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## ABSTRACT

### **Reconciling Memories: Narrative as an Approach to Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia**

Gerard Mark Goldman

This dissertation examines whether narrative is effective in bringing about reconciliation between indigenous-Australians and other Australians. This dissertation assumes there are no neutral observers in the historical and contemporary clash between indigenous and other Australians. People fall into three main categories: bystanders, survivors, and perpetrators. The challenge of reconciliation in Australia is to engage bystanders; for them to recognize that by virtue of being resident in Australia they are connected to indigenous-Australians' struggle for survival and reconciliation.

The dissertation begins with an account of the experience that initiated the dissertation. It then moves into a number of theoretical considerations (Part I). Chapter 1 draws from the fields of history and anthropology to outline the nature of the culture clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. The writer argues that there is a fundamental worldview clash around time and land and points to how this is present in contemporary problems of White-Black relationships in Australia. Chapter 2 surveys the literature on the general notion and theology of reconciliation showing that a fair degree of differences exists among theorists. The writer argues for the need to retrieve a trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei* and in this light the need to develop a trinitarian understanding of reconciliation, with

particular attention to the role of the Holy Spirit to bring about *koinōnia* communion (perfect unity). Robert Schreiter's insight that reconciliation looks very different at the personal and social levels is identified as an important contribution to clarifying some of the issues surrounding the discussion about reconciliation. Chapter 3 examines the literature on narrative and points to its power in bringing about reconciliation. The writer points to the way identity, memory, and remembering are interrelated and highlights that the goal of narrative exercises is to work towards the creation of shared memories that results in shared history. He argues that this is necessary for reconciliation between peoples.

The research tests Schreiter's narrative model of reconciliation by interviewing indigenous and Anglo-Australians (including missionaries) living at Wadeye, Northern Territory, Australia. Part II consists of summaries of representative interviews through which the writer explores three particular areas of narrative and reconciliation. Chapter 4 examines the level of difficulty narrators experience in telling their story. The writer shows a strong correlation between personal storytelling and integration of life experience. Chapter 5 explores personal narrative as a relational and interactive dynamic in people's lives. The writer argues that an individual's personal experience of reconciliation directly shapes his or her understanding of social reconciliation. The writer shows a close relationship between personal integration of brokenness and one's ability to understand corporate narrative and recognize its limitations. Chapter 6 examines whether narrative effects change in peoples' perception of reconciliation and whether this in turn promotes the possibility of reconciliation between



peoples. The writer argues convincingly that narrative (with particular attention to the facility of imagination) increases people's understanding of each other.

Part III summarizes the findings of the fieldwork in the light of the history and anthropology of Anglo and indigenous Australian interaction and Christian theology of reconciliation. The writer then names specific recommendations for the community of Wadeye and the nation of Australia, as well as several broader missiological implications. Those involved in reconciliation need to be rooted in a spirituality of *vulnerability*. Reconciliation strategies need to promote the goal of shared history by creating racially free and borderless places where individuals and groups can tell each other their stories in safe environments. Communities and nations need to develop remembering institutions and rituals that work to preserve the shared memories of perpetrators, survivors, and bystanders.

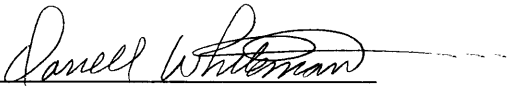
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Doctor of Missiology

by  
Gerard Mark Goldman  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING IAN .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Purpose of the Dissertation.....</i>	7
Assumptions .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	12
Limits of the Study .....	14
Audience .....	15
<i>Methodology.....</i>	15
Communication and Interpretation.....	17
<i>Schreiter's Narrative Model of Reconciliation.....</i>	21
Applying Schreiter's Narrative Model .....	24
<i>Missiological Implications and Importance of the Study.....</i>	25
Australia at an Impasse.....	28
The Goal of the Ministry of Reconciliation.....	33
<i>The Structure of the Dissertation.....</i>	34

## PART I

### HISTORY, RECONCILIATION, AND NARRATIVE

#### INTRODUCTION TO PART I: COORDINATING CONTEXT AND CONTENT ..... 46

#### CHAPTER 1: HISTORY: THE *BELLS* OF MISSION, TIME OVER PLACE ..... 48

<i>The Culture Clash between Indigenous and Anglo-Australians.....</i>	48
A Structure of National "Forgetfulness" .....	50
Colonialism Combined with Social Darwinian Evolutionary Theory.....	52
The Founding Paradigm .....	51
Missionaries: "Civilizing in Order to Evangelize" .....	59
A History of Colonial Violence.....	61
<i>Aborigines: People of Place over Time.....</i>	62
The "Dreaming Place" not "Dreaming Time".....	63
British Invasion: Destruction of Place.....	68
The "Top End" of the Northern Territory in the Late 1800s.....	71
The (Late) Arrival of the Missions: Respite from the Carnage.....	71
Contact in the Daly Region .....	72
<i>Turmoil, Vulnerability, and Mystery: The Ingredients of Mission at Wadeye.....</i>	75
Precontact Christian Seeds of the Gospel at Wadeye.....	76
The MSC Journey towards Mission at Wadeye .....	81
<i>The Founding Mission Paradigm: Residential, Agricultural, and "Civilized".....</i>	86
Education—Removing Children from their Families .....	86
The Hemorrhaging of a Culture.....	92
A Mission at Sea in a Paradigm Drift.....	97
Education: Signs of Policy Change .....	100
<i>Summary.....</i>	102

<b>CHAPTER 2: RECONCILIATION: G' DAY TO CONVERSION .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<i>Getting a Handle on Reconciliation.....</i>	111
The Pauline Understanding of Reconciliation.....	112
What Reconciliation Is Not .....	115
Clarifying the Processes and Language of Reconciliation .....	119
Psychologists' Contribution to Reconciliation.....	127
The Relationship between Reconciliation and Liberation.....	129
Reconciliation — God's Responsibility or the Person's Responsibility? .....	130
Who Are the Main Subjects of Reconciliation? .....	131
<i>Reconciliation—Where Have We Come from? Where Are We Going? .....</i>	133
The Need for a Trinitarian Understanding of Reconciliation.....	135
<i>Summary.....</i>	146
<b>CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVE: REMEMBERING MOOLA BULLA, REMEMBERING OUR STORY .....</b>	<b>156</b>
<i>The Story of Alan Goldman and Moola Bulla.....</i>	157
Conversion from “Bystander” to “Storyteller”.....	165
<i>Stories, Basic to Human Experience .....</i>	167
Narrative Theology .....	167
Creating Common Memory—Building Relationships from Difference .....	176
Storytelling Requires Vulnerability .....	182
<i>Summary.....</i>	182
<b>PART II</b>	
<b>RECONCILING NARRATIVES, RECONCILING HISTORY</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION TO PART II: COLLECTING NARRATIVES, WORKING NARRATIVES .....</b>	<b>192</b>
<i>Overview of the Interviews.....</i>	194
Overarching Themes in the Interviews.....	194
Confidentiality and Interview Setting.....	195
A Walk through the Interview Schedule .....	195
<i>Summary.....</i>	200
<b>CHAPTER 4: HOW WE TELL OUR STORY .....</b>	<b>201</b>
<i>Aboriginal Voices.....</i>	201
Kunyep Bunduck .....	201
Alanga Dumoo Nganbe .....	202
Tcheyunga Namarluk .....	205
Xaverine Ninnal.....	206
Mark Ninnal.....	208
<i>Voices of Anglo-Australians.....</i>	211
Liam Clancy.....	211
Dean Sparey.....	214
Brian and Maryanne Esmonde .....	214

<i>Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries</i> .....	220
Sr. Mary Williams .....	220
Sr. Ellen Fraser .....	222
Br. Vince Roche cfc.....	222
Fr. John Leary msc .....	228
<i>Summary</i> .....	234
<b>CHAPTER 5: HOW WE RELATE TO ANOTHER PERSON'S STORY</b> .....	<b>239</b>
<i>Aboriginal Voices</i> .....	239
Palibu Nudjula and Memelma Council of Elders .....	239
Ngardinithi Nganbe .....	243
Kevin Tipiloura.....	246
Kerry Charleton .....	247
<i>Voices of Anglo-Australians</i> .....	252
Xavier Desmarchelier .....	252
Lysbeth Ford.....	254
Jude Vincent Lane .....	256
<i>Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries</i> .....	261
Br. Terrence A Kingston cfc.....	261
Fr. Peter Wood msc .....	264
Lisa Smith.....	266
<i>Summary</i> .....	269
<b>CHAPTER 6: STORY AND RECONCILIATION</b> .....	<b>276</b>
<i>Aboriginal Voices</i> .....	278
Personal Reconciliation (Reconciliation→Forgiveness→Apology).....	278
Local Reconciliation (Apology→Forgiveness→Reconciliation).....	281
National Reconciliation .....	284
<i>Voices of All Anglo-Australians, Including Missionaries</i> .....	290
Personal Reconciliation .....	290
Local Reconciliation.....	293
National Reconciliation .....	295
<i>Summary</i> .....	307
<b>PART III</b>	
<b>SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>CHAPTER 7: LOOKING AT HOW WE STAND ON THE LAND</b> .....	<b>312</b>
<i>The Importance of Remembering</i> .....	318
<i>The Power of Apology, Facing the Past, Present, and Future</i> .....	319
Forgetting and Avoidance .....	320
Apology and Reparation.....	321
<i>Developing Structures for Remembering</i> .....	322

<b>CHAPTER 8: MOVING ON THROUGH REMEMBERING: MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>330</b>
<i>The Context for Reconciliation as the Emerging Model of Mission .....</i>	330
Vulnerability: the Cornerstone of a Spirituality of Reconciliation.....	334
Suggestions for Further Research.....	337
<i>Strategies for Promoting the Ministry of Reconciliation .....</i>	338
Twelve Strategies for the Ministry of Reconciliation for Wadey.....	339
Strategies for Reconciliation in Australia.....	343
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	348
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>353</b>
<i>Appendix A: Maps of Focal Area of Study.....</i>	353
<i>Appendix B: Maps of Moola Bulla and Kimberley .....</i>	354
<i>Appendix C: Interview Schedule .....</i>	355
Interview Schedule with Aborigines .....	355
Interview Schedule with Anglo-Australians Including Missionaries.....	359
<i>Appendix D: "The Story of Peter Brogan," Told by Fr. John Leary.....</i>	365
<b>GLOSSARY.....</b>	<b>368</b>
<b>REFERENCES CITED .....</b>	<b>369</b>



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Dedicated to the memory of

Wangu Nudjula

Demkadath Thardim

Wudarnthale and Xaverine Ninnal

and Fr. Don Wodarz ssc

May they each rest with

*Nugemanh* our Father,

Jesus, our friend and brother,

and the Spirit, the great Holy Spirit,

that brings us all together.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
CSJ	Center for Spirituality and Justice, Brisbane
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission
KLRC	Kimberley Language Resource Center
MSC	Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Latin spelling of the congregation's name, <i>Missionarie Sacri Cordis</i>
NT	Northern Territory
OLSH	Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart religious congregation

## **INTRODUCTION: Remembering Ian**

In 1935 Catholic missionaries established a mission among Aborigines at Wadeye at the invitation of the Commonwealth government of Australia. Wadeye is located in the northwest region of the Northern Territory—it is one of Australia’s most remote communities. Despite their geographical isolation, the Aborigines there were being shaken by the eruption of settlements some 100 to 300 miles away, and the ever-encroaching pastoralists.<sup>1</sup> Stories went through the region about the new people and the new things that these people brought with them. The Aborigines began to drift from Wadeye to see what was happening to their neighboring tribes. Unfortunately, this drift became for many a one-way exodus. Alcoholism, cocaine overdoses and newly introduced diseases quickly took their toll on the people. Undoubtedly, the Catholic mission arrived at a critical time to help stem the exodus of Aborigines from the Wadeye region. The success of the mission can be judged through the outstanding way it reversed the Aborigines’ declining population trend from around 120 in 1935 to now approaching 2000.

This success, however, has been at a cost. The attitudes of Western superiority, demonstrated through the missionaries’ attempts to “civilize” the Aborigines, had a tragic impact on the indigenous population (cf. Wilson 1982:36). Aboriginal religious and cultural ceremonies were condemned and forbidden; children from around age six were removed to

boarding compounds known as dormitories where a regimented structure was strictly enforced.<sup>2</sup> The children had a one-week holiday with their family each year. During the rest of the year they were not allowed to visit their family during the week; they were allowed an occasional visit to their family on a Saturday or Sunday. If they broke any rules or did anything wrong—often unknowingly due to the huge cultural and linguistic gap that existed—they were punished in varying degrees of cruelty. Some were beaten by hand or leather belt, others were beaten by electric wire, stock whip and hose—many have scars to prove it. A common punishment for the girls was being forced to stand still in the sun for hours at a time, sometimes all day, with a large metal cooking pot placed over their head—the hot tropical conditions make this a particularly brutal punishment. One punishment which terrified them was being awakened in the middle of the night by the missionaries and being forced to go around picking up garbage. The fear of snakes, spirits, and “wild blackfellas” in the night was common around Wadeye; the people there never walk around far from the light of their campfire. Not only was it terrifying, but it was altogether confusing (see Chapters 4 and 5). Many to this day cannot understand why the missionaries’ forced them to do this. Children would be punished for speaking their own language, arriving back late after visiting their family on the weekend, not cleaning properly, etc.

The dormitories closed in the late 1970s. While this may indicate that Anglo-Australian<sup>3</sup> missionaries have recognized the inadequacy and, even, immorality of such “pastoral practices,” they nevertheless continue to

struggle today to shake off attitudes of Western superiority toward the indigenous community.

Recent reports confirm my observations of a few years ago (Goldman 1991, 1994, 1997a) that the Aborigines are experiencing the church of the Anglo-Australian missionaries as increasingly irrelevant and alienating (cf. Costigan 1996). Potential local leadership on the whole is not being overly encouraged and supported. Attendance in church activities has dropped.

Nevertheless, during interview work in Wadeye in 1992 for my Th.M. thesis for the Sydney College of Divinity, and during my fieldwork for this dissertation, I discovered profound and stimulating theological reflection occurring among particular Aborigines (cf. Goldman 1994), as well as the tentative emergence of indigenous church practices in the community. These were occurring outside the dominant mission model of church leadership.

\* \* \* \* \*

My experience of the church at Wadeye commenced in 1984 when I left Sydney at the age of twenty to teach in the local mission school. I had just completed a Diploma in Teaching and Certificate in Religious Education from Catholic Teachers College, North Sydney (1981-1983). During my last year of study I felt a call to work among indigenous-Australians. I participated in a crosscultural-training program for lay missionaries and also had three weeks during a mid-term break with Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity in their work with Aborigines in the remote town of Bourke, New South Wales. The time at Bourke confirmed my

desire to seek a teaching placement in an indigenous community. I was delighted when I received an offer from the Catholic Education Center in Darwin to teach in Wadeye.

Despite all the preparation I underwent, I soon recognized my training as a teacher was severely limited in that it did not prepare me for the insensitivity that I encountered among the Anglo-Australian administration of the school. My positions on certain issues within the school came into conflict with the Anglo-Australian school hierarchy. The inappropriateness of the Western style and content of education that prevailed throughout the school curriculum jolted me. Even though I realized that much was wrong in this, I found myself falling into the same patterns; I too began adopting a model of discipline that reflected Western cultural assumptions of superiority and dominance—one that was violent. The isolation that I felt from the hierarchy of the school, my overall inexperience, together with the knowledge that others were not talking about how they were coping, all contributed to my dealing ineffectively with my stress, racism, and paternalistic attitudes. (See “Education,” Chapter 1)

One young, resistant teenager in particular—his name was Ian—was often the target of my frustration and pain. He was a student in my class, and on a number of occasions I struck him forcefully with my hand for his disobedience. My violence towards Ian in many ways reflects the way I became “sucked in” to the very system of insensitivity and violence that I had been objecting to.

Almost ten years later, on fieldwork for my master's thesis, I learned about the Aborigines' experience of violence in the dormitories. They told me story after story about their treatment. I realized that I had repeated the experience of my missionary predecessors—some of them still my contemporaries.

I was struck by the similarity of each individual's narrative. All those I spoke to wanted the missionaries to talk openly about the past. They wanted to move on in a spirit of more authentic relationship. As I listened to their hurts and hopes I was confronted with having to acknowledge my past behavior. I sought out Ian, now a young married man and father of two children. I expressed my sorrow for the times that I had beaten him and had attempted to humiliate him. Ian raised his eyes to look me in the face—this is most uncommon for Aborigines there—his eyes were a little watery (my eyes may have been as well), and smiled. I recalled that over the decade prior to this occasion Ian would always seek me out on my visits to Wadeye. During those times I always wondered why he would want to speak with me, and tell me his news. When he smiled, I realized that he had always wanted to maintain relationship with me—despite what I had previously done to him.

Since studying in the United States the story of Ian has kept arising. In many ways it has felt like my unconscious telling me to pay attention, and explore more deeply what this experience has meant for me, and what it may mean for others. While Ian and I have been reconciled and I have repented for my past behavior, I discovered that for a more complete



reconciliation I needed to accept the forgiveness that he had been offering to me for many years prior to that moment in which he smiled. I have been reminded of Jesus' dual challenge of "*Repent and believe the Good News*" (Mark 1:16). The recognition of what I had done made repentance a clear necessity. What has become clearer to me is that of equal or greater necessity is the imperative to "believe"—to accept the forgiveness that Ian had been offering. I have realized that by telling and retelling the story of myself and Ian, I have become more whole.

As I have reflected on this incident in my life, I have come to realize that in many ways my personal experience with Ian captures the dynamic of the entire Wadeye local church. Missionaries came with good intentions of helping the people, but many ended up misusing their authority—even abusing Aborigines.

In even broader terms, my experience with Ian may be analogous to what is needed in the Australian situation. It has only been through retrieving the memory of my relationship with Ian that I have been able to make greater connection with the struggle of indigenous-Australians for reconciliation, and this also has made me become more whole.<sup>4</sup> Many Anglo-Australians are struggling to see the connection between memory, remembering, and identity. There is a desire in many folk to try and forget the past, or easily gloss over the past, so as to get on with the future.<sup>5</sup> Indigenous-Australians say very clearly that there can be no reconciliation unless it is grounded on the truth of the past. Our past must be openly acknowledged. Only then can we hope to walk together into the future.

Reflection on my experience with Ian has impressed upon me the profound opportunity and need for healing that lies dormant in the Wadeye local church. The call for reconciliation has been a major catch-cry of indigenous-Australians across Australia, but it is something, which many other Australians seem reluctant to enter into. My visits among the Native American people of the Lakota tribe during my time in the United States has given me the hunch that this may be similar for indigenous peoples throughout the world.

### *Purpose of the Dissertation*

The specific purpose of this dissertation is to examine whether narrative (storytelling and storylistening) can be a significant tool in bringing about reconciliation between Aborigines, Anglo-Australian missionaries and other persons in the Wadeye local church, Northern Territory, Australia. Even though the focus of this research is the community of Wadeye, I believe this will lead to the further development of a model of mission as reconciliation that can be used on a global scale. In other words, the results of the research should be generalizable beyond Wadeye.

The narratives of twelve Aborigines and nineteen Anglo-Australians are analyzed to determine their value as a means for bringing about reconciliation between the two groups. The reconciliation model of Robert Schreiter is used in the analysis and tested with all participants of reconciliation: survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators.

There are three areas of particular interest regarding narrative and reconciliation that this dissertation aims to shed light on. The first is to identify the potential level of difficulty that people may have in talking about the experiences they had as survivors, perpetrators, or bystanders (Chapter 4). Perpetrators and bystanders are often reluctant to talk about their experiences. Their desire to protect their ego results in many experiencing denial over what has happened. Others experience the need for “social desirability,” that is, presenting the self in the best possible light. A survivor may have experienced such a devastating degree of trauma and shame that she or he may be unable to talk about it. Bystanders and perpetrators who discover their historical connection can experience this intensely.

The second is to determine whether personal narrative functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in people’s lives. Does narrative help break down barriers and lead to heightened appreciation of the other? Or is it a neutral phenomenon that provides no change or even serves to confirm bias in persons? (Chapter 5)

The third is to identify (through the person’s story) the person’s original understanding of what reconciliation means in the context of the relationship between indigenous and Anglo-Australians, and, whether this changes through exposure to another person’s narrative (Chapter 6).

### *Assumptions*

Five basic assumptions need to be recognized.

First, the cry of indigenous-Australians for reconciliation is just and proper and the churches must support it. Indigenous-Australians continue to suffer systemic racism.

