.

While in the previous section I began to articulate a possible way of imagining Christ present here apart from colonizers, it is important to acknowledge that in the thoughts, opinions and experience of virtually every Indigenous person whom I have met around this group of islands, Christ is seen as coming with the colonizers, as part of the 'moral' justification for the dispossession/colonization of this land and its people. Therefore to imagine Jesus singing the land's

(Continued from page 11)
"sacramental" act by the original designers/carvers of the stone, whereby particular "ordinary" implements and symbols were imbued with deeper cultural-spiritual significance. One of the ways toward a richer experience for people in being Indigenous in Tasmania today is to re-member the practises of earlier generations. As people sing the words, sometimes in their imagination they are there at *preminghana*, with stone upon stone, carving a circle in communion with their Creator.

The use of the word "Spirit" is intentionally ambiguous. In seeking and engaging in conversation, dialogue and communion in a cross-cultural interfaith colonial or post-colonial context, these words with ambiguous meanings, and double entendres are essential in keeping the conversation open enough for further and deeper conversation, dialogue and communion. In non-Christian Indigenous interpretation, the "Spirit" can be Creator who is not at all associated with the Christian God. In Indigenous-Christian interpretation "Spirit" can be Creator/Holy Spirit present in creation and community life in the formation of the circles.

On a nearby mountain. This is a particular reference to Mt. Wellington which rises to the west and south of Hobart. Its contemporary Indigenous name is *kunanyi*. Singing about this "nearby mountain" is intended to counterbalance the temptation to keep the symbolism at a distance. Each of the other verses refer to stories from places and times further away from today. This verse is "on our doorstep". It brings the song's desire into our experience.

Came Christ one night and prayed. This line remembers gospel stories of Jesus praying on mountains, and it particularly imagines Jesus coming here to our home, to this mountain near us and praying.

Our conversation raised some questions: So when did Christ "come and pray" here? Was it the post-resurrection Christ universally present, or was it when colonial Christians came telling the gospel stories on this island? Here we meet the "double-dialectic" of the pre-existent Word through whom all things came into being, the Jesus of history with his particular life in another land, the Christ of faith to whom Anglo-Christians bore witness here during colonial expansion, and also our personal encounter with Christ within our own lives and among us as community.

We can set aside the idea of the "Jesus of history" actually praying on this mountain. Nevertheless it is important to know of Jesus' experiences on mountains in first-century Palestine. Gospel references to Jesus in prayer on mountains stirs our thoughts to imagine Jesus praying on this particular mountain in a similar way.

tage sites. On several occasions Indigenous petroglyphs (rock carvings) have been cut out of rock by vandals using high quality rock cutting equipment, or daubed with paint in the form of a swastika. To name *preminghana* is also to recall the various stories and aspects of the site, past and present, as part of the story, the "spirit" of the place.

I carved the rocks and stone. This links today's community with the earlier pre-colonial communities. This is an important part of the cultural regeneration occurring among the community today. This mythic (in the positive sense of the word) connection between people in today's situation alongside community ancestors in the colonial era and alongside pre-colonial people is part of what we see as the role of an Indigenous Christian community. This is an "identity-defining" lyric: by saying "I", it posits the intention with the singer today desiring that deeper psychic/spiritual communion (communion of saints, we might say) with those who carved the rock, and who are also themselves "ingesting" the mythic symbolism of the petroglyphs into their own psyche/spirit/self-understanding.

However, it is not possible to return to a "pre-colonial" Indigenous spirituality. There is only the land as it is today, with the stories and experiences that are part of time since creation. What an Indigenous theology might seek to do is something akin to a "second naivete", one that acknowledges and somehow incorporates the colonizing experiences and influences, yet which nevertheless draws its primary inspiration from a source other than the dispossession, attempted genocide, destruction of kinship and other disintegrative affects of that experience. For beneath the urban bitumen and the genetics of a lighter coloured skin lie remnants, signs, yearnings and pathways into a profound mystical Creator Spirit still breathing within people and the land. It is a way of ensuring that in cultivating an Indigenous Christian identity, people are not actually defined by various colonial eras (whether pre-colonial, colonial, or post-colonial) as though people are less Indigenous today than a thousand or more years ago. In theological language, it is like the way the crucifixion is incorporated into the being of God, yet is not the single definitive description of God's triune identity.