Second, there are no neutral observers in the historical and contemporary clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. All are participants. We fall into one or more of the following categories: survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders. No person who is resident in Australia can claim ignorance or neutrality in this struggle.

Third, the calls for justice, such as for land rights, has not changed community attitudes. The cry for social justice is clearly insufficient to build the bridges needed for changing attitudes. Changed community attitudes would reflect a more compassionate understanding of the trauma that indigenous-Australians have experienced since the arrival of the British in 1788. This is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in the present inability of the Federal Government to apologize to Aborigines for the practice over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families (The children of these generations are now commonly referred to as the “Stolen Generations”).<sup>6</sup> To be sure, there have been significant degrees of support for reconciliation at the societal level. Unfortunately the present Federal Government has not been forthcoming in the area of apology and compensation.

Fourth, reconciliation is not cheap and easy. The process of narrative must occur within the broader framework of comprehensive socioeconomic and political empowerment.

Fifth, reconciliation is such a lengthy (and un-ending) process that the data of the interviews presented here can only reveal snapshots of persons—and maybe a community—at different stages of reconciliation.

There are also five missiological assumptions in this dissertation that need to be stated.

First, mission is the activity of God (*missio Dei*). Bosch (1991:390) notes “the missionary initiative comes from God alone.” The church works as an instrument for God’s mission. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission (cf. *Redemptoris Missio (RM)*: Chapter 3; *Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN)*: No. 75).<sup>7</sup> As such, we are called to align ourselves with the Spirit’s ongoing movement in human history.

Second, reconciliation is the heart of the gospel, and therefore, lies at the heart of God’s mission for the world (cf. Lederach 1999:159-161; Schreiter 1996b, 1997a, 1997c). While reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel it has not always been in our mission consciousness. Four interrelated phenomena—accelerated globalization, resurgence in ethnic and religious particularity, increased environmental awareness, and the aftermath of the legacy of colonialism—mark the contemporary situation. The gospel makes reconciliation a priority in such a context. What the global situation requires, the gospel offers. As such, the emerging model of mission may be “mission as reconciliation.” This model incorporates the expansion (Great Commission) and solidarity (Great Commandment) models of mission; it does not act as over/against these. Mission as reconciliation does not do away with the call to bring people into closer

relationship with God through baptism; there is still the need to live out the Great Commission. Mission as reconciliation acknowledges that the need to support the powerless and marginalized has increased, not diminished. The global context today cries out for Christians to demonstrate reconciliation in both the personal (vertical) and social (horizontal) domains.

Third, since mission is primarily and ultimately the work of God, reconciliation as the mission of God must by its very nature be trinitarian. The coordination and unity of the Trinity is the work of the active grace of God, that is, of the Holy Spirit. The inner workings of the Trinity respect difference and value vulnerability in relationship. The Holy Spirit by holding together the three distinct persons, not through identifying them as one, and through bringing into harmony the divinity of Christ and the humanity of Christ, reveals the model of mission as reconciliation. As such, respect for difference and vulnerability in relationship, are necessary conditions for expressing the reconciling love of God.

Fourth, it is through the Spirit's lead that individuals and communities become able to acknowledge and honor their brokenness. As "the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history" (*RM*: No. 28) we can be confident that the Spirit is at work and leading persons and communities into the sacred place of vulnerability. Our individual story needs to better integrate the master narrative of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Vulnerability is at the heart of authentic, life transforming narrative.

Fifth, since the missionary impulse is from God, and specifically from the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18; 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 13:46-48; 15:5-11,28) it follows that the task of missionaries is to enter as deeply as possible into a life that fosters openness to the Spirit's ongoing movement in human history and in our personal lives. This is an essential dimension of a genuine spirituality. With the many attempts at reconciliation today it is becoming possible to articulate more carefully such a spirituality. This spirituality then will stretch the imagination to identify appropriate strategies for different circumstances.

### *Definition of Terms*

There are a number of terms that need to be defined in order for the reader to understand the particular way I am using them. Some of the key terms are noted immediately below. Please also see a glossary on page 390 of Australian terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader.

*Reconciliation.* Reconciliation is the process initiated by God of drawing persons, peoples, and nations to discover their common humanity ("new creation," cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17) through forgiveness, repentance, and reparation. Reconciliation does not alter the need for human liberation through radical structural change. Rather, reconciliation encapsulates this thirst for liberation with the awareness that liberation comes mostly through transforming relationships. It is fundamentally relational, something that persons must work at with other persons. It is essentially concerned with broken and damaged relationships: between persons, between nations,

between humankind and the rest of creation, and between humankind and God. Christian theology has historically focused primarily on restoring the vertical relationship between the person and God; the horizontal relational understanding of persons with persons (and creation) has often been placed on the margins or ignored altogether. The vertical is necessary but not sufficient in a holistic understanding of reconciliation. (See Chapter 2)

*Narrative.* I use narrative in the specialized sense of being the process of storytelling where persons are able to disclose with vulnerability their authentic selves. Narrative includes the telling and retelling of a person's story so that he or she is able to integrate his or her past into his or her present. The process is dynamic and relational. The listeners must be engaged in deep listening as they attempt to recognize the truth of the other's story and relate this to their own story. Listeners are called to tell their story through their encounter with the other. It can be said that the call to vulnerability distinguishes authentic from superficial storytelling. (See Chapter 3 and Part II)

*Survivors.* Survivors are persons whose life and life-story have survived significant acts of violence and oppression.<sup>8</sup> These persons have suffered from the action or inaction of others. They can be descendants of persons who suffered traumatizing conflict and oppression. Their life story shows a desire to survive, despite the trauma and horror of the past. In the context of reconciliation in Australia, many indigenous-Australians as well as some missionaries and other Australians would fall into this category.



*Perpetrators.* Perpetrators are persons who consciously or unconsciously inflicted pain on others. In the Australian context the majority of these are unconscious. Some even may have come with the intention of helping others—like church folk—only to be caught up in a systematic, powerful attack on the fabric of indigenous society. Some indigenous people would also be included in this category. There has been much violence committed by indigenous-Australians against each other. Some indigenous people have also used the colonial system to their own advantage at the expense of their own community.

*Bystanders.* Bystanders are persons—often the great majority—who have chosen not to participate in halting the violence and oppression that others have suffered. They benefit from what others suffer from. Bystanders often claim ignorance and do not recognize responsibility for such behavior. This appears to be the main problem that needs to be turned around. The connection between bystanders and survivors needs to be made closer. People only repent, apologize, and seek forgiveness when they recognize that their past and present action—or inaction—has been wrong.

*The Dead.* Reconciliation is deeply connected with reconciling the memories of all the deceased. The deceased relatives of survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators have a very important place in the reconciliation process. The ministry of reconciliation is not only reconciling memories of those alive; it is also reconciling the memories descendants have of the deceased. For many survivors, the reconciliation

process helps their ancestors and deceased loved ones to be remembered with honor and respect. The descendants of perpetrators and bystanders are also in need of reconciling their memory of their ancestors with the memories of the descendants of those who survived past abuses and pain.

### *Limits of the Study*

This dissertation is focused on the key problems noted above. In order to do this I have placed three limits on the study.

First, although some implications have been drawn for the wider Australian church and other similar contexts, this dissertation has primarily limited itself to the experience of persons within the local church at Wadeye.

Second, the research did not depend on people coming to experience reconciliation through the course of the fieldwork. The goal of the fieldwork was to find data that could be analyzed to determine the role and value of narrative as a means for bringing about reconciliation.

Third, the dissertation is not a sacramental or liturgical presentation on reconciliation. The focus is limited to the role of narrative as it is used for theological and missiological purposes in the reconciliation process for indigenous-Australians, Anglo-Australian missionaries, and other Anglo-Australians.

### *Audience*

Although the primary audience is the local church at Wadeye it is expected that the results of this dissertation will have a wider relevance: for

other indigenous Australian church communities, and other situations such as Native American communities throughout the United States.

### *Methodology*

This dissertation tests the theory that has come from my own experience that narrative can bring about reconciliation. I use a heuristic method, as I believe this mode of inquiry is particularly appropriate for the subject matter of reconciliation and narrative. Michael Patton (1990:71) says:

Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher. Heuristic inquiry asks: “What is *my* experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?”

Patton (1990:71) suggests two things must be present in a heuristic study: “First, the researcher *must* have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study. Second, others . . . who are part of the study must share *an intensity* of experience with the phenomenon.” I believe that both the subjects of this study and, myself fulfill both these requirements.

Douglas and Moustakas (1984:42) comment that: “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior.” Heuristics is about discovering. Patton (1990:71-72) notes: “The reports of heuristic researchers are filled with discoveries, personal insights, and reflections of the researchers.” It will become evident that my narrative of reconciliation

has been challenged and broadened through the fieldwork. My experiences during the fieldwork have become an important component of my research. Where appropriate they have been recorded and reflected on. This is risky, yet necessary for this research. Douglas and Moustakas (1984:47) affirm this. They claim discovery comes from “being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life.”

Patton (1990:72) states: “The rigor of heuristic inquiry comes from systematic observation of and dialogues with self and others, as well as depth interviewing.” P. Craig points out that heuristic inquiry “affirms the possibility that one can live deeply and passionately in the moment, be fully immersed in mysteries and miracles, and still be engaged in meaningful research experience” (cited in Patton 1990:72). Douglas and Moustakas (1984:40) observe:

The power of heuristic inquiry lies in its potential for disclosing truth. Through exhaustive self-search, dialogues with others, and creative depictions of experience, a comprehensive knowledge is generated, beginning as a series of subjective understandings and developing into a systematic and definitive exposition.

### *Communication and Interpretation*

All practice is theory-laden. There is no such thing as value-free observation. How one interprets the data is profoundly connected to how one obtained the data. My approach to interviewing has therefore been

theory-laden. This being the case, it is necessary to briefly discuss here rather than later, the influences of theory on my interviewing methodology.

David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet (eds.) in their book *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (1994) convincingly demonstrate the strength of acknowledging the intersubjectivity of ethnography. They agree with Victor Turner who argued: “ethnography is founded on participation in *shared common experiences*” (cited in Young and Goulet 1994:33). Intersubjectivity must be seen as a normal component of the data collection process (cf. Goulet 1998). Being conscious of and honest about the *intersubjectivity* within processes like interviewing is essential to the integrity of this dissertation (cf. Schutz 1962).

Effective intercultural communication is essential for the accurate gathering of data. The work of William B. Gudykunst (1993) has been particularly helpful for my heuristic methodology. Gudykunst (1993:34) suggests there are three important assumptions about the nature of effective communication. These are:

1. Ontological. “Our shared intersubjective realities are sufficiently stable that we consider the shared portion as an ‘objective’ reality” (Gudykunst 1993:35).

2. Epistemological. “[We can] assume that our interpretations of our communication *and* external observations of our communication provide useful data for generating and testing theories.” He is careful to point out

that meaning is “constructed in discourse,” it is not simply found in the person (Gudykunst 1993:35).

3. Human nature. While we are influenced by our culture and environment, “[w]e nevertheless have the ability to choose how we communicate.” If one person changes so does the relationship. Therefore, it necessarily follows that one person “can increase the effectiveness of communication that occurs in a relationship” (Gudykunst 1993:35).

*Gudykunst’s “Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Perspective.”* Crosscultural fieldwork at the best of times is stressful. This is particularly the case when working with areas of vulnerability (regardless whether people recognize it as vulnerability), like the need for reconciliation in people’s lives. Gudykunst’s (1993) “anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) perspective” has been specially relevant and helpful for this fieldwork.

Gudykunst (1993:37-38) highlights two crucial aspects of communication. First, the need to manage anxiety (our own and those with whom we are communicating). And second, the ability to be able to predict with increased certainty the behavior of others and ourselves.

We need to be *mindful* of the degrees of anxiety and uncertainty that each person—including the interviewer—experiences in the interview. If the levels of anxiety and uncertainty are too high or too low we are unable to communicate effectively.<sup>9</sup>

Gudykunst (1993:43) and others remind us that communication is most effective when it is focusing on the *process* rather than the *outcome*.

A process approach is particularly necessary when working with peoples' memories and stories as is the case with my fieldwork.<sup>10</sup>

*Cultural variables.* There are several cultural variables involved in any communication process (cf. Gudykunst 1993:65-68). My fieldwork highlights the crosscultural dimensions of communication. Gudykunst (1993:65) claims, "Individualism-collectivism is the major dimension of cultural variability used to explain cross-cultural differences in behavior across disciplines and cultures." The fundamental identity differences between an individualistic "I" culture—like Australian-Anglo culture—and a collectivistic "We" culture—like that of indigenous-Australians—must be recognized and understood.<sup>11</sup>

*Method of qualitative interviewing and participant observation.* My method of discovery was qualitative interviewing and participant observation.<sup>12</sup> During a six-week field trip to Wadeye in June and July 1998, I interviewed twelve Aborigines and nineteen Anglo-Australians. The Anglo-Australians were divided between those who were missionaries (nine) and those who were not (ten). Although I had conversations with more people, for the purpose of this dissertation extensive interviewing was limited to the above numbers. That is, the thirty-one interviews came from a larger pool of initial interviews and conversations. I intentionally chose to interview people that collectively provided a balance in gender, age, different socioeconomic groupings, and professional and non-professional backgrounds.

Rudestam and Newton (1992) suggest that qualitative designs need to maintain the same scientific rigor as quantitative methods. Tape-recording of interviews and the inclusion of my process notes occurred wherever possible. Each interview involved a series of open-ended questions that solicited stories and memories<sup>13</sup> from each interviewee.<sup>14</sup> (See “Introduction to Part II,” and Appendix C)

I maintained process notes throughout the fieldwork, and indeed, right throughout the dissertation process. These notes were my opportunity to record honestly my understanding, challenges, confusions, and hopes that arose throughout the work.

### *Schreiter's Narrative Model of Reconciliation*

Narrative is one possible road to reconciliation. Alienation is caused by a complexity of multiple factors. Loss of land, ethnic segregation, and violent culture clash are three such factors. It would be foolish and ultimately quite limiting to argue that narrative is a panacea for the hurting cries of all humanity in each and every context. We need to avoid making claims that polarize discussion. This dissertation is one attempt—and I hope a significant one—to shed further light on the way narrative works with survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators in need of reconciliation.

Robert Schreiter in his text, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (1992a), provides a helpful model to test the link between narrative and reconciliation. Schreiter writes from the context of humankind trying to recover from the devastating, calculated, and ruthless



acts of violence in Latin America, South Africa and other places (like Australia, the list is almost endless). His model of reconciling narrative mostly focuses on the way survivors of systemic violence come to experience God's reconciling love and healing. His model suggests that survivors come to experience a sense of safety and subjecthood (reconciliation) through personally and socially reclaiming a new redeeming narrative.<sup>15</sup>

Why narrative? Schreiter's (1992a:30) model understands violence as a phenomenon that destroys our meaning system. His model views systemic violence as being far from irrational. On the contrary, the violence of oppressive governments has a clear rationality "aimed precisely at the destruction of existent and opposing rationalities" (Schreiter 1992a:30). Working from leads within anthropological literature (in particular the work of René Girard 1977, 1986, 1987), Schreiter argues that we need to recognize the fragility of our meaning-making systems.<sup>16</sup> As he (1992a:31) says:

We must begin by realizing what fragile constructions we humans and our societies are. We are largely bereft of instinct and so feel so deeply insecure in an uncertain and often dangerous world. Not only do we feel uncertain and insecure, we are not told who we are. We need to find ourselves and to check them constantly against surrounding reality. To remedy this sense of vulnerability and to avoid perishing in fear, we need to construct and reconstruct constantly for ourselves a sense of safety and a sense of selfhood.

We gain a sense of shared safety and selfhood through the meaning we apply to our physical things, like the things we eat, the way we eat, the

clothes we wear, and the shelter we build (Schreiter 1992a:31). We construct our reality out of this sense of sameness in our lives. Schreiter (1992a:31) poignantly warns us however: “Because it is constructed, it is also very fragile.” Change can happen swiftly, causing confusion and subsequent loss of meaning to arise.

The importance of narrative flows out of this primordial need to construct meaning in our lives. In Schreiter’s (1992a:32) words:

The record of the encounters of the self [and community] with events is preserved for us largely in narratives—the stories that we tell about ourselves, both to ourselves and to others. These stories become foundational not only for describing ourselves to others, but for our very understanding of ourselves. They constitute our truths. They tell us what we need to know about ourselves, how we remember what has happened to us, how we may have changed, and how we have stayed the same—in other words, how we manage to be who we are.

Schreiter’s model argues that when people are systemically attacked and put down they can begin to doubt, or even totally abandon the meaning system encoded in their narrative. This can eventually break down their sense of safety and selfhood.

We are now at the heart of Schreiter’s model. Perpetrators of systemic violence attempt to “destroy the narratives that sustain people’s identities” (Schreiter 1992a:34). They in turn wish to substitute the survivors’ narratives with their own. Schreiter calls this, “*narratives of the lie*.” When humans lose their *identity* (read, their narrative) they struggle to survive. That is why many survivors ultimately collude with oppressors for “any narratives—are better than no narratives at all” (Schreiter 1992a:34).

If people are to resist the narrative of the lie they must sustain their own narrative. Schreier (1992a:36) calls this: “the quest of a redeeming narrative.” Survivors overcome the violence of oppression by beginning to regain their own narrative. Survivors need to break the partner of oppression; namely, deadly silence. They must try to recover their voice (cf. Schreier 1992a:36-7). This is a frighteningly new thing for many survivors. Systemic (and personal) violence declares boldly—both in action and inaction—that nobody is listening. Many of those who have survived torture remember the words of their torturers, “you can scream as loud as you want, nobody can hear you.”

Schreier (1992a:37) understands this crying out to be “an appeal to God.” I understand this to be the person experiencing radical *vulnerability*, like the vulnerability that God experienced through suffering on the cross. It is in this experience of profound brokenness that people need to “find other narratives that can pick up the fragments of [their] own and piece them back together” (1992a:37). Schreier (1992a:37) refers to this as “find[ing] an *orthopathema*, a right way to suffer.” This involves replacing the narrative of the lie with a new redeeming narrative. This is a difficult and risky process for “[a]t the heart of the *orthopathema* is an act of fundamental trust, a faith, in the new narrative” (1992a:37).

“Trust” and “memory” are the two crucial ingredients in Schreier’s model for claiming a redeeming narrative and ultimately for the successful reintegration of the person into the community. First, the role of trust is important because: “The nucleus of our humanity is restored to us in

reestablishing the ability to trust” (Schreiter 1992a:38). Second, we need to recognize the profound connection between memory and identity. In Schreiter’s words: “Memory is the principal repository of our identity” (1992a:38).

Schreiter concludes his model with a discussion on the difference between retrieving memory and reconstructing memory. Retrieving memory is not enough for survivors. There is a need to reconstruct it; otherwise the memory is too raw. That is, the violence associated with the memory must be placed in a safe context. Survivors of violence do this in different ways. One way is to tell and retell their memory of violence so that it no longer has the power to hold them captive to that experience. Reconstructing memory means putting new meaning onto old wounds; the wounds do not simply disappear. The scars of the violence remain, however, the meaning that survivors place on these scars becomes slowly changed as they regain and reclaim their inalienable sense of power and subjecthood.

### *Applying Schreiter’s Narrative Model*

As seen above, Schreiter’s model focuses almost exclusively on the relationship between narrative and reconciliation for survivors. His model can also be applied to the other two categories of persons involved in reconciliation, namely, perpetrators and bystanders. The “ministry of reconciliation” must promote the possibility of conversion on the part of bystanders and perpetrators. We need to explore whether narrative can help

these persons recognize their foundational interrelationship with the story of survivors.

Schreiter's model, therefore, becomes a useful stepping stone for working with the (narrative) experiences of all persons; survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. I apply Schreiter's model to the narratives of perpetrators and bystanders so as to these folk (cf. South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission strategy; Finca 1997; Maluleke 1997; Boraine and Levy 1995; Boraine, Levy, and Scheffer 1994).

As such, the data of the narratives of bystanders and perpetrators are just as crucial to this dissertation as are the narratives of the survivors. Each category is given equal attention.

### *Missiological Implications and Importance of the Study*

I agree with Robert Schreiter (1996, 1997a, 1997b) when he suggests that "mission as reconciliation" may be becoming the new model<sup>17</sup> of mission in the church. Schreiter draws from David Bosch (1991), who in his groundbreaking text *Transforming Mission*, discerned a variety of mission paradigms throughout Christian history. Many, like Schreiter (1996:245), felt Bosch hesitated too much in proposing a new paradigm for the present. Bosch felt the church was most needing to respond to the "post-modern" condition. With this in mind he inclined to view the newly emerging paradigm as the ecumenical paradigm. Schreiter (1996:245) asserts "this does not present a compelling image or metaphor to galvanize missionary activity." He is also quick to point out that Bosch completed his

manuscript before the dramatic events of 1989 and could not have foreseen the astonishing changes that would happen since that time (cf. Schreiter 1996:245). Unexpected death in 1992 robbed the world of his reflections on these epoch-changing events.<sup>18</sup>

Before proposing his new model of mission, Schreiter looks back to recent church history. He submits that the modern missionary period can be characterized by two metaphors: *expansion* (Great Commission) and *accompaniment* (Great Commandment). Expansion is that period covering the beginning of the nineteenth century to World War II. In this, mission was closely connected with European colonial expansion. Here we have the motto, “Civilize in order to Christianize.” Matthew 28:19 could be claimed as the key text for this model. The period of accompaniment covers the 1960s to the 1980s. The key words in this period are solidarity with the other, contextualization and inculturation, dialogue and commitments to liberation. Luke 4:16-20 captures this theme.

Coming to terms with post-colonialism and accelerating globalization in the 1980s,<sup>19</sup> has led to “mission as reconciliation,” emerging as perhaps the most important model of mission as we approach the next millennium (cf. Goldman 1997b, 1998). As stated earlier, the model of “mission as reconciliation” incorporates the models of expansion and accompaniment or solidarity, it does not do away with these.

Wadeye can be viewed as a microcosm of the broader social, political, and historical fabric of Australian society and the present difficulties of achieving reconciliation in our communities and nation. In

short, this narrowly focused study is a way to explore the broader national picture and contribute to the global need for reconciliation. John Harris (1990,1994), in his history of Christian missions and Aborigines entitled *One Blood*, employed the focus on representative individual communities to convincing effect. This is a model for my research.

The need to tell and own the history of communities like Wadeye is becoming an increasingly urgent one. Both in Wadeye and throughout Australia, the political struggle of indigenous-Australians for “self-determination” has awakened their desire to be taken seriously—to have their story heard. And throughout the world the struggle of marginalized people has awakened the same desire. As such, the Wadeye story has relevance to indigenous peoples and other oppressed peoples’ throughout the world.

The history of the Wadeye local church suggests that the past pains and hurts needs to be addressed by Aborigines and other church members. Meaningful efforts towards reconciliation are needed for an indigenous church to be able to further grow and renew itself and the wider church community.

Australia is struggling to come to terms with its need for reconciliation. It would be fair to say the possibility of reconciliation in contexts like Australia rests on whether the majority of the population (bystanders), become active in the reconciliation process. I do not know of any process in Australia that has intentionally focused on the narratives of

all participants of reconciliation; bystanders, survivors, and perpetrators. In this regard the dissertation breaks new ground.

Narrative has power. We recall that the role of narrative is “key to our sense of safety and selfhood” in the reconciliation process (Schreiter 1992a:3). Indigenous-Australians, like those in Wadeye have struggled to be heard in the church and society. They have suffered from racism and colonization. Similarly, missionaries, many of whom may have been stigmatized for working with indigenous communities, have struggled with self-esteem from such difficult and often unappreciated work. With greater sense of self-respect (subjecthood) the healing of past (and ongoing) hurts may begin. It is only through authentic narrative that a sense of shared history emerges.

### *Australia at an Impasse*

There is a significant gulf in understanding and trust between indigenous-Australians and Anglo-Australians. Nevertheless, the gap is beginning to be closed. Increased community awareness has resulted from the High Court judgments of Mabo (1992) and Wik (1996), the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), and the Commonwealth Government’s (1997) report, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*.

Most churches have called Australians to recognize the claims of the indigenous community for Land Rights—so a just and proper settlement can



occur. Creative Christian responses have included a “Pay the Rent” theme by the *Action for World Development*. This endeavors to be a vehicle for those who desire to make reparation in a tangible way for living on land that belonged to indigenous-Australians. We could say that the churches and other Christian agencies have equated a just social package with reconciliation. To be sure, justice is a requirement for reconciliation to occur, but justice alone does not mend relationships, it does not create a “new social reality.” The cry for justice has convinced neither the members of the church nor those who listen from a distance.

Politicians at different times have called for some form of symbolic contract between indigenous-Australians and the Australian government. They have argued that a statement, perhaps a treaty, compact or *makarratta*,<sup>20</sup> that recognized the prior occupation of the indigenous people, would be a catalyst for achieving national reconciliation. Over the last decade we have seen the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, apologize for past hurts to the Aborigines.<sup>21</sup> The next Prime Minister, John Howard, chose not to for fear that the nation will be legally forced to pay compensation for past actions.<sup>22</sup> Any prospects of a unifying treaty quickly gets removed to the “too hard” basket in such an environment—for the moment at least, a treaty would appear forced and shallow.

Perhaps the greatest effort toward reconciliation has come through the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation* (CAR) formed at the instigation of the previous Commonwealth Government. The CAR’s decade long mandate is due to finish in 2001. The CAR has produced some excellent

resources to facilitate an increase in community awareness on the need for reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> Despite exceptional Aboriginal leadership and genuine goodwill by all on the CAR, it has been plagued on the outside by partisan politics and racist elements in the broader society. It is uncertain whether this body will succeed in helping the nation come to more harmonious relationships with its indigenous populations.

There have been a variety of responses by churches to their Aboriginal members. Some church leaders have called on Aborigines to forget the past and move on to the future. They want Aborigines to leave behind the misunderstandings of the past in a spirit of partnership and hope for the future. This for the most part has only created resentment and a simmering of anger that lies just beneath the surface of most indigenous-Australians.

Other churches, particularly the Uniting Church,<sup>24</sup> responded by supporting the rights of indigenous-Australians to self-determination. This resulted in the handing over of church resources and leadership to their indigenous members (cf. Gondarra 1994; Hollingsworth 1994). Churches were handed over in a spirit of great hope that others would recognize that paternalistic policies could no longer be accepted. While these were signs of great hope within the particular communities, this significant shift in church policy did not seem to impact the greater bulk of church members who lived thousands of miles from these communities.

Others have urged people to listen to indigenous-Australians. One response by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the 1980s was entitled,

“Listening to the Voices.” In this process, indigenous-Australians were encouraged to tell their stories.<sup>25</sup> It was hoped that through the process of listening, people would experience a personal awakening to the call of indigenous-Australians for justice. While it was a much-needed antidote to their previously silenced voices the project did not achieve the changes it had hoped for. This may have been due to the absence of responsibility on the part of the listener to enter into dialogue with the indigenous storytellers. The process was weakened through the telling of only one part of the story. The bystanders were not fully engaged.

Churches, like the rest of society, have struggled to recognize their connection to the Aborigines’ story. Aborigines have been hurt by real people, and some of those real people have belonged to our churches and been part of the policies of our churches. We need to respond to their story, and through this response begin to name and own our own story. The absence of this may have been a significant reason for the lack of potency of the “Listening to the Voices” program. *All persons have to participate if reconciliation is to occur.*

We can see that churches have tried many methods—mostly in the area of social justice—to create reconciliation in the community. Despite these efforts, reconciliation appears more elusive than ever. We noticed that the “Listening to the Voices” program failed to recognize the need for bystanders to respond to Aborigines’ stories. While the Uniting Church’s efforts to promote Aboriginal self-determination are commendable it is uncertain whether this has greatly touched the lives of those who live far-

removed from where this policy is in practice. And we have seen that despite the best intentions of the CAR the failure of government leaders to support the processes of the CAR have largely undermined the its' work.

Nevertheless, the CAR, through its understanding of the notion of “shared history” has come closer than any other body in recognizing the need to share stories, listen to each other, and endeavor to create a sense of shared history. This dissertation aims to build on those goals. It is obvious from the lack of success of the above approaches that there needs to be efforts to understand and implement processes that promote the possibility of reconciliation. If this does not happen, efforts at the building of a truly indigenous church and more harmonious society will be seriously undermined and ultimately any result will be shallow.

### *The Goal of the Ministry of Reconciliation*

We need to envision what Australian society would look like if reconciliation between indigenous and all other Australians were accomplished. To be sure, we are flawed human beings and as a result we are less than able to create a perfect and ongoing experience of reconciliation. Nevertheless, it helps us to focus on what the goal of our ministry of reconciliation is. It is with this in mind that I offer my vision of what reconciliation would look like in our Australian community.

For reconciliation to be accomplished the nation will have created a broader and more inclusive historical understanding of itself. This increase in historical consciousness would lead to greater respect and appreciation of

each community's contribution to our present well being. The failures and the pains of the past would be acknowledged and embraced not out of guilt, but rather, from a healthy sense of shame that reveals genuine apology, repentance, and reparation. This would serve as a cathartic release from the bondage of sin, which reveals itself in hurting and damaging relationships that have been based on narrow and suspicious views of one another. In short, our horizons will be broadened. We will find ourselves experiencing profound levels of relationship with one another no matter how great our experience of difference may be from one another. In this kind of environment there would be no sense of hesitancy or fear in apologizing over the mistakes and abuses of the past. We would readily understand that we are indeed constituted by our past, and as such we need to share corporate responsibility for the failings of the past that have continued into our present times (cf. Lederach 1997:27).

There is a crucial need to clarify the difference between guilt and shame (cf. Habel 1999:123). Guilt suggests that the person is directly responsible for another person's hurt; this requires some act of repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Shame, on the other hand, is the feeling that is experienced simply through being in some way connected to the hurts of people. We can be ashamed of the way our grandparents may have hurt others; we do not necessarily experience guilt for the actions of our grandparents. The shame that we experience can help in making connection with the other.

Most Anglo-Australians do not need to feel guilty about their relationships to indigenous-Australians as they are not responsible for many of the crimes of the past against indigenous-Australians. Aboriginal leaders like Mick Dodson (CAR 1997c:33) declared at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in 1997: “individual Australians are not guilty for what happened to [Aboriginal] families.” Nevertheless, a healthy response to the tragic history of indigenous-Australians is one of shame. Shame is healthy—not toxic, like repressed guilt—and can empower Anglo-Australians to acknowledge the truth of Australian history, and work to remove ongoing injustices and prejudices against indigenous-Australians. As Dodson (CAR 1997c:33) put it, “if you fail to respond to what you know that will be another thing. If you do not help to ease the pain, that will be your act for which you are responsible.”

### *The Structure of the Dissertation*

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 form a first major part and focus on history, reconciliation, and the power of the narrative process. These chapters represent a “step back” from my own and Australia’s faltering praxis of reconciliation to a theoretical coordination of relevant context and content.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 form the second major part; it moves the study back towards practice. After a methodological introduction, Chapter 4 discusses the level of difficulty narrators’ experience in telling their stories. Chapter 5 examines whether personal narrative functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in people’s lives. Chapter 6 explores the fieldwork

interviews from the perspective of whether narrative actually promotes the possibility of reconciliation between peoples.

Chapters 7 and 8 form a short Part III. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings of Part II in the light of the content of Part I. Chapter 8 explores the missiological significance of the study before returning to offer some suggestions on what the study may mean for the ministry of reconciliation in the Wadeye community (and communities like it), the nation of Australia, and other communities and nations further abroad.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Bradshaw Station lies forty-five miles southeast of Wadeye. The Aborigines from that region tried to defend their land against incursions by pastoralists resulting in suffering one substantial massacre in 1905. There is one cave painting in that region that depicts fourteen rifles killing people. It is almost certain that it was referring to one of the massacres that took place. Two families who belong to that land live in Wadeye. The Australian army now owns the property.

<sup>2</sup> At Wadeye the term “convent” included the dormitories for females.

<sup>3</sup> I prefer the term “Anglo-Australian” to “non-Aborigine” or “non-indigenous.” While being very interested in Norman Habel’s (1999: ix) use of the term “immigrant-Australian” I believe “Anglo-Australian” sharpens our awareness that the great bulk of the historical clash between indigenous and other Australians has been with Australians from Anglo backgrounds. I much prefer the terms “Anglo-Australian” or “immigrant-Australian” to the term “non-Aborigine” as most people prefer to be described in terms of who they are rather than what they are not.

<sup>4</sup> I will use wherever possible the expression “indigenous-Australians.” Australia’s Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities have brought to our attention that they do not wish to be included under the blanket expression “Aborigine.” They have unique cultural traits that they wish to be acknowledged. The expression “indigenous-Australians” may be awkward at times, nevertheless, for the moment it appears to be the best available term. I am aware that South Sea Islanders are not indigenous to Australia, and therefore the term “indigenous-Australian” may not sit comfortably with them. Nevertheless, for convenience, it seems the best choice until some more inclusive term is found.

<sup>5</sup> Max Charlesworth (1998: xxiii-xxiv) states “One is left with the dispiriting impression that most white Australians—both political leaders and the general populace—seem to be ignorant of the true reality of the white occupation of Australia and what C. D. Rowley [1970] has called ‘the destruction of society.’”



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<sup>6</sup> The Australian Commission for Human Rights and Equal Opportunities released their report on the Stolen Generations in 1997. The title of this report is *Bringing Them Home*. A number of recommendations were made in this report which the present Federal Government is struggling to come to terms with. The most notable being the recommendation that the present government makes apology to the indigenous community for the forced removal policies of previous governments.

<sup>7</sup> “RM” represents *Redemptoris Missio*, an encyclical letter of John Paul II (1991) “On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate.” “EN” represents *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an apostolic exhortation by Pope Paul VI (1975) “On Evangelization in the Modern World.”

<sup>8</sup> I intentionally choose the word “survivor” to describe those who have suffered trauma and abuse. Indigenous-Australians have proclaimed loudly during the last few decades that they have survived the trauma of the past. In this way “survivor” is a better word than “victim.” The other advantage in using the word “survivor” is that it is less likely to be misunderstood or watered down than the word “victim.” I have heard in some circles that those who perpetrated abuse against indigenous-Australians were “victims of the time” too. In that sense the word “victim” begins to lose its original meaning, that is those who suffered trauma and abuse. It does not run off the tongue to suggest that perpetrators of abuse were “survivors of the time.” The word “survivor” therefore works to clearly identify who did what to whom.

<sup>9</sup> When levels are too high we are unable to recognize another person’s frame of reference. Our degree of interpretation is too narrow. If our levels are too low we lack motivation to communicate. The communication becomes boring (cf. Gudykunst 1993:40).

<sup>10</sup> An “outcome approach” on the other hand can produce “*induce mindlessness*” (Ellen Langer 1989:34). Langer (1989:34) continues: “If we think we know how to handle a situation, we don’t feel a need to pay attention. If we respond to the situation as very familiar. . . we notice only minimal cues necessary to carry out the proper scenarios. If, on the other hand, the situation is strange, we might be so preoccupied with the thought

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of failure ('what if I make a fool of myself?') that we miss nuances of our own and others' behavior. In this sense, we are mindless with respect to the immediate situation, although we may be thinking actively about outcome related issues."

<sup>11</sup> An important aid to this has been David W. Augsburger's (1992) exceptional book *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*.

<sup>12</sup> In line with this, I followed Spradley's approach to interviewing as described in *Ethnographic Interview* (1979) and *Participant Observation* (1980). The need to provide clear concrete questions (as opposed to abstract) is particularly pertinent for any development of narrative.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent discussion on the different types of memory and the use of narrative for moral development see Paul C. Vitz 1990.

<sup>14</sup> One scenario-type setting (called "Imagination Exercise," see Introduction to Part II for a full description) was used in which I invited the interviewee to imagine what it may be like being the other. For example, each Anglo-Australian was taken through a story where they were asked to imagine being an Aboriginal child, and then reflecting back on this experience as an Aboriginal adult. I am very grateful to Professor Burrell Dinkins who suggested the needed role of imagination in helping bring about increase in empathy for the Other.

<sup>15</sup> The call to subjecthood lies at the heart of Paulo Freire's (1970) approach to education as outlined in his classic, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire condemned the "banking method" of education where someone simply deposits information into the other's head. He outlined the need for a "dialogical method" of education where the person truly becomes a subject and responds from the place of their experience.

<sup>16</sup> Schreier (1992a:31) does not agree with Girard's unprovable hypothesis that violence "lies at the formation of every culture or society." Nevertheless, Girard has useful insights into the nature of violence.

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<sup>17</sup> Schreiter (1996:245) prefers the term “model” to “paradigm.” He indicates two advantages in doing this. First, paradigms are not nearly as self-enclosed as Kuhn first proposed. Second, the word model can draw from Clifford Gertz’s use; that is we can have both a “model of” what is happening, and a “model for” how to act.

<sup>18</sup> The seeds of his thoughts are contained however in his book *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (1995).

<sup>19</sup> In a personal communication to me Schreiter notes: “It is much debated when globalization began. The word to describe this phenomenon first appeared in 1959.” The phenomenon was recognized by John XXIII, in *Mater il Magistrata*, No. 47-48 (1961); and by Paul VI, *Pacem it Terris*, No. 130 (1963).

<sup>20</sup> *Makarratta* is a widely borrowed Aboriginal word meaning, “cessation of hostilities.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, speech at Redfern Park in Sydney on 10 December 1992 (<http://apology.west.net.au/redfern.html>).

<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Howard at the Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in May 1997 refused to apologize on behalf of the Australian government and people for the government policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families. See “Editorial,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 27, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> See bibliography for Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation documents to see extensive examples of these.

<sup>24</sup> The Uniting Church created in 1977 in Australia represents the attempted unification of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches.

<sup>25</sup> This process occurred in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). The Aborigines that participated in this process were from NSW.

**PART I:**

**HISTORY,  
RECONCILIATION,  
AND  
NARRATIVE**

## **INTRODUCTION TO PART I:**

### **Coordinating Context and Content**

Part I comprises three chapters. Each chapter explores a particular aspect of the conversation on reconciliation in Australia.

Chapter 1 lays down the historical nature of the culture clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians before applying this specifically to the community of Wadeye. An anthropological perspective is employed to shed light on the specific nature of the culture clash in Australia between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. It is vital that we have an historical and anthropological grounding of the cultural clash that has occurred—and is still occurring—between the indigenous and dominant society. Until we become conscious of these differences Australia's journey towards reconciliation will lack focus—it may even lead to increasing the misunderstanding in the community.

Chapter 2 provides a survey of the literature on reconciliation. While I have already outlined my working definition of reconciliation it is necessary to place this in context with the historical and contemporary understanding of reconciliation. In many ways it is just as important to inform people what we do not mean by reconciliation as by what we do mean. The confusion and misinformation in the Australian community about reconciliation is presently causing many people of good will in

Australia to give up in trying to come to better understanding. It all seems too hard.

Chapter 3 explores models of narrative theology and their connection to reconciliation. We remember in order to give our experience coherence. In this way our personal memory becomes enlarged so as a broader social memory is able to unfold. A broader social memory is vital to helping bystanders and perpetrators make meaningful connection with the stories of survivors.

With this in place, we are then well positioned, having the necessary context and content, to examine the data of the fieldwork.

## CHAPTER 1

### History: The *Bells* of Mission, Time Over Place

I recently returned to Australia after completing over two years of study in the United States. I was excited to be home again. In the months leading up to departure I was looking forward to surfing again in the Pacific Ocean. But more importantly, I was looking forward to having deep and sustained conversations with my friends and family about their perception of where the Australian community was going with reconciliation.

For a great amount of my time in the United States I had been researching issues surrounding the notion of reconciliation. I had informed my family and friends of my dissertation topic, and shared with them my developing thoughts on what is required for reconciliation to occur. The day after arriving home in Sydney, after a surf in the morning with my daughter, we all made our way out to be with some friends for an afternoon barbecue. While my friend David and I were cleaning the barbecue I asked him what he felt about reconciliation and Aborigines. David paused, looked at me and asked: “Do you really want to know what I think?” I replied: “Just tell me as you see it.” David said:

Well, we hear Aborigines talk about how important the land is for them. But they never did anything with it before we came here. So why all the fuss now that they want it back because it’s valuable to them? If it’s valuable to them now, why didn’t they do something with it before?

What is so powerful about David's comment is that it reflects the huge cultural gap in understanding that exists between the Anglo-Australian and indigenous communities in our nation.

*The Culture Clash between Indigenous and Anglo-Australians*

Over the years of being with indigenous people throughout Australia I have been struck by the way they speak about their memory of the mission bells. The memory of the bells chiming seems to pierce them like a spear. In thinking about this I have begun to see the mission bells as the symbol *par excellence* of the radical nature of the culture clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians.