Circles of the Spirit. The "circles" are the petroglyphs (rock carvings) at *preminghana*. There are various designs with different people interpreting them, some quite specifically and others more generally. To name them as "Circles of the Spirit" is firstly to begin to name the spiritual nature and meaning of the place, and the whole island. Secondly it is to say the act of carving was a "sacramental" act by the original de-

(Continued on page 14)

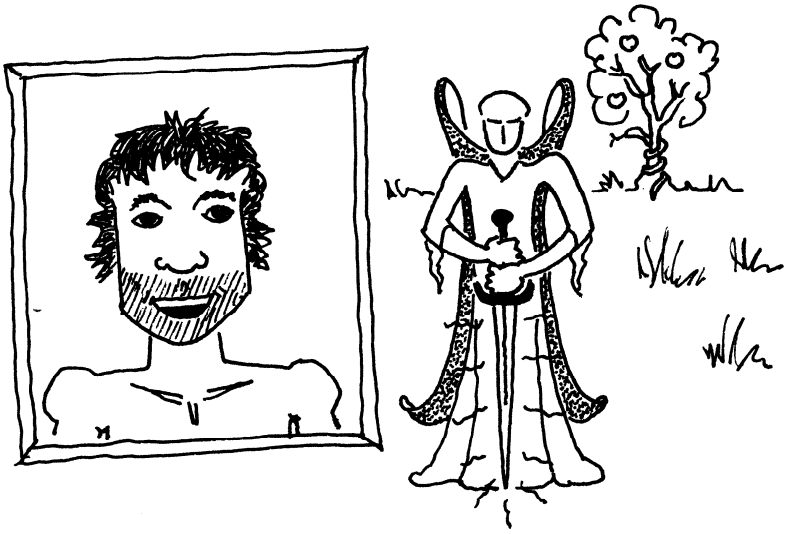
Double Take

by Hilary Howes

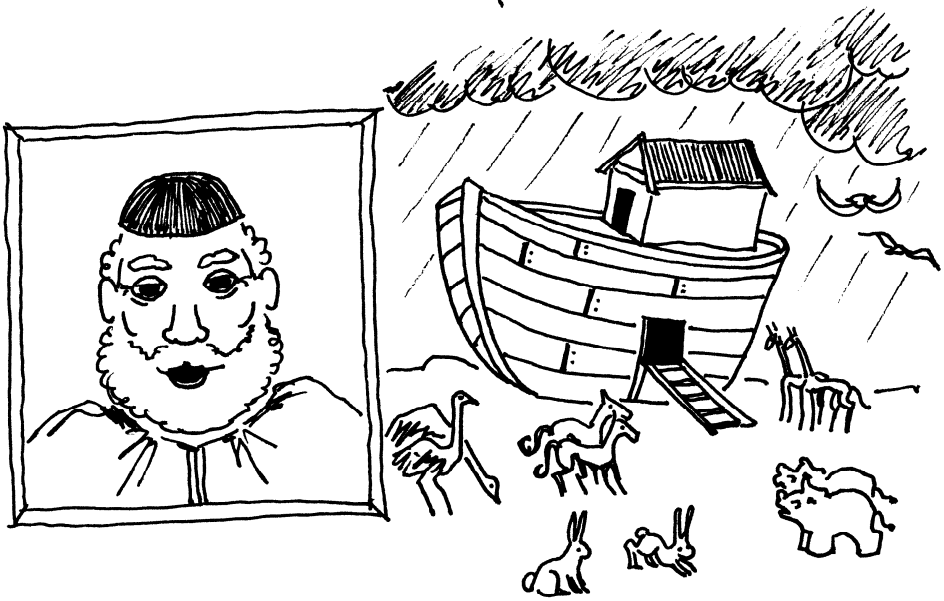
CELEBRITY QUESTION:
"What do you do to relax?"

DANIEL:
"I love playing with my kitties!"

ADAM:
"I used to enjoy working in the garden - when I had a garden. Landlords, man, they can be hell!"



NOAH:
"Well, I do like messing about in boats ... and a good drop of red never goes astray, either."



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