The bells were rung to a set pattern of time. During the course of a day the bells would tell people when to wake up, when to eat, when to start work, when to sleep, even when to pray. This is all pretty much the normal routine for Anglo-Australians. But for indigenous-Australians it is part of a foreign worldview. Things happen in Aboriginal life when everything is in place. For example, ceremonies do not begin at a set time, rather they begin when all the needed people have arrived.

For many indigenous-Australians, the sound and memory of the bells reminds them of the trauma of the past. It reminds them of their struggle to understand a dominating Western worldview. Some commentators like Tony Swain (1993) have named the clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians as a clash of time (Western) over place (indigenous).



The cultural clash of time over place is implicit in David's comments above. David, like so many Anglo-Australians, clearly sees land as something to be used; the value of land is what we can get out of it, and how quickly and efficiently we make profit from it. To be sure, many Australians are increasingly recognizing the need to consider the environmental impact of actions on the land. Nevertheless, it would still be accurate to say that most Australians look on the land as a resource to be used.

Indigenous-Australians on the other hand prefer to speak of the land in terms of relationship (cf. Dodson 1988; Pattel-Gray 1991, 1996). They refer to it in terms like "Mother" or "Mother Earth" (cf. Swain and Trompf 1995:109-116). This sense of intimate relationship with the land is at the forefront of their understanding of how land can be used. It is precisely because the land is so valuable, not just in terms of economic value, but moreover in terms of its social and spiritual value, that disturbing the land is anathema within their worldview. If one of my Aboriginal friends from Wadeye had been with David and me during that Sunday afternoon, my guess is that he would probably laugh and say, "How can we get across to you that the land is the heart of our culture. It is more than just something to make use of. Our identity comes from the land—without it we are nothing."

Max Charlesworth (1998: xxiii) comments that the political debate in Australia's Parliament House in 1997 was so disappointing because "very little reference was made to the religious or spiritual basis of Aboriginal

land rights or to the radical differences in land use by Aboriginal peoples on the one hand and, on the other hand, by White pastoralists and miners.” We must recognize and come to understand the historical and anthropological nature of this culture clash. A failure to bridge these views threatens to undermine authentic efforts at reconciliation in the community.

### *A Structure of National “Forgetfulness”*

It could be claimed that Australia was formed as a nation of survivors.<sup>1</sup> Its founding historical narrative is based on the deportation of convicts from England who mostly came from the oppressed and downtrodden groups of that nation, such as poor Irish and other persecuted minorities. Robert Hughes, in his compelling book *The Fatal Shore* (1986) makes the poignant observation that Australia’s founding historical narrative has for most of its history been sublimated. Hughes (1986:xi) contends that “the desire to *forget* about our felon origins began with the origins themselves” (emphasis added).

I believe the early years of our nation’s beginning have served as a formative influence on our nation’s psyche. It should not be surprising that the culture of abuse and oppression was carried into its treatment of the indigenous people (cf. Thornhill 1992:51ff). Just as we have sublimated and tried to forget our “felon origins” we have also tried to forget the history of the violent warfare and clashes that occurred during the settlement of the nation. For a large part of Australian history there has been a certain sense of “historical amnesia” or “conspiracy of silence”

towards its indigenous people (cf. Hughes 1986: xi-xv). In his famous 1969 Boyer Lectures, W. E. H. Stanner named this “The Great Australian Silence.” During those lectures he (1969:25) observed,

What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now even hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.

Stanner (1969:25) noted that this cult of forgetfulness was not due to absent-mindedness. Rather, it was “a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape.” H. Reynolds (1984:1) picks up Stanner’s line of thought and points out “The Great Australian Silence was a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon.” According to Reynolds (1984:1)

the few major historical works produced before 1900 gave considerable attention to the great tragedy of destruction and dispossession. But during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Aborigines were dispersed from the pages of Australian history as effectively as the frontier squatters had dispersed them from the inland plains a century before.

Professor J. A. La Nauze in his 1959 address, “The Study of Australian History 1929—1959” to a conference of historians concluded, “unlike the Maori, the American Indian or the South African Bantu, the Australian Aboriginal is noticed in our history only in a melancholy anthropological footnote” (cited in Reynolds 1984:3). It has only been since the 1960s when indigenous political aspirations for “land rights” came to consciousness that Australia has begun to reflect on its history with its

indigenous people. Reynolds (1984:5) states it nicely: “The pivotal issue of land-rights is, above all, about history.”

### *Colonialism Combined with Social Darwinian Evolutionary Theory*

The clash of cultures experienced throughout the world during the centuries of European colonialism was the most pronounced in Australia. The sixty thousand years of more-or-less isolation from the rest of the human community (particularly in the southern half of the country) created an unparalleled clash of culture. Josephine Flood (1983:16) reminds us that “[Australian] Aboriginal society has the longest continuous cultural history in the world.” Eugene Stockton (1995:18) asserts that the clash between Blacks and Whites in Australia was “the most severe culture clash in history.” Manning Clark in Volume 1 of his monumental series *A History of Australia* said that the Aborigines were “endowed with a tenacious, if not unique inability to detect meaning in any way of life other than his own” (1962:5). On the other hand, the ethnocentrism of the British, combined with the “scientific” backing of the newly emerging theory of evolution, resulted in Aborigines being viewed as an earlier stage in evolution (cf. Charlesworth 1998: xiv). Ultimately Aboriginal culture was deemed savage, and one that would quickly succumb to European civilization and dominance.

The influence of social Darwinian evolutionary theory was most dominant during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century when such ethnographic observers as Howitt, Baldwin Spencer, Gillen, and Pastor

Strehlow were doing significant research (cf. Cowlshaw 1986:3; J. Harris 1998:90-92). Charlesworth (1998: xv) points out that almost all ethnographic studies up to the second half of the twentieth century had “a generally evolutionist and positivistic view of religion.” He adds, “Aboriginal religions in particular were viewed as the most ‘elementary’ or ‘primitive’ form of religious experience” (1998: xv). J. Harris (1998:90) puts it nicely, “Through social Darwinism, notions of European superiority were given scientific respectability.”

The seeds of systemic racism, ethnocentrism, abuse, and unimaginable acts of violence were planted in Australia. These past abuses and patterns of thinking are still shaping our contemporary response to the Aborigines cry for reconciliation. For instance, in 1996 Australia’s Deputy Prime Minister, the Honorable Mr. Tim Fischer, referred to the Aborigines’ culture as being so “backward” that it was not even able to invent the wheel during their long time of existence here. In May 1997, Senator Ross Lightfoot told the Australian Senate that he stood by his oft-repeated view that “in their native state, Aborigines are at the bottom colour of the civilisation spectrum.”<sup>2</sup> And on 9 March 1999, Mr. John Elliott, the former president of the Australian Liberal Party stated in a set speech, “We’ve got to keep [the Prime Minister] . . . to stay worrying about economic growth and not worry about saying sorry to a forgotten race.”<sup>3</sup> As we can see, for people like the Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Lightfoot, and the former Liberal Party President ethnocentrism and prejudice—like some foul odors—are not easily removed.

### *The Founding Paradigm*

When the British came in the First Fleet to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay (present day South Sydney) in 1788, the Aborigines' fenceless land excited them.<sup>4</sup> For the British worldview understood fencelessness to mean unclaimed land. This resulted in Australia being claimed under the legal fiction, *terra nullius* ("no-one's land," cf. Reynolds 1987). On the other hand, the Aborigines had no need to put up fences, since they knew who belonged to each part of the country—it made no sense to an Aborigine to claim land that did not belong to them. Rivers, trees, rocks and hills served as their "fences."

Reynolds (1987:55-80) draws out in compelling fashion that the White settlers and penal administration soon began to recognize—albeit not without a significant amount of surprise—that the Aborigines had a sense of property ownership towards land. Reynolds (1987:58) observes, "Within months of arrival the officers of the First Fleet were able to describe the various local group locations and their boundaries." As early as 1791 it was acknowledged that the Aborigines "have also their real estates" (cited in Reynolds 1987:59, cf. Reynolds 1999:197ff). Governor King in 1807 considered the Aborigines to be "the real proprietors of the soil" (cited in Reynolds 1987:60). As we will see, the notion that Aborigines owned land could not be easily reconciled in the minds of the Whites with their belief that Aborigines were "primitive"—barely human (cf. Yarwood and Knowling 1982; Mulvaney 1989; Roberts 1981).

It is important to recognize that the First Fleet was a military regime led by a military governor. It was the worst possible structure for entering into peaceful cooperation or coexistence with the indigenous populations. They were also necessarily survival oriented—their need to find resources within the new country was urgent (cf. Hughes 1986:7). Unfortunately British agriculture was diametrically opposed to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Aborigines.

Views built on centuries of British racism and ethnocentrism combined with acute worldview differences were difficult to change. The eruption of social Darwinism in the 1870s and 1880s was used to promote the belief that Aborigines were destined to die out. John Harris (1990, 1994), in his seminal work *One Blood* surveys the attitudes of many towards Aborigines right up to the twentieth century. Aborigines were regarded as “sub-human, degraded or deformed” (Harris 1994:25). Examples of these thoughts include one man in 1830 noting that for his fellow settlers Aborigines were “nearest of all to the monkey or orang-outang, and therefore incapable of enjoying the same state of intellectual existence as themselves.” An 1834 entry placed Aborigines “at the very zero of civilisation, constituting . . . the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe” (cited in Harris 1994:26).

The thoughts of Captain James Cook in the 1770s, that Aborigines were more content and happy in themselves than the British, was quietly forgotten (cf. Harris 1994:24-25; Yarwood and Knowling 1982:24-32).<sup>5</sup> The decimation of the Aboriginal population in the southeast corner of the

mainland and the attempt at total extermination in Tasmania (cf. Reynolds 1995) was not viewed as evidence of British brutality, but rather as evidence of the inevitable passing away of something that belonged to another time (cf. Yarwood and Knowling 1982:70-97; Mulvaney 1989:29-37; Roberts 1981:16-18, 29-30).<sup>6</sup> The *Northern Territory Times* in 1884 exclaimed: “Backward the natives must go before the tide of civilisation” (cited in Harris 1994:28).

Harris (1994:28) noted that the anti-Aboriginal writing seemed to coincide with publicity about “brutal or unprovoked massacres of Aborigines.” He observed “the storms rose to a crescendo whenever any white person was likely to be tried for the killings of blacks” (1994:28).

*Addressing the legal fiction.* In the past decade Australia has had to substantially change the way it has viewed its history. Up until recently Australian history was considered to commence with Botany Bay in 1788, and as indicated earlier, even this historical starting point was downplayed. Sixty thousand years of existence were commonly reduced to a few short paragraphs—if included at all—in most Australian history books written in the first half of this century (cf. Reynolds 1984). The Australian High Court Decision of *Mabo* on 3 June 1992 cut through the two hundred years of Australian silence on its Aboriginal history. (It is worth noting here that the *Mabo* judgement was very clearly influenced by the historical work of Henry Reynolds and colleagues.) The *Mabo* decision overturned the 204 years of legal fiction, *terra nullius*, when it spelled out that Australia’s indigenous people should have been considered the legal owners of



Australia when the British claimed possession in 1788 (cf. Reynolds 1987:185ff). The High Court acknowledged that once the British claimed sovereignty over Australia, the indigenous people should have been protected by British common law (cf. Stephenson and Ratnapala 1993). Reynolds (1987:1) opened his important book *The Law of the Land*, with the telling observation, “In 1937 R. T. Latham, a prominent legal scholar, remarked that when the first settlers reached Australia, ‘their invisible and inescapable cargo of English law fell from their shoulders and attached itself to the soil on which they stood.’”

The 23 December 1996 High Court decision on the Wik people’s claim for rights over existing pastoral leases worked to shed further light on the implications of the Mabo decision in the community. The Wik decision acknowledged that where indigenous-Australians are able to prove a line of continuous relationship with land, they are entitled to some form of co-existence with existing pastoralists or other property owners. There has been an outcry from many pastoralists and others that the decision has caused too much uncertainty in regards to their title of ownership. Indigenous-Australians, at the time of the decision, rejoiced that the highest court in the land acknowledged some of their people’s continuous contact with the land. It should be noted that the great majority of indigenous-Australians gained nothing by the Wik decision, as most through the forces of history are not able to prove a continuing link with the land as they were dispossessed from it generations ago (for a good example of this see *Moola Bulla* story, Chapter 3).

*Addressing the “changeless” fiction.* The legal fiction of *terra nullius*, and the historical amnesia that resulted from this, swam in the same direction as the fiction that Aborigines were a changeless people, or a people that belonged way back into the past. The belief that the Aborigines were changeless people deeply penetrated every aspect of Australian society. The eminent Australian philosopher of religions, Max Charlesworth (1998: xvii-xviii), notes that scholars in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century (particularly in the field of ethnography) had the unquestioned assumption that Aboriginal religions “were essentially conservative and unchanging and ‘timeless’” (1998: xviii).

Gillian Cowlshaw is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the Australia National University, Canberra. In her important article (1986), “Aborigines and Anthropologists” she admonishes her fellow Australian anthropologists and the history of anthropology in Australia for its preoccupation in looking for the “unchanged” and so-called “traditional” Aboriginal tribes. She argues (1986:3) that, for too long, Australian anthropologists have struggled to free themselves from the earlier concept of “race” which was the founding influence of evolutionary “science.” In her words, “there has been little reassessment of the social anthropologist’s heritage from evolutionary theory, and unexamined assumptions are still part of the framework of social anthropology” (1986:4).

Tony Swain (1993) in his provocative book *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being*, provides a sharp critique on Australian anthropology. His main critique centers on his belief that

anthropologists down the years have often failed to recognize Aborigines as being contemporary, thereby perpetuating the myth of Aborigines being “timeless” (cf. Cowlishaw 1986:5).

Swain (1993:118) argues that early prominent anthropologists in Australia such as Alfred Howitt (1904) fell into this trap (cf. Swain and Trompf 1995:61). Anthropologists spent considerable effort recording the “timeless beliefs” of the Aborigines (cf. Swain 1993:118). They traveled farther and farther to find these so-called “unchanged tribes.” Swain (1993:219) takes aim at more recent anthropologists like Ronald and Catherine Berndt (who wrote from the 1940s through to the 1980s), particularly R. M. Berndt, who Swain states refused to acknowledge the dynamic worldview change that was occurring among tribes he was studying in the Kimberley, northwest Australia (cf. Cowlishaw 1986:6). In his concluding comments Swain (1993:278) postures, “Aboriginalists, like the culture which shaped such scholars, need their primitives to be timeless”<sup>7</sup> (cf. Cowlishaw 1986:4).

Bernard McGrane (1989) and Johannes Fabian (1982) provide significant insights into the way that many exponents of anthropology have been guilty of placing indigenous people as outside the time of anthropology and therefore contemporary society. A result of this is that indigenous people are seen as objects rather than being a contemporary subject.<sup>8</sup> Cowlishaw (1986:9) argues along similar lines and cuttingly concludes, “The bulk of social anthropology in Australia until recently may be more accurately described as social archaeology.”

Another danger that comes from placing the “Other” outside the present time-frame is the anthropologist’s claim for “neutrality.” This has been disastrous for Australia’s indigenous people. It has resulted in some anthropologists, like the Berndts, withholding the results of their research that may have served as a critique on the way forces in society were oppressing indigenous people (cf. Swain 1993:218-219; Cowlshaw 1986:4). Having “produced a disturbingly revealing report of pastoral conditions” in the northeast Kimberley in the mid-1940s, the Berndts’ waited until 1987 to publish their findings (Swain 1993:219). Referring to this, the respected anthropologist, Deborah Rose (1988:98), claimed that the Berndts’ silence was a “matter at that time . . . of life and death with action or inaction making the difference.”

I believe there may be a close connection between the call for so-called “neutrality” and the sense of being “bystander.” Most anthropologists, up to very recent times, claimed the role of neutral observers and presented their findings through such a lens (cf. Cowlshaw 1986:8-9). Could it be that the focus of anthropological study over the years and the manner in which these studies have been presented has partly contributed to Anglo-Australians feeling disconnected—that is, a bystander—to the struggle and history of indigenous-Australians?

*Missionaries: “Civilizing in Order to Evangelize”*

Missionaries were no less ethnocentric. They considered Aboriginal culture to be a stumbling block for the acceptance of the gospel. Harris

(1994) provides a survey of views of nineteenth century missionaries. The Wesleyan, Samuel Leigh, deemed Aborigines to be “barbarians,” they were “the lowest in the scale of intellect.” For the Lutheran missionary William Schmidt, they were “the lowest in the scale of the human race” (Harris 1994:30). Harris (1994:30) notes: “John Harper of the Wesleyan Missionary Society was more specific. The Aborigines were ‘degraded as to *divine* things, almost on a level with the brute.’”

*The interchangeability of “civilizing” and “evangelizing.”* The ethnocentrism of missionaries is most apparent in the manner in which “civilize” and “evangelize” were seen as interchangeable. As Harris (1994:77) comments, “there were no missionaries in this early period and a very few in later periods who did not believe that there was a connection [between the gospel and civilization] and that the connection was very important.” In 1842 Lord Stanley describes the early missions work as “the civilisation and protection of [the Aborigines]” (cited in Harris 1994:77). Harris (1994:77) observes that the Lutheran missionary, William Schmidt, writing in 1846 describes the missionary failures “as failures to civilise.” In 1848, the Benedictine Rule at New Norcia (Western Australia) was approved as “the only practical method to be followed in civilising and Christianising the aborigines” (cited in H. Carey 1996:67). Fr. Donald MacKillop was among the pioneering group of Jesuits who established the mission at Daly River in 1886. In his annual report for 1890 on the Mission<sup>9</sup> he writes, “we recognize that we must first civilize the blacks before we can christianize them” (cited in O’Kelly 1967:41 fn 128). As

Carey (1996:67) observes, “The Catholics, no less than the Protestants, remained convinced that the two processes of ‘Christianising’ and ‘civilising’ must proceed hand in hand.”

*The removal of Aboriginal children from their families.* Missionaries felt that in order for Aborigines to become Christians they had to be removed from their “traditional” (read: unchanging) culture. In many ways this attitude has affected government and church policies right up to the 1970s. The *Bringing Them Home* report in 1997 by Australia’s Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission details the actions of governments and churches from the early 1900s through to the 1970s in removing Aboriginal children of mixed parentage from the Aboriginal parent and community. The children were taken to orphanages or raised in White families. The notion of “civilizing” them out of their own culture into a White Australian culture is obvious (see Chapters 4 and 5).

### *A History of Colonial Violence*

The British invasion was disastrous for the Aborigines. For the colony it meant the opening up of new productive land; a chance for many businessmen to amass fortunes, and for the convicts that survived horrendous punishment and treatment, a chance to start a new life. The plight of the Aborigines largely went by unnoticed—their demise was not seen as a concern for alarm. They were expected to die quietly and quickly. We see this in the view of George Thornton, the Mayor of Sydney who

became the first Protector of Aborigines in New South Wales in 1881. He opines:

[I]t would be wise and beneficial that reserves of suitable land in various parts of the colony should be set apart for the use of the Aborigines, for purposes of forming homes [and] cultivation . . . this would prove a powerful means of domesticating, civilising and making them comfortable. . . . It is my firm belief that Aborigines cannot be made properly susceptible of or duly appreciate religious instruction. . . . I cannot conceal my knowledge of the painful fact that the black Aborigines are fast disappearing, destined to become extinct. (Cited in Harris 1994:548)

Aborigines continued to be massacred until the mid 1920s, “while the survivors of earlier violence were . . . dying rapidly of introduced diseases” (Harris 1994:548). As Harris (1994:548) notes: “The question to ask did not seem to be whether Aboriginal people were a dying race or not, but what should be the response to this situation. The convenient and widespread assumption was that their death was inevitable.”

Aborigines were largely wiped out by the unprecedented and unimaginable violence of colonization—not because of a so-called “inability to change” (cf. Reynolds 1987, 1989). One of the reasons the colonizers were so successful was the fact that Aboriginal political life did not have a structure for any type of pan-Aboriginal resistance (cf. Stanner 1969:42-43; McConnochie, Hollinsworth, Pettman 1988:59). Each tribe considered itself to be a more-or-less distinct entity, with definite land boundaries (cf. Reynolds 1987:67ff). This, combined with British superior warfare technology and the introduction of Western diseases, was the main

reason for the successful assault and defeat of Aborigines (McConnochie, Hollinsworth, Pettman 1988:59).

*Aboriginal resistance.* The history of colonization needs to acknowledge the efforts of Aboriginal guerrilla fighters who inflicted remarkable casualties on the invaders (cf. Reynolds 1984:13-18; 1999:146ff). Yarwood and Knowling (1982:55) point out that “One of the long surviving myths about the Australian frontier is that the Aborigines offered but desolatory and ineffective resistance to the white invader.” The story of Aboriginal resistance is more accurately of a dynamic people, fighting under impossible odds to defend themselves and their country (cf. Roberts 1981:13-25; Mulvaney 1989:168-175; Grassby and Hill 1988; Reynolds 1999).

It is estimated that, from the beginnings of settlement through to the early years of the twentieth century, large numbers of casualties were taken on both sides; upwards of 3,000 on the British side, and well over 20,000 Aborigines (Reynolds 1987:1; 1999). Yarwood and Knowling (1982:55) drawing from research in Queensland and New South Wales conclude, “the frontier was violent and dangerous to both races.” One such example was the battle for possession of the Hawkesbury, just north of Sydney. This battle lasted twelve years, beginning from the moment the White men arrived in 1794. Aborigines inflicted huge casualties on the Whites (cf. Yarwood and Knowling 1982:54-60; Roberts 1981:14-15). The story of Aboriginal resistance has long been muzzled and needs to be told.<sup>10</sup>



*Indigenous cultural exchange.* The dominant story of British invasion and Aboriginal defeat in the south needs to be juxtaposed to the cultural exchange that seemed to be occurring with the Melanesian and Macassan visitors in the northern regions of Australia (cf. Swain 1993; Swain and Trompf 1995). Swain (1993, Swain and Trompf 1995) points to the fact that before the British arrived, Aborigines in northern Australia, over many centuries, were involved in vital relationships with their Melanesian and Macassan visitors. He puts the case that Aborigines in each location were able to respond creatively to those who came to their shores. He suggests that in Cape York, they responded to Melanesian influence through the creation of Hero myths (1993:69-113); and in Arnhem Land, the All-Mother cult (not “Mother-Earth”) emerged from their contact with Indonesian Macassans (1993:159-211). Aborigines in those regions did not appropriate this foreign mythology wholesale; a considerable degree of reinvention occurred. It is sobering to consider that while Aborigines in Arnhem Land were peaceably exchanging ideas and resources with their Macassan visitors, the British were slaughtering and raping Aborigines in the south-east, and attempting to exterminate the Tasmanians.

*Aborigines: People of Place over Time*

There is a foundational clash in worldview between indigenous and Anglo-Australians primarily around the notions of *place* and *time* (cf. Swain 1993, Swain and Trompf 1995). Anglo-Australians are time-oriented; they closely monitor their use of time, they have it down to nanoseconds! The

phrase, “time is money” nicely summarizes this. The worldview of indigenous-Australians, on the other hand, is centered on place. Knowing one’s place provides significant meaning in their lives. Their emphasis on place appears to effectively suppress a notion of time. Stanner (1987) may have prefigured this understanding when he stated that Aborigines had in some sense, been able to “‘defeat’ history.”<sup>11</sup>

It is vital for the reconciliation processes in Australia, that indigenous and Anglo-Australians understand these fundamental worldview differences. Anglo-Australians, like my friend David, need to understand and appreciate the spiritual underpinning of the indigenous view of land, and how this is foundational to the personal and social identity of indigenous-Australians (cf. Habel 1999:40). In order to do this we need to understand what Aborigines mean by *The Dreaming*. To this we now turn.

### *The “Dreaming Place” not “Dreaming Time”*

Much ink has been used trying to explain the Aboriginal philosophical system known by the English phrase, *The Dreaming*. Most anthropological discussion has centered on trying to explain *The Dreaming* in terms of time. It used to be referred to—and still is in many instances—as “*The Dreamtime*.” As Swain (1993:14ff) points out emphatically, such focus on “time” within Aboriginal worldview actually reflects more the worldview of Western anthropologists than the worldview of Aborigines.

The preoccupation with time seems clearly at odds with the Aborigines focus on place. In all my discussions with Aborigines in northern Australia, indeed throughout Australia, the great bulk of it has centered on them explaining and teaching me about their relationship with the land. (This includes the animals and plants that are on their land, which they refer to as *Dreamings*.) Putting it in very simple terms, the Aboriginal philosophical system of *The Dreaming* is primarily concerned with the ancestral and present relationships with place—their place in the land. The entire social, political, spiritual, and economic structures for Aboriginal life are tied into this land-locked belief system (cf. Swain 1993:14-21).<sup>12</sup> Swain (1993:25) suggests one principle is permeating Aboriginal philosophy. In a highly original turn of phrase, he refers to this as “*geosophy*,” a system of belief “where all knowledge and wisdom derives . . . from place.”

The Aborigines could perhaps summarize their belief with the phrase, “land is life.” Their catch-cry, “Land Rights” embodies this. The historical and contemporary culture clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians reflects these foundational worldview differences based around place and time. An anthropological perspective can help explain these worldview differences. To this we now turn, exploring the complex philosophical system of *The Dreaming*.<sup>13</sup>

*Cosmology.* Swain (Swain and Trompf 1995:23-24) identifies four components within Aboriginal cosmologies as found in their myths. First, “something exists,” that is, the ancestors exist. Second, “something becomes active.” The ancestral potentials move and act and then become

immobile again. Third, through the activity “certain aspects of life are given order and shape.” Fourth, the “Ancestors take on an enduring form as a terrestrial or celestial place.” There is pluralism within Aboriginal cosmologies. There are “a multitude of events in which countless Ancestors travel and transform themselves into sites” (Swain and Trompf 1995:24). An important factor is that the movement of the ancestors “provides for a plan of cosmological relatedness.” The Australian continent is criss-crossed by a network of pathways (nicely captured in Bruce Chatwin’s, *The Songlines*). Swain (Swain and Trompf 1995:24-25) notes:

that while the Ancestors move, they do not move *from* one place *to* another place. Rather, their essence remains simultaneously throughout the entire pathway, so that at a basic level Aborigines conceive of pre-established lines of cosmological relatedness permeating their world.

*Aboriginal worldview—abiding events.* It was thought that the only alternative to Western linear understanding of time is a cyclical one. “Bunkum” says Swain. Rather than a cyclical or linear understanding of time, Swain suggests that “Aborigines have a *rhythmic* understanding of events” (Swain and Trompf 1995:20). In no degree is cyclical time evident in Aboriginal philosophy, myth and ritual. The closest that Aborigines come to a sense of time or history is an understanding that there are *Abiding Events*. Swain (1993:282) believes that these Abiding Events are “defined by their embeddedness in places.” For example, the Aranda tribe “could name at least thirty qualitative changes that occurred over what we would call a period of twenty-four hours”—all of which were connected with place

(Swain and Trompf 1995:20). Aboriginal worldview “is not based on time and history but, at an absolute level, on sites and places” (Swain and Trompf 1995:21).

*Cosmological competitiveness: land over the woman's body.* In a real sense, everything came under the all-conclusive evidence and truth of the land. Aborigines' very being came from the land. What do they make of women bringing new life into the world? The problem is resolved by remembering that life most potently comes from land. Aborigines will say, “We are born from the country” (Swain and Trompf 1995:29). Women are understood as carrying “a life-potentiality from a site” (1995:29). This is exemplified by how the Aborigine views human conception. Many anthropologists felt that Aborigines did not understand the connection between the sexual act and procreation (cf. C. P. Mountford 1981). This is nonsense. Aborigines knew how children came about (cf. T. G. H. Strehlow 1978:21). What Aborigines emphasized however, was the spiritual connectedness of the child to the country (cf. Yunupingu 1996:5-7). Thus, the woman's body, through being connected with time through the natural bodily cycles of menstruation and pregnancy was relegated as secondary to place. Life for Aborigines “is annexation of place” (Swain 1993:39). Some tribes demonstrate this by placing the newly born baby in a small depression in the ground. This symbolizes its rebirth from the country (Swain and Trompf 1995:34). A Murrinhpatha elder told me that soon after birth the baby was painted with charcoal, then washed clean. He was unable to

explain exactly what this meant. Perhaps it had been a ritual symbolizing “birth” from the land.

The same cosmological competitiveness between the woman life-creating potentiality and land is evident among the male initiation rites. In a dramatic sense the young men are reborn. This is not a male and female competitiveness issue. Swain (Swain and Trompf 1995:38) succinctly explains:

[T]he making of young men seems to strip boys of their self-developed status since their actual birth, and to give them a new birth which is regulated and symbolically realized in secret by men. While men control the process, however, it should not therefore be interpreted merely as a case of men taking over women’s power and women’s birth-giving abilities. What is being asserted is *not* that youths are born to men but rather they are born from Ancestral powers residing in land. Once again, it is a matter of removing authority from the temporal body and locating it instead in Abiding places.

Thus for Aborigines, initiation is not meant to be a focus on death and rebirth. It is more properly understood as a focus on the fullness of life—namely that life emanates from the land, not from the body.

*Place as foundation for kinship: “dreamings” as place.* Aboriginal kinship reflects the above pattern of place over and against body. While people are related through blood, their linkage to place is emphasized more. The commonly heard phrase, “he is my countryman” captures this. The phrase “he is my countryman” substitutes for what Anglo-Australians would say, “we are related.” The emphasis is obvious, yes, the person may be related by blood to that other person, but the expression “countrymen”

captures the intimate relationship each has with the land they both come from. In a real sense, they are related both through blood *and* through land. Each tribe's land has significant places or sites. These are known as sacred sites. The sites are sacred as back in *The Dreaming* special things occurred on those sites. For example, a kangaroo entity may have procreated on that site. That site from time immemorial is then looked after as a special site. Those from the tribe who are born near that site or where the mother felt the first pangs of pregnancy, grow to be responsible for looking after that site. The site is referred to as a *dreaming site*. Thus people from within a tribe can literally share *dreaming sites*. It can also go much further than the individual tribe. A visiting Aborigine from another community may be linked, not necessarily through blood ties (though they may be), but through sharing a common *dreaming*, like crow or kangaroo.

Aborigines prefer to use the word "*dreaming*" rather than "totem" to explain their connection with particular animals, plants, and other natural phenomenon. *Totemism* is a Western word to explain the complex arrangement of *dreamings* that is distributed among the tribes. Humans are responsible for ensuring the stability of this arrangement. They are expected to visit the *dreaming sites*, ensure that the site is being protected and respected. There may be particular dances that groups need to do with some regularity. Why? Because their very identity, or sense of being depends on maintaining this cosmic stability.

*British Invasion: Destruction of Place*

As we have seen, the violence of the contact with the British was altogether different from other northern contact. Ninety-six per cent of the southeastern Aboriginal population was wiped out within a few decades (cf. Swain 1993:115). This was traumatic. Westerners were seen as amoral people who could not be reached. There could be no relationship with that kind of being—the only relationship being that of one to a conqueror (conquistador). This effected significant shifts in cosmological ontological understanding.

*Indigenous religious responses to the trauma of invasion.* If we agree that Aboriginal cosmology is profoundly tied up with place we can begin to grasp how the British invasion confronted Aborigines in the southeast with a major crisis of identity. Swain (Swain and Trompf 1995:60) believes that the trauma of invasion resulted in the birth of the All-Father cult. In this cult the Ancestral spirits of the land were rapidly transmuted into an eternal High God above (Christian influence?). Place becomes secondary to time as a sense of eschatology emerges. Swain's (Swain and Trompf 1995:64) reflection on this is at least worth noting:

[T]he logic of the cult [All-Father, High God] reflects the effects of invasion and the life of people who have been wrenched from their spirit-places. In such contexts, religious authority would of necessity be removed from their sites, while the emphasis on the future was the promise or threat of a cosmos which had lost its enduring balance.

*Indigenous negotiation of change.* Aborigines have always been subjects of change. From the gentler versions of change with the



Melanesians and Indonesians to the traumatic version of the British, their worldview and social structure underwent tremendous change.

Unfortunately, this was often not recognized. As we have noted earlier, many anthropologists unwittingly contributed to the belief that Aborigines were incapable of change. Cowlshaw (1986:9) observes:

[T]he only integrity recognised in an Aboriginal society, until recently at least, was the integrity of tradition. A whole body of literature in anthropology, valuable as it is in recording past traditions, did not see itself *simply* recording past traditions. Rather it saw itself defining what Aborigines were, and are. This literature is dominated by the false notion that there *are* traditional Aboriginal societies.

Nearly all of the early anthropologists came after the onslaught of invasion (Swain 1993:280). Swain quotes Maddock's sobering words: "one has only to add L. R. Hiatt's observation that anthropologists in Australia have moved behind the advancing frontier to A. W. Howitt's observation that the frontier in Australia has been marked with a line of blood." In summary, anthropologists were studying a people radically hemorrhaging, a worldview in disarray.

We now turn to a more focused historical perspective of clash between Aborigines and the White Australian community. This section pays particular attention to the Northern Territory and even more specifically to the community that makes up the focus of this study, Wadeye, in the Daly River Reserve.

*The “Top End” of the Northern Territory in the late 1800s*

Harris gives us a picture of how Europeans viewed life in the Northern Territory. He (1994:454) notes:

Strange, distant, harsh, adventurous, wild, untamed, romantic, mysterious . . . these are the words a century of writers have chosen to describe tropical Australia. . . . Tropical Australia was a distant, unfamiliar, even alien environment, a place where crocodiles “lurked,” mangrove swamps “festered,” wild blacks danced their “frenzied” corroborees, and a tough breed of White frontiersmen hunted buffalo, sought pearls or drove huge herds of cattle, battling the unpredictable elements of a “primitive” land.

The first permanent township in the Northern Territory was established in Darwin in 1870. It was a tiny colonial outpost with a population of less than 200 Europeans. With the discovery of gold it became a rough frontier town with a highly mobile population. By 1888 the population had increased to 6,000 Chinese and 1,500 Europeans (cf. Harris 1994:458-459). The arrival of these newcomers brought immediate and detrimental consequences for Aborigines across the Territory. Alcohol and opium abuse as well as tension over land and treatment of Aboriginal women became widespread problems. The Aborigines of Wadeye, despite their considerable isolation, were not removed from the impact of these new visitors.

*The (Late) Arrival of the Missions: Respite from the Carnage*

Over a century of carnage passed before the institutional churches as distinguished from individuals awakened to the tragedy before them. Despite their tardiness, the Christian missions were a place of refuge for

those Aborigines still surviving. In Stanner's (1973:6) words, "The missions were the only centres where Aborigines could expect solicitude . . . [they] were the only proof the Aborigines had that European society was not indifferent, selfish and ugly through and through."

Stanner (1979:139) refers to the Jesuits at Daly River in the 1880s, as not sharing the "prevailing estimate that the Aborigines were 'in a kind of transition stage between beasts and men,' and in particular, were 'deficient in the most elementary spiritual notions.'" R. M. Berndt visited Daly River in 1952. When he asked the people of their memory of the Jesuit fathers he was told, "They didn't hit or shoot us." This is an obvious comparison with other experiences of Europeans (Harris 1994:476. Cf. Berndt 1952).

### *Contact in the Daly Region*

Wadeye is located in an area now known as the Daly River Reserve (see maps in Appendix A). Contact in the Daly River Reserve commenced soon after the establishment of Darwin. In 1879 exploring European and Chinese farmers arrived at Daly River. Mining prospectors who arrived in 1882 quickly followed them (Stanner 1938:3,25). This brought immediate disaster. The murder of four White men at the copper mines close to Daly in 1883 brought a bloody reprisal (Stanner 1938:3-4): the miners slaughtered large numbers of one tribe and smaller numbers of another (cf. O'Kelly 1967:24-25).

In 1886 a road to the Daly was opened and under regular traffic. The construction of the rail line together with the exploring farmers brought

many unsettling forces to the Daly. Stanner (1938:10-11) notes that these included “new foods, new and valuable manufactured articles, and new ways of life, as well as grog, opium and venereal and other diseases.” This had detrimental effects on the tribes of the regions. Large numbers of Aborigines (mostly men) initially went to the Daly to see the strangers and the new things (like grog, opium, and tobacco) these explorers had brought with them. Stanner (1938:16) notes that addiction to substances like tobacco became a major factor in the tribes coming to and remaining at the Daly.

*Arrival of Jesuit missionaries.* In 1886, Jesuit missionaries arrived at the Daly.<sup>14</sup> Their time was troubled by sickness, lack of finance, and floods. They reluctantly left in 1899 after much internal ruminations that were occurring within their order over the lack of success of the mission compared to other projects (cf. O’Kelly 1967). The image of the Jesuit missionaries being forced by their religious superiors to leave the Aboriginal mission captures poignantly the attitude of the church to Aboriginal evangelization. It was seen as too difficult, and considered a waste of the limited resources for a people who were believed to be dying out. With the Jesuits’ departure, it would be over fifty years before Catholic missionaries returned to the community.

*Arrival of missionaries to Wadeye.* The Wadeye people had developed a reputation for being fierce and unfriendly. Even among the Aborigines of the Daly Area they had—and still have—a reputation for being rough and wild. As Wilson (1982:36) recounts:

They were responsible for a number of murders early in the century (not without some provocation), and early in the 30s they had murdered the crew of a Japanese lugger and also a couple of prospectors . . . . To “civilize” them and prevent their dying out the Government asked us [the MSC] to found a mission among them. Moreover the Holy See asked Fr. Gsell [MSC Bishop of Darwin] to see what he could do for the Aborigines on the mainland. Fr. Gsell decided to explore the possibilities of the Wadeye area.<sup>15</sup>

Under the remarkable leadership of Fr. Richard Docherty, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were to establish a permanent mission in Wadeye, the land of the Murrinhpatha tribe, in 1935. Accompanying them was the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner. The government hoped that the mission would stem the exodus of Aborigines from the Wadeye region to places along the Daly River, Darwin, and Wyndham. As stated earlier, while direct contact did not occur at Wadeye until 1935, the tribes of the area were being shaken since the 1880s by these same European settlements (cf. Stanner 1973:12).

Stanner (1954:6) believes the exodus of the Murrinhpatha heightened after World War I. When the mission arrived he considered the Murrinhpatha “a dying tribe” (1954:2). Fr. Docherty (c1935:26) recalls, “Dr. Stanner wasn’t impressed with . . . [the] outlook regarding the Aborigines at P. K. [Port Keats/Wadeye] . . . as though they could scarcely recover and survive. They were the remnants of seven tribal groups. There were no babies and very few children.” It was highly likely that the Murrinhpatha would have continued to disperse. Stanner, who was by no

means “pro-mission,” was “sure that it was the Mission which averted that fate” (1973:12).

The birth of the church in Wadeye is one of culture clash, changing political fortunes, and mystery. To this story we now turn.

*Turmoil, Vulnerability, and Mystery: The Ingredients of Mission at Wadeye*

The missionary religious order that came to Wadeye in 1935 was the French founded Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC). This society was born during the political and religious instability of France in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, this period was also a time of unprecedented turmoil and change among Aboriginal tribes like the Murrinhpatha of Wadeye. Encroaching colonization was shaking the foundations of Aboriginal society. The MSC and the Aborigines around Wadeye were at different stages of decline and growth. The Murrinhpatha were reeling from the changes that colonization and exploring European and Chinese farmers were bringing to their region; the MSC were in the beginnings of growth, stumbling, uncertain of their future, but determined to risk for their sense of call to mission.

The Australian MSC that came to Wadeye were products of an Australian society that was entrenched in colonialism and imperialism. Cultural and linguistic appreciation of the Australian Aborigine was rare during this time.

Christian missions concentrated on attending to the physical survival of the people. This was a much needed radical counter-cultural presence in

an overwhelming brutal and oppressive historical clash. The spiritual dimension in the lives of the people was largely unrecognized: this says more about the extent of the missionaries' ethnocentrism than the cultural and spiritual genius of the Aborigines. It also reflects the prevailing notion of the time, "civilize" in order to evangelize.

The mystery of the birth of the church at Wadeye revolves around the unique precontact experiences of the Murrinhpatha and the particular spirituality of the MSC. The MSC had a particular emphasis on Marian piety. The Murrinhpatha claim that one of their elders, *Mulinthin*, prior to the arrival of the missionaries had a vision of Mary. In retrospect we could think that both groups were mysteriously intended to meet each other. The Murrinhpatha also claimed they knew about the creator God before the missionaries arrived—they named the Creator God, *Nugemanh*.<sup>16</sup>

### *Precontact Christian Seeds of the Gospel at Wadeye*

Earlier we described in some detail the foundational significance of land for Aborigines. This however, does not provide a complete picture of the spiritual beliefs of the Murrinhpatha at the time of missionary contact. Both *Mulinthin's* vision and their belief in the supreme spirit being, *Nugemanh*, were ignored or discounted by the MSC. It was felt that indigenous-Australians had nothing to offer other Australians—other than their land, women, and children. It was inconceivable to the Anglo-Australian missionaries that Aborigines could help them understand the

gospel. Aborigines on the other hand were felt to have everything to gain from modern Western culture and Christianity.

I believe that the precontact beliefs of the Murrinhpatha were foundational to the Murrinhpatha's acceptance of the Christian gospel. We will hear first about these precontact beliefs before learning about the history and development of the MSC order prior to coming to Wadeye.

*Mulinthin's vision.* The *Mulinthin* vision has had a profound impact on the people who now live in and around Wadeye. The following is a brief description of it (cf. Stockton 1985:3-5).

*Mulinthin* was very sick. He was lying down alone at *Kudantiga*<sup>17</sup> while family members were out hunting and gathering foods. A brown hawk [maybe his dreaming] descended and cried out. At that point *Mulinthin* went into a trance. He then had a vision and everything went misty. The hawk and *Mulinthin* ascended [maybe an "out of body" experience]. He came to a beautiful place where he saw a woman. The woman had a dark complexion but did not have Aboriginal features. She was treading on a snake. The woman was called "mother" and the "boss lady." He was given new songs, which were called "*Malgarrin*." With the new songs he returned to where he lay. At that point the trance was over. It is claimed that *Mulinthin's* face and hair were shining, "he was radiant all over." As people returned from hunting they could not recognise him at first. He called the people together and sung them the new songs.

*Mulinthin's personal history.* Previous to this vision experience *Mulinthin* was a "kidney-fat man," that is, a sorcerer. As Demkadath explained to me, "*Mulinthin* used to murder many people who came along. You wouldn't go across him. Everybody was dodging him all the time. If they see him they would go off on another track. They were very nervous of old *Mulinthin*."<sup>18</sup> The kidney-fat operation was the most feared and



common in the Daly River Area. After making the person go unconscious, the kidney-fat man would operate on the person so as to remove their kidney-fat. The person would die a few days later. The fat was believed to have great power and magical qualities. It could be used for many purposes ranging from healing sickness, increasing numbers of game, and attracting sexual partners.

After the vision experience, *Mulinthin* completely changed his life. He never murdered again and is remembered as a very caring person. Ngiparl (the only Murrinhpatha deacon) comments, “When he told the story and the people all came back to him—because they knew he was a bad man. But when they heard him tell his story—they didn’t try to run away. He changed—I don’t know what happened to him! They came back to him.”<sup>19</sup> *Mulinthin* encouraged members of his tribe to cease murdering and adopt his new way of living and he advised them, “something good will happen.” *Mulinthin*’s story went throughout his Murrinhpatha tribe. They kept this story from the other tribes. Wurrngit observes that when the Murrinhpatha “heard this they probably knew something was going to happen.”<sup>20</sup>

Referring to the impact of *Mulinthin*’s vision on the tribe Wurrngit notes:

Old Murrinhpatha people had big change from being violent to other people—stealing wives and all that—when old *Mulinthin* had that vision. It didn’t change over night. It did change in the long run gradually. From that generation they are really caring people.<sup>21</sup>

The vision reached its climax when Fr. Docherty arrived in 1935, some time after the vision. He presented a print or statue of Mary to a gathering of Aborigines. *Mulinthin* was among the crowd and exclaimed

that this was the woman of his vision. *Mulinthin*'s proclamation led to the Murrinhpatha believing the Jesus and Mary story of the Catholic missionaries. Thangalith refers to this when he states "if *Mulinthin* wasn't there or had a dream we could have forgot Jesus."<sup>22</sup> Members of the other tribes gradually learnt of the story and this contributed to their adoption of the new faith.

*The uniqueness and authenticity of Mulinthin's vision.* Much can be written on the uniqueness and authenticity of *Mulinthin's* vision (cf. Goldman 1994). Perhaps the greatest indicators for the vision's authenticity are the radical change in behavior of *Mulinthin* himself; this is indicated through the apparent preparedness of others to believe the new Christian message because of *Mulinthin's* conviction. It is interesting to note here that this story has increased in importance among the Aborigines. Only in recent times have Anglo-missionaries at Wadeye taken a real interest in it. It would be accurate to describe the influence of *Mulinthin* as an indigenous phenomenon.

*Nugemanh: True Man—True God.* The pre-contact visionary experience of *Mulinthin* and the subsequent interpretation and meaning applied to it finds a correlative in the traditional spirit-being, *Nugemanh*. Stanner (1966:161) describes *Nugemanh* as "The most eminent of the pure spirits." Stanner notes that "pure spirits" were quite distinct from the culture heroes like *Kanamkek* and *Mutjingga*: these heroes were identified as "persons with fathers" and were called "clan spirits." The "pure spirits" were "persons without fathers," they existed by their own power. Stanner

thought *Nugemanh* was “comparatively unimportant” as he could find no myth or association with any religious ritual. Stanner (1966:162) did note however, that *Nugemanh* was often petitioned to provide food, and was claimed to be responsible for sending down good children. Among all the spirit-beings, *Nugemanh* alone was supposed to be “true man,” that is, distinct from the beings of *The Dreaming* who were somehow unified with the animal world (1966:162).

*Contemporary views on Nugemanh.* The above description of *Nugemanh* has remained largely unaltered. In 1978 a group from Nadirri (near Wadeye) were attending a program at the Daly River Leadership Training Center operated by the MSC. *Nugemanh* again emerged as the one figure “who appeared to be different from the others” (cf. McGowan 1978:21). They depicted *Nugemanh* as a being who lives “on high” (cf. Wilson 1978:24). It was noted: “At the same time, he is close to human beings, knows them and their doings, and commonly people themselves have a highly personal awareness of him in turn” (Wilson 1978:25). This group attributed all good things as the result of *Nugemanh*’s work. This again included the provision of food, and the sending of good children.

These descriptions and thoughts on *Nugemanh* generally parallel those given to me on a fieldtrip in 1992. Ngiparl summarily states, “*Nugemanh* is the creator. That’s why when a new baby is born this child has come from *Nugemanh*. Or anybody passed away he go back to *Nugemanh*.” Those interviewed identified *Nugemanh* as the equivalent of the missionaries “God the Father.” They were insistent that they always had

this concept of a caring, beneficent being. This is concordant with Stanner (1966:162) who said the old people to whom he spoke (in 1963) grew “impatient with any suggestion that they had been influenced by the example of Christian prayer.” I found similar responses in 1992.

Demkadath remembered her grandfather declaring that when the missionaries spoke of God the Father they were “Talking about the same God that I worshipped for many years in this country. This is the same God that we worship. No different.” She added, “I was a little girl then. I never forget this.” She later recalls her “grandfather talking to *Nugemanh*: ‘I know He’s there.’ He came back with lots of food. He always used to pray, talk to *Nugemanh*.” It appears that when Fr. Docherty spoke on the power of Jesus the people thought he was talking about *Nugemanh*. Demkadath spoke directly on this matter: “He [Fr. Docherty] might have talked about that, but they didn’t see it that way. You get me? They thought he was talking about *Nugemanh*—the same person. *Nugemanh* had all the Jesus power.”<sup>23</sup>

When questioned about the power of his *dreaming sites*, the elder, Chula, quickly pointed out: “Our country, our *dreaming site* has power. We didn’t make the *dreaming sites*—the power comes from *Nugemanh*.”<sup>24</sup>

### *The MSC Journey towards Mission at Wadeye*

The founding event or person of a movement often shapes the movement for many years. Followers seek to hold on to or retrieve their tradition. This is particularly the case for religious movements and

societies. It is now timely to explore the story of the religious order, the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), who came to establish the mission at Wadeye in 1935.

*The beginnings of the Society: founder, Jules Chevalier (1824-1907).*

Jules Chevalier intentionally founded the MSC in France on the same day as Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1854. He had only been ordained a priest for three years.<sup>25</sup> Chevalier and a few other diocesan priests were convinced of three things. First, France and many parts of the world were suffering from indifference and a lack of living faith. The term “missionary” was applied broadly. They saw France itself in need of missionary work. While Chevalier in particular had a special affection for foreign missions this was not the reason for the society’s founding. Second, the doctrine and devotion of the Sacred Heart was an efficacious means of preaching the gospel message of God’s love and care for people. Third, spiritually well-formed priests could be the most effective forces in bringing about change (cf. Cuskelly 1975:11).

*The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH).* Any study of the mission at Wadeye must take into account the impact of the MSC’s sister congregation, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. They came into being in 1874. These women in 1865 detached themselves from their previous religious community; they were more or less an independent group of women seeking a stable religious community. Chevalier always had hopes of “founding a group of Sisters dedicated to Our Lady of the

Sacred Heart” to work side by side with the MSC (Cuskelly 1975:141).

They were happy to accept his idea. The precariousness of their admission into the new rule lasted a number of years. It would be another ten years before the new Society was to have its first professions (Cuskelly 1975:148).

*French School of Spirituality.* Chevalier was deeply impacted by the seventeenth century French School of Spirituality. Most important among this movement:

were the renewal in biblical and patristic studies; the Catholic Counter Reformation, especially the need for the reformation of the clergy; . . . These writers had a strong contemplative, apostolic, and missionary spirit. They professed a Trinitarian theology and believed deeply that men and women are called to commune intimately in the divine life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . they evolved a number of major themes. . . . They are theocentrism, Christocentrism, Mary, and the priesthood. (L. M. Glendon in M. Downey 1993:420. Cf. Walker 1978:28-35)

This school believed the life of the priest should be “centred on the Eucharist and the sacrifice of the Mass. For it is here that Christ principally continues his work of giving glory to God and accomplishing the work of man’s redemption” (Cuskelly 1975:108). It was only to be a small development from the French School to Chevalier’s spirituality of the Heart of Christ (cf. Cuskelly 1975:124). Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was in direct contrast to Jansenism. Jansenism played down the human, bodily component of the person. The focus on the Sacred Heart of Jesus recognized the profound love and human affection that God has for the person.<sup>26</sup>

*Nineteenth century France: revolution, instability and piety.*

Chevalier's small group of priests was being developed during uncertain times in France's history. Revolutions had rattled the stability of the political order. The disasters of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) gave great impetus to the forces of anti-clericalism and atheism.

Despite the political turmoil and anti-Christian forces there were great signs of Catholic piety. In 1858, the whole Catholic world's eyes turned to Lourdes where Bernadette had apparitions of Our Lady. John Vianney during the same time was drawing crowds from all over France. Both these were to become canonized saints. Great numbers of French priests were going to work in the foreign missions.

In 1861, true to his Marian piety Chevalier created a new image of the Sacred Heart that became known as devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.<sup>27</sup> As Cuskelly (1975:33) reflects:

The devotion took on immediately. Certainly not all would have appreciated the full theological content which Fr. Chevalier had in mind. Many were chiefly interested in her "power of intercession." But even this could be the beginnings of growth to a more selfless devotion and to a discovery of the unfathomable riches of the Heart of Christ.

Cuskelly (1975:35) claims "The spread of the devotion was really extraordinary." He continues, "In almost every place that the MSC were to go . . . they found that the devotion had preceded them."

The society grew gradually. By 1879 they numbered 63 professed members in all. That same year the Republicans came to power in France; this spelled great difficulties for the church. Anti-clericalism reached a

zenith; the catchword was “humanity without God.” During the period 1879-1889 most religious congregations were expelled from France (Dansette 1967:18). The MSC left in 1880, first heading to Rome then gradually established other centers in Holland, Spain, England, and Ireland.

*First foreign missions.* While still in a very fragile state of development, and amidst much internal disagreement, the MSC accepted the invitation of Pope Leo XIII to establish a foreign mission in Melanesia and Micronesia, particularly in Papua New Guinea. With next to no foreign mission training and preparation, the first missionaries departed in 1881 (McMahon 1987:5; cf. Waldersee 1995).

Just as the missionary field opened up for the MSC in 1881, the same field opened up for the OLSH sisters. Within five weeks of the first members’ profession they left France for Oceania in the company of five MSC. Like their MSC brothers they were in a hurry to obey the call to foreign missions. They have remained companions in the missions throughout Oceania.

In order to establish a secure base for the Papua New Guinea missions the MSC were given parishes in Sydney, Australia in 1885. Rapid progress led to the establishment of an Australian Province in 1905. The first Australian MSC priest was ordained in 1904. In 1906 they were entrusted the diocese of Victoria and Palmerston in the Northern Territory, now known as Darwin. In 1935, at the invitation of the Commonwealth government, and the request of the Holy See, the MSC commenced their mission at Wadeye.



*The Founding Mission Paradigm: Residential, Agricultural, and  
“Civilized”*

The missionaries that came to Wadey in 1935 understood Christianity and the need to establish a permanent mission residence as being coterminous. Soon after arrival they immediately set out to find a site where there would be fresh water, a good boat landing, agricultural land, timber, room for an airstrip, and good building sites. The physical development of the mission was given highest priority. They moved from the original location (“Old Mission”) after four years because it was judged as limited in its capacity to sustain a growing population. It has continued to expand at its new location ever since.

The missionaries believed their (Western) form of Christianity was universal. The slogan, “Civilize in order to Christianize,” indicates the prevailing mentality of Western superiority towards indigenous-Australians both inside and outside of the church. It implied the need for a radical assault on the cultures of indigenous-Australians. It is important to recognize that the missionaries were a minority in this remote part of the country. They never left their own Anglo-Celtic culture while in Australia. This being the case they reflected attitudes of superiority to indigenous-Australians that were almost universal among Anglo-Australians at the time.

Much of the subsequent missionary action can be brought back to this founding paradigm. Attention to indigenous culture and language was not

at the forefront of the MSC approach to evangelization. The Bible was only translated in the local language in the late 1980s, and not by Catholic missionaries, but by a Baptist couple who belonged to the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Only two Catholic missionaries have learned one of the Aboriginal languages in the mission's history.<sup>28</sup> One is long deceased, the other, Sr. Teresa Ward, an OLSH sister, was moved in 1983. This being the case, the efforts of the missionaries to effectively communicate the gospel have been limited. Priorities of the mission were the improvement of health; educating the children in new Western ways; instilling values of productive use of human labor and the land; and, baptism.

Martin Wilson (1982:37) records that "Fr. Docherty had begun baptizing quite early." By 1940 seventy baptisms had occurred. The bishop enjoined caution; however, when Fr. Docherty informed him that "the mothers were begging that their children be baptized, he let Father continue." By 1954 over 308 baptisms had taken place.

In an MSC report on the state of the Wadeye mission in 1954 the excellent annual produce of the garden was highlighted as "a fit symbol of the spiritual progress made" (Wilson 1975:37). This statement indicates a few things. First, productive agriculture was seen as a responsible use of land—indeed it was understood as a gospel value. This was opposed to the perceived laziness of the Aborigines attitude to land. It also indicates that the agricultural base was essential at that time for the ongoing presence of missionaries. It is almost certain that the mission could not have survived by hunting and gathering. The mission from its inception had experienced

difficult economic conditions. It commenced in the middle of the Great Depression, and then suffered from limited resources due to the War years not long after. We should also remember that the threat and occurrence of Japanese bombing clouded the northern regions (known as the “Top End”) of Australia during the time of World War II.

Evangelizing activity concentrated on Sunday Mass, followed by instruction in the faith which took place in the schools. It would be eleven years however before the sacraments of confirmation and communion were first administered.

Daily catechesis of the adult workers occurred each workday for about an hour (cf. Wilson 1975:31). Referring to the time of catechesis Fr. John Leary told me, “Dick Docherty never learned the language. He’d ring that bell at nine o’clock and he’d harangue them for about an hour in English.”

Consistent with their Marian piety, the *Legion of Mary* was introduced. The Legion of Mary highlights prayer through Marian disciplines such as praying the “Rosary.” It served a cohesive social function of bringing women together and children of different age groups where prayer and social recreation occurred. It is still active to a smaller degree in Wadeye today.

### *Education—Removing Children from their Families*

The missionaries did not recognize that culture is like a seamless garment where change to one part necessarily impacts the whole. The consequences of the missionaries’ efforts to educate the children through

the strictly enforced dormitory system demonstrate this vividly. With the arrival in 1941 of the MSC sister congregation, the OLSH sisters, the MSC's mission began a massive effort to shift the Aborigines from their indigenous culture to a Western one. A girl's dormitory, known as a "convent," was established immediately. The boys' dormitory had to wait until after the war.

*The trauma of the dormitories.* The boys and girls were taken in to their respective dormitories at the age of seven or eight where they would live permanently under supervision from the missionaries (cf. J. Falkenberg 1962:19). The girls left the convent only when they were to be married (cf. Stanner 1954:4). Stanner (1973:15) believes that the sisters made a radical change in the deeper structures of Aboriginal life when they took the young girls to live with them. The missionaries encouraged the youth to flout the traditional pattern of arranged marriage; traditional rites of initiation for boys and girls were actively discouraged—some even forbidden.

Yenmeni<sup>29</sup> was in the dormitory from the 1960s to the early '70s. He confirms Stanner's (1954:14) observation that the zeal, which the missionaries brought to their proselytizing, was extraordinary. Stanner described the religious instruction of the children as "intense," much more so than their literate education lessons. With the dormitories closing only in the late 1970s, the consequences and reverberations of the dormitories are still very much felt today (see Chapters 4 and 5). We hear this in the following reflections. Yenmeni recalls:

In the 1960s when I was young boy. I was always told to wash my hands, put on clean clothes, must go to church. And morning, go to morning prayers. Lunchtime, every time we heard that *bell*—for lunch—everybody around that area, used to stand like statues. That’s praying to ourselves. Otherwise we would be in trouble if we move. And in the afternoon, after supper we go wash and we always had to go to church.<sup>30</sup>

I asked him: “When you look back on that how does it feel?”

Feels like I am a prisoner again. Always had to go to church or being chased [by the missionaries], keep clean. I had to keep clean inside. Keep holy, always. Even if we were out bush. When we heard the *bell* on Sundays, holiday time, run down. Run back from home to the church.

Wudarnthale explains how the dormitory experience violated the child-to-parent bond.<sup>31</sup> He states, “When I was in the dormitory I was never allowed to camp with my family. I was not allowed to visit parents. Parents are special for us—we weren’t allowed to see them. I feel I was lost. I was lost. I feel no good about that time.”<sup>32</sup>

It was not uncommon for the children to be physically punished in the dormitories. Wudarnthale recalls how he used to belt the younger boys in the dormitory. He dryly states, “I got the idea from the missionaries.” Referring to his own actions he exclaims, “I felt that I did the wrong thing. I shouldn’t do that. I was learning from them.”

*Dormitories: quarantining a culture.* Wurrngit remembers the dormitory for the way it blocked his access to cultural knowledge. He went to the dormitory at around six years of age. He states that he did not know his culture during his years in the dormitory. Regarding tribal ceremonial

life he discloses: “The ceremonies are still new to me. I’m only just starting to learn it. To get the full knowledge is really hard.” He spoke about the difficulty and confusion the dormitory experience has left him in.

Reflecting on this time he confesses:

I’m really confused. I’m only new to my culture now—for thirty-five years from age five or six I was told that I was a Catholic. The Aboriginal stuff wasn’t important to me then—all my father did was taught me how to hunt, when I was fourteen I used to go out hunting with my father. He never taught me anything about ceremonies, Law, he never told me anything. That’s what I’m saying—I’m confused about that. *There’s about two hundred of us walking around here. We have been through hell.*<sup>33</sup>

Pandella recalls that she was not allowed to speak her language in the dormitory. When I asked her what would happen if she used her language she said that the sisters would belt her. I asked, “What did you do?” She replied with a nervous laugh, “I learn to speak English.” When asked how the older women felt about her not having gone through the young girls ceremonies, she answered, “Just lost I think.”<sup>34</sup> The sense of grief and lostness is most evident.

Wurrngit and Pandella’s reflections help us recognize the detrimental impact of the dormitories on the Aborigines’ ceremonial life, particularly on the rites of initiation. Falkenberg (1962:19) was an anthropologist at Wadeye in the 1960s; he notes that the dormitory system led to “the almost complete discontinuation of the boys’ initiation ceremonies.” He identifies this as an attempt to replace “the gradual admission into the secret life . . . by a systematic education in Christianity” (1962:19).

The missionaries actively discouraged the higher initiation rite of *punj* and the circumcision (*thempith*) of pubescent boys. By far the most important was the post-circumcision rite, *punj* (cf. Goldman 1996). Stanner (1966:149) indicates there was “persistent pressure by the missionaries to put an end to all pagan ceremonies.” He indicates the severity of the pressure as being “too insistent to be resisted” by the Aborigines. This resulted in the *punj* going underground or ceasing operation altogether. My interviews with Wurrngit, Pandella, and others, indicated that men and women, now in their mid-forties, are just beginning to learn about the significance and meaning of these ceremonies. Until they do, the elders will not ascribe them the status of being an adult; this means they will not be trusted with the sacred stories and ceremonies of their culture.

### *The Hemorrhaging of a Culture*

*The impact of attacking the rites of initiation.* The consequences of the missionaries’ attack on rites of initiation like *punj* were far reaching. Referring to *punj*, Stanner (1966:20) declared, “It would be possible, and in many ways desirable, to relate the entire culture and organized life of the region to this single ceremony.” By condemning and forbidding *punj*, the missionaries actively destabilized the entire cultural framework of the people. This may have occurred through ignorance rather than being intentional.

*Punj* works to renew the community, as the neophyte’s connection with land is fully ingrained. The close of the ceremony is a time of frenzied

celebration for the entire tribe—their community is regenerated. Stanner never found an Aboriginal youth that had come through the ceremony that would find any lasting meaning in European values and beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

Every aspect of life was affected by *punj*. This ranged from the economic framework of the culture, to personal and social identity; from reinforcing religious beliefs to imparting new information. In tribal economies, transactions are in the form of gifts and material sharing. *Punj* would be an occasion when tribes who were antagonistic to each other set aside their differences. No doubt significant distribution of resources occurred during this annual event.<sup>36</sup>

*The introduction of a cash economy.* As seen in the founding paradigm, the missionaries were quick to introduce the concept of regular work (productivity) into the community. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle gradually became less nomadic and more sedentary. The early decades of the mission saw the people working for basic food items like flour, sugar, rice, and tobacco. Later on a few cans of beer were included for the men. Small amounts of cash were given for work as well. During those early years the adults were encouraged to rotate two weeks in the mission compound with two weeks out bush. The children remained in the dormitories.

The missionaries' efforts to gradually introduce the Aborigines to a cash economy were upturned in 1972 when the Federal government introduced social welfare payments into Aboriginal communities. Long-



term missionaries maintain that this action drastically changed overnight the entire social and cultural framework of the community.

It is worth pointing out that the generation that came through the dormitories was the first to feel the abrupt impact of a cash economy. Those who experienced the greatest instability were the men, as the women still had their role as mothers (even though they had basically been sheltered from appropriate role-models in the convent). It is also true that this generation of men have experienced the greatest problem with alcoholism. They truly can be called a “lost generation.” Almost two decades would pass before Wadeye and other Aboriginal communities were given the opportunity to develop a work for welfare payment scheme. This initiative known as the “Community Development and Education Program” began in Wadeye in the late 1980s.

The abrupt introduction of a full cash economy had other immediate consequences on the community. New health problems arose. Alcohol consumption dramatically increased; as did social problems like domestic violence, and not much later, juvenile crime.

*Health.* Government payments gave Aborigines unprecedented purchasing power. The role of males as hunters diminished even further, as did the food gathering activities of the women. Hunter-gathering activities were left to weekends or “bush-holiday” time (a four-week period of school vacation in the “Dry Season”). Traveling to land is a major difficulty for many, as most people’s country is on difficult roads requiring four wheel drive vehicles.

The local store has become the principal source for food and other dietary needs. These changes soon impacted their health. Poor dietary choices, particularly high sugar and salt contents have led to Aboriginal women having the highest rate of diabetes in the country. The poor diet combined with a lack of traditional “bush tucker” (which is phenomenally high in vitamins and protein) has resulted in low birth weights and other health related problems.

*Increased alcohol consumption.* Increased income led to increased consumption of alcohol. Statistically, Aborigines are more likely to be non-drinkers than the average Australian. This is largely the result of the high non-drinking rate among Aboriginal women. Unfortunately a great majority of the men experience drinking problems. This has impacted the health of Aboriginal families in many ways. A significant part of family income would be spent on alcohol. A common practice of the fathers coming home from the “Social Club”—Aboriginal Alcoholics Anonymous and Al Anon members have named it the “Anti-Social Club”—would be to buy bags of pop and chips for the children. For many, this would be their evening meal. The trauma of having a relative die or receive injuries in alcohol related vehicle accidents have become all too common. One of the church’s most impressive ministry efforts has been the introduction of self-styled AA programs into the community. A significant percentage of the Wadeye population has gone through these programs since the early 1980s. The need remains however, for the development of a solid community after-care program.

*Domestic and juvenile crime.* Wadeye has experienced increased rates of domestic violence and juvenile crime. Nearly always, the domestic violence is alcohol related. The outbreak of juvenile crime began to increase significantly in the early 1980s and has not abated. It is no surprise that the children of the “lost generation” have been the most anti-social. Without exception, the offenders are male.<sup>37</sup>

*Marriage.* Aboriginal marriage rules were the target of change by the missionaries. The tribes around Wadeye had a sophisticated marriage system, which effectively ensured the stability of the whole tribe. The tribes were divided into eight “skin” groups—there were set rules of who could marry whom.<sup>38</sup> Marriage and family reflected the all-consuming ontological reality of connectedness to place. Aboriginal elders at Wadeye gain immense intellectual satisfaction from explaining this complicated kinship arrangement. They still deplore the past efforts of the missionaries to erode it.

The missionaries saw the system of arranged marriage as antithetical to Christian values.<sup>39</sup> For industrialized societies, sentiment is the primary, if not the sole basis for marriage. Arranged marriage and polygyny was seen as destructive of sentiment. The missionaries saw *love* and *free choice* as being foundational requirements for Christian marriage. As late as the 1980s the OLSH sisters in Daly River would arrange planned meeting nights for the young girls and boys to get to know to each other. Formal “White weddings” (that is, a classical European wedding for the Aboriginal couple) were preferred and supported by the missionaries. Arranged

marriages were viewed as an unnecessary limit and imposition on human freedom.

While the missionaries did not intervene with the existing marriage arrangements of the adults they felt the younger generation had the right to choose their own partner. Wudarnthale captures the impact of this when he laments:

Today it is all mixed. That's why we call the young married ones "half-half." Uncles married to cousins! I call them half-half! That's what's happening now. This came from the church idea—you can marry anybody—[according to] White man, White priests. They didn't know what we had before.<sup>40</sup>

Demkadath places her cultural understanding of marriage as a significant component of her cultural system. She explained how marriage was integrally connected with "country, ceremony, dreaming, Law." She confirms the impact the missionaries and social change had on marriage: "Marriage done the right way—that was very important, not so important now. That has been destroyed by drink and the priests. Marriage is completely destroyed—it is surrounded by darkness. The priests didn't understand that much."<sup>41</sup>

People are still aware of previous cultural marriage patterns. Nevertheless, the generations of attack have left their mark. Arranged marriages would now be considered the exception to the norm.

### *A Mission at Sea in a Paradigm Drift*

Social change increased with the creation of the mission. Mission and government policy united even further. Missionaries accepted the

(paid) responsibility of being superintendents of the community. It would be well into the 1970s before they would give up this role. It should be mentioned that the missionaries care for the Aborigines during this period was outstanding. Stanner (1973:16) captures the ethos of the missionaries during the years 1948-56 when he states,

There was more money, more staff, more paper work; more demands from Government to the Mission to carry out essentially secular tasks; more social, economic and religious questions to think out concerning the long future of an Aboriginal population already growing at a fast rate; more pastoral and spiritual care needed—and given. I saw a lot of the Mission over this period. The impression I retain was of over-burdened religious at unremitting labour of the hardest kind, in season and out, and that phrase means a great deal in a sub-tropical zone.

It is clear that the efforts to ensure the survival of the Aborigines at Wadeye, through the development of a mission compound have been tremendous. Unfortunately the need to understand the Aborigines' cultural framework was pushed to the side. Only in contexts like the one Stanner describes above, can we make any sense of the bishop telling his young priests in the 1950s “not to waste time learning the language.”<sup>42</sup> (See *Memelma*, Chapter 5)

*Impact of Vatican II: much talk—not much action.* Vatican II was a major watershed for the Catholic Church. Missionaries began to recognize the need to change the old paradigm, but they did not know what this would look like. After Vatican II, the MSC missionaries began to seriously address the manner in which it was spreading the gospel message. They began to evaluate their strategy in the light of the Vatican II, particularly

with the release in 1965 of the “Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church” known as *Ad Gentes*. *Ad Gentes* affirmed that the church, by its very nature, is missionary, that this is indeed the purpose of the church’s existence. The MSC’s historical lack of missiological training, however, began to show. Despite meeting many times over the next decade they were unable to develop a cohesive mission strategy (cf. Crawford 1978:4; 14-15).<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately this missiological drift continues up to the present. The MSC have created some outstanding mission statements and even established a missiological center and a journal. Nevertheless, they have largely failed to take Aboriginal culture seriously. It seems that the hunter-gatherer culture of the Aborigines, combined with the missionaries attitude of Western superiority, have been factors that the MSC still struggles to come to terms with. There have been no significant moves towards understanding what is involved in being an *indigenous Aboriginal church*. A report by Phil Costigan (1996:34-35), a Christian Brother who was working at Wadeye echoes what many missionaries—including MSC and OLSH missionaries—told me in 1998:

[C]hurch life in Wadeye as based on external practice seems to have almost died. White people [read: missionaries] are discouraged by the poor church attendance, the drop in baptisms and marriages, the lack of reverence and devotion. The people seem to have lost interest in what the church has to offer. Maybe they do not see it as relevant any more to their lives . . . There has been a constant changeover of priests in the last few years. The bishop has not been at Wadeye for the last two years except for one fleeting visit of a few hours for

Confirmation. The people must feel neglected or consigned to the too hard basket.

*Education: Signs of Policy Change*

In terms of personnel and finance the two basic pastoral institutions of the Australian Catholic Church are the parish and the parish primary school (later the secondary school was added to this). This was transferred to Wadeye where the major ongoing effort of the church has been the school system. The great bulk of church personnel and resources have gone into the education of the young.

*Colonial model of education.* It has only been in recent years that indigenous culture has begun to be recognized as a necessary starting point for education. For example, when I arrived in 1984 to teach, I learned that my teenage students from grade one had been taught by Anglo-Australians who had little to no knowledge of the local languages and only a sketchy understanding of the cultures of the area. The religious curriculum was from Papua New Guinea. As mentioned earlier, there was no reference to *Mulinthin's* vision or the understanding of God as *Nugemanh*. In short, the school system reflected wider Australia's belief that Aborigines would simply assimilate into mainstream society. This reflects the government policies of those times.

The following is a brief sketch of what the school was like in 1984. Every class had one Anglo-Australian teacher and one or two indigenous teaching-assistants (who were paid accordingly). It was not uncommon for classes to have no indigenous teacher-assistant present. All leadership

positions were held by Anglo-Australians. Aboriginal teacher training was just commencing despite a number of Aboriginal teacher assistants having been at the school for over a decade. There was quite a degree of skepticism among the Anglo-staff—including from among its leadership—about the need for the teacher education program. There was no Parents and Friends association or equivalent (like PTA). It was not unusual at certain times of the year for school attendance to plummet below twenty percent.

Educating the children in Western ways was seen as the primary tool to move the community forward. Promising students were encouraged to go to boarding school in Darwin, Cairns, and other distant locations. This policy still continues to the present. Secondary schooling at Wadeye was referred to as *post-primary*. The older females would concentrate on activities like cooking, hygiene, and sewing. The males would have an emphasis on woodwork. It was considered odd to suggest that Aboriginal art, crafts, and the like should occur in the curriculum.

*Movement towards empowerment model.* The shift to Aboriginal education has largely taken place through the education policy introduced by the Northern Territory government. Significant government money has been poured into two programs in particular; these being the school bilingual program, and the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) Program. These commenced in the late 1970s and mid 1980s respectively. Both programs have received constant criticism by assimilationist



politicians and media. It took almost a decade to convince the Catholic school authorities about the need to support such programs.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the opposition these programs have received from Anglo-Australians, both internally and externally, they have resulted in significant indigenization of schooling. Aboriginal teachers, many of whom had taught at the school for many years, yet were only referred to as “assistants,” and paid accordingly, seized the opportunity to gain formal recognition of their teaching prowess. The school now has many fully trained Aboriginal teachers. Nevertheless, there has been little training to acquire management skills. There still is little indication that leadership of the school will be given over to the Aborigines with all coordinating positions, including principal and deputy principal still being held by Anglo-Australians.

### *Summary*

Wadeye serves as a microcosm of the church’s efforts to evangelize Aborigines in remote parts of Australia. It effectively demonstrates how colonialism radically impacted the Aborigines’ nomadic hunter-gathering culture. As change agents, the missionaries there have a mixed scorecard. There can be little doubt that the mission contributed to halting the violence of colonialists’ expansion, thereby enabling the Aborigines to survive. Nevertheless, the model they employed was no less conditioned by notions of Western cultural superiority, hierarchy, and patriarchy. (Church structures reinforce such thinking.) They still struggle under the legacy of such a policy.

Like missionaries to Aborigines all over Australia (Pallotines, Benedictines) the MSC could not separate the forces of modernization (read urbanization, education, destruction of traditional social networks, etc.) from their model of evangelization. They created mission compounds to help “modernize” the Aborigines. These compounds were a radical contrast to the nomadic movements of hunter-gatherers. In short, the mission compound and their associated dormitory system for the children were symptomatic of the wider colonial assault on the ontological and social framework of Aborigines. This contributed to, at a deep level, the massive psychological, cultural and socio-religious dislocation of Aborigines (cf. E. Hunter 1993; Commonwealth of Australia 1997).

We can see that the clash of time over place was felt throughout every aspect of indigenous life. When we recall this chapter’s opening conversation with David, we can see that this clash of worldviews continues up to the present moment. These gaps in understanding must be bridged. This chapter has relied on anthropology and history to show the exact nature of these clashes in worldview. Until this is addressed our national conversation and emerging story will continue to have little foundation and focus. Chapter 2 takes our attention to the reconciliation literature. Just as we must accurately remember our history it is crucial that we have an adequate grasp on what we mean by “reconciliation.”

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor George Hunter III for this observation.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 31, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> John Elliott speech given to Institute of Chartered Accountants, Melbourne, Australia, 9 March 1999. Cited in *The Australian*, 11 March 1999, p.2.

<sup>4</sup> “First Fleet” refers to the voyage of the first ships from England to Sydney Cove that established the penal colony.

<sup>5</sup> Harris quotes from *Captain Cook’s Journal during the First Voyage Round the World made in H.M. Bark ‘Endeavour’ 1768-1771*, W. J. L. Wharton (ed.).

<sup>6</sup> Hughes (1986:120) contends that Tasmania “was the only true genocide in English colonial history.”

<sup>7</sup> Swain’s thesis has received considerable response by anthropologists and historians. Interestingly anthropologists have responded more positively to his views than have historians (cf. Carey 1996:32ff). Hilary Carey (1996:32) in her significant book *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions*, tends to support most of Swain’s argument. She observes: “For most of the colonial period, Aboriginal religions responded to the traumas of invasion by internalised ontological changes that were effectively opaque to European observers.” Max Charlesworth, in his introduction to the collection of essays entitled *Religious Business: Essays on Aboriginal Spirituality*, acknowledges Swain’s important contribution (1998: xxv).

<sup>8</sup> McGrane (1989) and Fabian (1982) both argue that the way anthropologists have described the Other provides us with more information about how we see ourselves than actually providing an understanding of the Other.

<sup>9</sup> The annual report from the mission was submitted to the Government Resident, and printed in the South Australian Parliamentary Papers. South

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Australia at that time included the territory now known as the Northern Territory.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Reynolds (1999), in his book, *Why Weren't We Told: A Personal Search for the Truth About Our History*, gives his own story of coming to learn about the violence and indigenous resistance to invasion in Australia. As an academic in Australian history he notes that most historians up until him had basically ignored or glossed over the Aboriginal wars and violence on the Australian frontier.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. H. Stanner, "The Dreaming" in *Traditional Aboriginal Society: A Reader*. W. H. Edwards, ed. (1987:234).

<sup>12</sup> Tony Swain (Swain and Trompf 1995:19ff) has an excellent treatment of *The Dreaming* in his section of the book *The Religions of Oceania*.

<sup>13</sup> Anthropologists and other academic commentators are now very reluctant to try to provide a complete definition and explanation of *The Dreaming*. In similar vein, I prefer to be tentative in claiming an all-consuming definition for *The Dreaming*. Nevertheless, the following discussion I believe is sufficient for the purposes of this discussion. See Swain (1993:14ff) and G. Goosen (1999:79-91) for discussion on this point.

<sup>14</sup> Most of these Jesuits were Austrian. Note the non-English nature of the missionaries in those times.

<sup>15</sup> "Lugger" means large boat.

<sup>16</sup> It needs to be noted that the concept of *Nugemanh* contradicts Swain's thesis that a sky-God type being only resulted in Aboriginal religion after dispossession. This does not account for the particular Murrinhpatha understanding. It again does not account for the fact that the surrounding tribes had no notion of *Nugemanh* or an equivalent being.

<sup>17</sup> *Kudantiga* is on the seashore about twenty-five miles southwest of Wadeye. It is part of Wudarnthale's country who we will meet later in this chapter and again in Chapter 5.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Demkadath Thardim, October 1992. Demkadath sadly passed away in April 1999 after a long battle with kidney failure.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ngiparl Perdjert, October 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Wurrngit Melpi is in his mid forties. He has been a teacher in the local Catholic school run by the OLSH sisters. I taught with Wurrngit in 1985 and 1986.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Wurrngit Melpi, October 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Thangalith Parmbuk is in his mid to late thirties. He is an emerging leader in the community, already having been the local council president.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Demkadath Thardim, October 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Chula is one of the last remaining precontact elders.

<sup>25</sup> He was a baker's son and up until the age of seventeen was an apprentice shoemaker. He was not a particularly brilliant student; however, his religious convictions were fervent. He had an infectious quality in his desire to spread the love of Christ. This was the quality from which others accepted his leadership (Cuskelly 1975:10).

<sup>26</sup> Meditation on the Heart of Jesus led Chevalier to a heightened awareness of the needs of humankind. Human regard for others and the desire to be of service to others was understood as a gift of God. Because human beings are easily discouraged they need to have Christ firmly before their eyes and in their hearts. Thus prayer and contemplation become the spiritual center for Chevalier's society. Cuskelly (1975:125) notes that Chevalier would write "that his missionaries must 'unite themselves with the divine Heart, be penetrated by its sentiments, cooperate as docile instruments of its designs of mercy.'"

<sup>27</sup> He took a well-known image of Mary Immaculate, standing with her hands extended towards the earth, signifying that she makes grace reign upon the earth. In front of this statue he placed the figure of the Christ

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child, indicating his Heart with his left hand and pointing to his Mother with his right—as if to say “It is through my Mother that the treasures of my Heart are poured out on earth” (Cuskelly 1975:33).

<sup>28</sup> There are a variety of language groups living in Wadeye. Apart from Murrinhpatha other significant language groups includes Murrin-Ke, Marringarr, and Marrijabin.

<sup>29</sup> Yenmeni Cumaiyi is a prominent member of the self-styled Alcoholics Anonymous Group.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Yenmeni Cumaiyi, October 1992. Any emphasis in quotes from interviewees is the interviewees’ unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>31</sup> We will meet Wudarnthale’s wife, Xaverine and son Mark in Chapters 4 and 5. Wudarnthale died unexpectedly in April 1999. He had a sudden heart attack when leading a dance at one of the funeral celebrations of Demkadath Thardim. Wudarnthale, Xaverine and me worked as a team for eighteen months during 1989-1990 at the church’s alcohol family recovery center at Daly River.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Wudarnthale Ninnal, October 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Wurrngit Melpi, October 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Pandella is a teacher at the Daly River community. Her story is identical to others at Wadeye. She was interviewed at Daly River in October 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Stanner had close working relationships with the MSC missionaries. Cf. Leary (1981).

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately I am unable to provide a more thorough analysis of the economic character and qualities of *punj*. This is something that I would like to explore in the future. Stanner’s Ph.D. dissertation from London University (1938) entitled, “Economic Change in North Australian Tribes” will be a good starting point for this.

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<sup>37</sup> The results of juvenile crime have all the qualities of an initiation rite. After committing some petty misdemeanor like stealing a vehicle or breaking glass windows at the school, the youth is caught and sent to the local lock up (forced removal and separation). Their case is then put through the local court. From here, they invariably receive a jail sentence for Darwin or retention at a facility for juvenile crime in Darwin or Alice Springs (lengthy period of liminality, new knowledge and stories). After serving their time they return to the family/community (reintegration). It is my perception that the male youth are suffering the most as they live in these destabilizing times. As we have seen above, initiation ceremonies that would help integrate the youth into adulthood are only just beginning to return to their former place of prominence and meaning. Fr. Cyril Hally confirms this observation. He is aware, through the work of Fr. Allan Mitten (prison chaplain) in Sydney that young Aboriginal lads in jail for the first time had composed a song in Creole (distinct blend of Aboriginal grammatical structure and some vocabulary with English) describing their journey for their relatives and friends.

<sup>38</sup> The eight skin groups appear to have been introduced into the region not long before the missionaries arrived, through contact with Aborigines in the southeast Kimberley. Nevertheless, elders at Wadeye continue to speak with great appreciation of the newly incorporated marriage system that was in place before the missionaries arrived.

<sup>39</sup> Bishop Gsell was known as “the Bishop with a hundred wives.” He would “buy” young Tiwi women as a means of ensuring her a chance to choose a husband. While this did not occur at Wadeye it provides a good indication of the attitudes of the missionaries toward indigenous marriage practices.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Wudarnthale Ninnal, October 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Demkadath Thardim, October 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication to me by Fr. Martin Wilson.

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<sup>43</sup> It is as if the MSC did not realize the need for first class men to be sent north. The demands of their missions in PNG and Japan, plus the schools and parishes, have always been part of the MSC effort in Australia. As stated earlier, they were not formed as exclusively missionary, that is, with the idea of crosscultural mission at the center of their identity. They were primarily religious.

<sup>44</sup> The Northern Territory government in 1999 ceased funding the great bulk of its bilingual education programs. Aboriginal communities have interpreted this as a direct attack on their efforts to have their culture survive.



## CHAPTER 2

### Reconciliation: G' Day to Conversion

The previous chapter laid down the historical and anthropological nature of the culture clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. This chapter reviews the current reconciliation literature. This is necessary, as reconciliation has become such a well worn word these days that it is difficult to gain an accepted definition of what it actually is. After examining the literature, the need for a more developed trinitarian understanding of reconciliation will be explored (Goldman 1997b).

Australian politicians in recent years have indicated their grasp of reconciliation with views like, “Let us get on with Australia today—the nation we are all blessed to have as our own—no apologies, no dwelling on the past. Let us get on with the future” (Mr. Armstrong, NSW State National Party Leader, June 1997). Prime Minister Howard in his 1996 Robert Menzies lecture<sup>1</sup> said we need “to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it.” He went on to name this attitude as a “black arm band view” of history.<sup>2</sup> (Chapters 5 and 6 have lengthy discussions on this point.)

Aborigines at Wadeye in 1992 told me that when they tried to talk to a well-beloved priest about abuses in past missionary behavior—including his own—the priest responded, “let’s get on with living the future.” This

view is also widely held by a significant number of the wider Australian community. A number of the Anglo-Australian interviews in Chapter 4 show the widespread nature of this view.

### *Getting a Handle on Reconciliation*

Robert Schreiter's writings on reconciliation often begin with an outline of the various meanings that reconciliation has already been given (cf. 1992a, 1992b, 1996, 1997a, 1997b).<sup>3</sup> Schreiter observes that reconciliation is heard in regards to arbitration, the cessation of hostility, the divorce court, and the end of estrangement. In religious circles in Latin America it is used by conservative Catholic bishops as an alternative to liberation theology. Schreiter (1997b:379) observes that reconciliation is often "conflated with forgiveness, justice, reparation, and expiation." Many see it as "the end point of a process that includes all of these" (1997c:379). Reconciliation has become for many a "codeword for granting amnesty to wrongdoers, repressing memories of atrocity, and returning to some semblance of a normal way of life" (1997c:379).

The understanding of the *missio Dei* being "reconciliation as the model of mission" can be understood when we see nations all over the world (examples include, South Africa, Rwanda, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, El Salvador, Australia) using processes of reconciliation in their efforts to recover from traumatic social upheaval and conflicts (cf. Wink 1998). The quiet, subtle movement of the Spirit seems to be at work.

There are numerous theological meanings of reconciliation as well. It is used in the New Testament as God's saving activity in the world. Gregory Baum and Harold Wells (1997) in their edited volume *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches* bring together some of the different approaches to reconciliation within Catholic and Protestant traditions. Baum (1997:184-192) notes that the classical Protestant tradition, with its "emphasis on Christ's atonement, the forgiveness of sins, and justification by faith," (1997:184) can tend to see reconciliation in a private and individual manner.<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic tradition tends to follow a more explicitly social approach. Speaking as a Catholic theologian, Baum (1997:185) suggests that he would be more "inclined to explore the public meaning of love of God and love of neighbor and stress the role of sanctifying grace in the salvation of the world." We should remember, however, that Roman Catholic theology is also closely tied in with the sacrament of the same name, which focuses on bringing the penitent back into relationship with God and neighbor. We need to recognize Catholic (social) and Protestant (personal) approaches to reconciliation as being complementary—when we exclude one aspect we detrimentally affect the whole (cf. Hay 1998:150-151).

The Bible has numerous stories that refer to reconciliation. Ones that regularly receive attention in the literature are the reunion of Isaac and Esau (Genesis 33); Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45); the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23); and the parables of the lost sheep and the Prodigal Son

(Luke 15). A theology of atonement sees Christ's expiatory death as a model of reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:19-20; Mark 10:45; John 1:29; Hebrews 7:27).<sup>5</sup>

### *The Pauline Understanding of Reconciliation*

The word "to reconcile" (*katallassein*) is found only thirteen times in the New Testament and exclusively in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline correspondence. Paul dramatically reinterprets the original Greek idea of reconciliation as the cessation of hostility between enemies. His use of the term is so novel that Cilliers Breytenbach (1986:3) asserts it "is not to be found in Jewish or Old Testament religion." Schreier (1992a, 1997b) takes up José Comblin's suggestion that reconciliation in Paul operates on three levels.<sup>6</sup>

The first level is *christological*, with God reconciling the world through Christ (cf. Romans 5:11). Through the cross of Christ humankind comes into a new relationship with God; in a sense humankind has been created anew (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Breytenbach (1986:3) asserts: "From Paul's perspective, it is the substitutionary death of Christ which makes possible the reconciliation of [humankind] to God."

The second level is *ecclesiological*, with Christ reconciling Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:12-18; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 1:21-23). Breytenbach (1986:4) refers to the Ephesians text as the "reconciliation of cultures."

The third level is *cosmic*, where Christ reconciles all the spirits and powers of the universe, whether in heaven, on earth or under the earth (Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 1:9-10). The reconciling work of Christ is now entrusted to the church in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

*Christian teaching based on the Pauline reconciliation correspondence.* Schreiter (1992a, 1997b) identifies five points of Christian teaching on reconciliation that are mostly based on the Pauline correspondence. First, “reconciliation is the work of God, who initiates and completes reconciliation in Christ” (1997c:380). An important feature of Paul’s understanding is that reconciliation is the work of God within us: we understand this as “the experience of grace” (1997c:380). With this in mind, Schreiter (1997b:380) asserts that reconciliation is a “prior condition, not a result of repentance and forgiveness.” Schreiter’s position serves to highlight the gracious activity of God in the lives of persons. God loves us and is reconciling us even before we know we need to repent, or forgive, or that we could experience life any differently. This is indeed good news.

Second, Christians are called to be “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). This grace of reconciliation and ministry of reconciliation is more like a way of life—we could perhaps even call it a worldview (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16). Schreiter (1997b:380) suggests that “it could be characterized more as a spirituality than a strategy.”

Third, “the experience of reconciliation makes of both victim and wrongdoer [this includes bystander] a new creation” (1997c:380).<sup>7</sup> When a

person experiences reconciliation the person does not return to his or her former state. In a mysterious way the person experiences in part, the resurrection; the person becomes more human—reflecting more the image of God. How are justice and forgiveness understood in the light of this new creation? Only those who have experienced this can answer. What is clear is that forgiving and healing are not matters of forgetting, as in the adage of “forgive and forget.” As Schreier (1997b:380) observes: “One can never forget, but one can remember in a different way; that is, a memory can now give life to the future rather than dwelling on the undeniable hurt of the past.” Schreier refers to Thomas’ experience of the Risen Christ in John 20, where Christ still bears the scars of his torture; these scars become sources of healing for Thomas (cf. Schreier 1998:70-82).

Fourth, “the process of reconciliation that creates the new humanity is the narrative of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ” (1997c:380). The passion and death becomes a “dangerous memory” (J. Metz 1972, 1980) that subverts the power of injustice that estranges the world from God and humanity. “The resurrection is the confirmation and the manifestation of God’s power over evil” (1997c:380-381). The cross is the symbol, par excellence, of the paradoxical nature of God’s reconciling power (cf. Habel 1999:146-148). As Schreier (1997b:381) reflects: “To come to understand the meaning of the cross is to plumb the meaning of reconciliation.” Paul again and again speaks of the reconciling power of the cross of Jesus Christ to break down the barriers that separate persons from each other (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Ephesians 2:12-16; Colossians 1:22-23. Cf.

Lederach 1999:159-166). Paul's witness of Stephen's "cross" would profoundly contribute to his understanding of the power of weakness and vulnerability. Christians are called to a way of the cross because through that self-giving (kenotic witness) the power of God's overwhelming grace can unfold.

Lastly, the challenge of reconciliation is daunting. It is something that overwhelms most persons. Because of this Schreiter (1997b:381) ponders that "it ultimately can only be grasped cosmically and perhaps eschatologically." It will be apparent already from my definition of reconciliation that I embrace the above Pauline theological understanding of reconciliation. While Paul (nor any other New Testament author) does not articulate a trinitarian understanding of reconciliation I argue below that the seeds of such are evident in his thought and need to be acknowledged. I will now highlight what reconciliation does not mean in this dissertation.

### *What Reconciliation Is Not*

*Reconciliation is not a hasty process.* We hear this in the phrases, "forgive and forget," "let's get on with the future," or even, "isn't it time for reconciliation." It is mostly called for by perpetrators who want the focus taken off their abuse: they are committed to suppressing the history of violence.<sup>8</sup> Schreiter (1992a:19) points out that trivializing the other's story "actually underscores how far the situation still is from a genuine reconciliation." Those who call for forgetting are actually participating in the ongoing victimization of the person; they are really saying the other's

experience is not important. By trivializing the other's memory we are effectively ignoring his or her identity and therefore not acknowledging their human dignity (Schreiter 1992a:19).

The other problem with a hasty approach to reconciliation is that it fails to address the causes of suffering. Such an approach provides no guarantee that the violence will not be repeated (cf. Schreiter 1992a:20-21).

It also fails to recognize the role *time* has in the reconciliation process. It takes time for persons to give in to the inchoate yearning for sense-making out of their pain and hurt.<sup>9</sup> There is nothing forced or sudden in the way people come to new meaning.

*Reconciliation is not an alternative to liberation.* Reconciliation can only occur in a context that is committed to achieving social change. Schreiter notes that we often hear the phrase "Reconciliation or Liberation" as if the two were in opposition. This logic is seriously flawed as it fails to take heed of the conflictive reality of life found in the biblical worldview. Schreiter tells us that we should not be surprised that the cosmic battle between goodness and evil is part of the human arena. The example par excellence of this fact is "making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). Christians believe that God reconciled the world through the death of Christ. As Schreiter (1992a:24) reminds us, "the violent death of Christ hardly bespeaks a consensus view of reality." Schreiter (1992a:25) states, "Perhaps it would be better to say that not only *may* a Christian hold to a conflictive view of reality, but a Christian *must* hold to



such a view in order to acknowledge sin and evil in the world and to participate in the process of overcoming it.”

Liberation theologians have recognized the reality of tension in the fearless proclamation of the reign of God. It is possible to recognize the existence of tension without necessarily supporting violence. As Schreiter (1992a:24) states, “we can have a conflictive view of reality that does not require conflict as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life.” Bosch (1991:442) puts it nicely when he says, “the element of conflictual analysis in liberation theology should not be an alternative to reconciliation but an intrinsic dimension of restoring community between those who are now privileged and the underprivileged.”

Schreiter (1992a:22) points out that those who advocate reconciliation as an alternative to liberation “[do] not acknowledge the deeply conflictive realities that create the chasms that reconciliation hopes to bridge.” Many Christians embrace a non-biblical “consensus” worldview. In such a worldview tension is understood as something to be avoided.

It is no coincidence that Liberation Theology has evolved among oppressed peoples. It took persons from the “underside” to draw to attention that Christ’s life was immersed in tension; from the moment he was born (cf. Matthew 2:13-16); throughout his ministry, even from its beginning (cf. Luke 4:14-30; 22:36; John 5:16-18; 7:1, 19; 10:31). As an adult he never avoided tension in naming the unjust parts of both Jewish and Roman law (cf. Luke: 6:6-11; 11:37-12:12; 13:31-32; Mark 2:23-28).

He shook people out of complacency (cf. John 5; Mark 10:23-27; Luke 19:46; Matthew 10:34). He experienced righteous anger (cf. John 2:13-20; 5:39-47). Liberation Theology draws from this biblical worldview to remind us that for reconciliation to be genuine the source/s of tension must be truthfully faced (cf. Matthew 10:34; Mark 12:1-12).<sup>10</sup>

Truth-telling alone does not bring about reconciliation. We are obligated to create conditions that will not repeat the violence of the past (cf. Moltmann 1991:49). This requires commitment to changing personal and social structures of behavior. We do not want to hear the next generation telling the same story.

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

*Reconciliation is not a managed process.* Understanding reconciliation as a managed process is one of the most common misconceptions about reconciliation. The cessation of hostilities through arbitration and conflict management is often equated with reconciliation. They are not. To put it simply, suspension of violence is not the same as overcoming it.

Schreiter (1992a:26) draws to our attention that a managed approach to reconciliation “falls far short of the Christian understanding of reconciliation in significant ways.” Firstly, it fails to appreciate that it is God who reconciles. Second, the managed process assumes that reconciliation is a skill that is to be mastered. This is alien to Christian worldview. Rather than being a skill to learn, Schreiter (1992a:26) points out that reconciliation should more properly be understood as “something [to be] discovered—the power of God’s grace welling up in one’s life.” The Holy Spirit calls us to enter into a participatory role, where our task is to cooperate with the Spirit in creating the best possible atmosphere for God’s reconciling power to come forth. We do this humbly acknowledging that if reconciliation takes place it usually far transcends our human efforts; it is something that makes us stand in awe.

The three misunderstandings of reconciliation above are evident in the present national conversation in Australia about reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians. The “hasty process” notion of reconciliation is apparent when people talk with great frustration and anger that “reconciliation seems to be taking so long,” and that “Aborigines are getting bogged down with it,” and “Why don’t they get over it?” (See Part II) Reconciliation as “an alternative to liberation” is present when we hear politicians say that “education, health-care, and employment opportunities are more important than reconciliation” or that these issues show a commitment to “practical reconciliation.”<sup>11</sup> The “managed process” is seen when we hear politicians talking about how to best manage a process of

reconciliation that will result in the least amount of financial pain—if any at all—for the nation.

### *Clarifying the Processes and Language of Reconciliation*

The processes of reconciliation at the personal and social levels are fundamentally different. Herein lies the source of the confusion and mischief that exists in much of the conversation on reconciliation at the national and community levels. Robert Schreiter, in his book, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (1998), makes some crucial observations on the processes of personal and social reconciliation (cf. Schreiter 1998:63ff, 111ff). Personal reconciliation begins with the survivors of abuse experiencing God's reconciling and healing love. Through the experience of God's healing love they become able to offer forgiveness to the perpetrator and bystander. The process is completed with an apology and reparation by the perpetrator and bystander. Thus we could say the process of personal reconciliation looks like the following:  
reconciliation → forgiveness → apology.

Social reconciliation reverses the process. Reconciliation at the social levels of communities and nations must begin with an accurate memory of the truth of the past. As such, social reconciliation begins with bystanders and perpetrators acknowledging the wrongs of the past through apology (cf. Lederach 1999:67-68). With authentic apology and efforts towards reparation the survivors offer forgiveness. And with this, the process concludes so to speak in reconciliation. Thus we could say the

process of social reconciliation looks like the following: apology → forgiveness → reconciliation. (This is taken up in much greater detail in Chapter 6.) Much of the confusion in the contemporary discussions on reconciliation lie around an uncertainty on what process of reconciliation each person is actually talking about. As the processes of personal and social reconciliation are so different, it is easy to see why there is a sense at the grassroots level that it is “all too hard,” resulting in people giving up on dialogue with each other.

Hand in hand with the different ways people talk about reconciliation is the need to seek some type of consensus on the actual terms used (cf. Lederach 1997:28ff). Consider the following book titles: Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz’s (1997) *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation*; Donald W. Shriver’s (1995) *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*; Nicholas Tavuchis’ (1991) *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*; and, William A. Meninger’s (1997) *The Process of Forgiveness*. The way in which many of these authors use the terms, “reconciliation,” “forgiveness,” “apology,” even “process,” suggests that the meanings flow one into the other. This is not the case.

An exceptional book on reconciliation that suffers from the “interchangeable syndrome” is Müller-Fahrenholz’s (1997) *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation*. The main reason why Müller-Fahrenholz (1997:2-4) uses both terms is his belief that “reconciliation” is not a strong enough word to convey all its meaning.

He claims this is the reason for international reconciliation commissions like the one in South Africa adding the word “Truth” to the titles of their Reconciliation Commission. Thus it becomes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Müller-Fahrenheit has missed the point of the connection between reconciliation and truth. Daan Bronkhorst has worked with Amnesty International over many years in the area of reconciliation. He argues persuasively in his book *Truth and Reconciliation: Obstacles and Opportunities for Human Rights* that reconciliation can only occur when grounded in the truth of the past (1995:9). It is for this reason that reconciliation and truth must be understood as close partners.

*The connection of truth and suffering in reconciliation.* A significant component of the process of truth and reconciliation is suffering. As the fieldwork in Part II will show, when people tell their stories of past hurts, a certain history of suffering is uncovered. Survivors often relive the pain of the past when telling their stories. The pain of the past must be confronted, and through telling their stories in safe environments the survivor can begin to experience healing. As Habel (1999:43) points out, “Facing the wrongs of the past, struggling for justice and mediating healing will involve ‘suffering through’ the process of reconciliation.” He continues, “Admittedly this ‘suffering through’ may be different for both parties [read: survivors, bystanders, perpetrators], but without it the end result is likely to be a false reconciliation, a temporary truce, and ultimately a mockery of mutual communal respect” (1999:43).

The transformation of suffering into life lies at the heart of the narrative of Jesus Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. For Christians, "the cross becomes the instrument of reconciliation" (Habel 1999:43; cf. Schreiter 1998:20-21). The cross also signals the vulnerability of the triune God; a God that experiences suffering (cf. LaCugna 1992:295-296; Moltmann 1991:123). It was the memory of the suffering of God on the cross that united the Jewish and Gentile Christians (Ephesians 2:13-16). Suffering or taking up the cross is at the heart of knowing Christ and being a follower of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:6-7; 3:10-11; Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27). Paul links Jesus' suffering and death with the resurrection. It is out of this understanding that we can say that experiencing the cross, that is, suffering, is an intrinsic part of our journey to reconciliation. Schreiter (1998) captures this in his reflection on the resurrection narratives. Schreiter (1998:21) explores the resurrection narratives as "moments of recognition, or reconciliation, and of healing" for Jesus' disciples.

Just as Paul saw the suffering and death of Jesus as deeply connected to Christ's resurrection, so we hope that the stories of suffering in Australia will become connected to hope and reconciliation in the nation. Metz (1972:15) has pointed out that "The enslavement of men begins when their memories of the past are taken away." He added, "All forms of colonization are based on this principle" (cf. Schreiter 1992a). For Metz (1972:15), the struggle against colonization is "fed by the subversive power of remembered suffering. In this sense, suffering is in no way a purely

passive, inactive ‘virtue.’” Rather, “It is, or can be, the source of socially emancipatory action.” Metz links the remembered story of suffering with the story of Jesus Christ’s passion. He points out,

it is of decisive importance that a kind of *anti-history* should develop out of the memory of suffering—an understanding of history in which the vanquished and destroyed alternatives would be taken into account: an understanding of history as *ex memoria passionis* as a history of the vanquished. (1972:16)

Metz points to the power of narrative—particularly narratives of remembered suffering—to effect change in the way people perceive the past. These narratives become “dangerous memories” for us, they are memories “which make demands on us” (Metz 1972:15, cf. Villa-Vicencio 1995). Why are these memories dangerous for us? They are dangerous because “they subvert our structures of plausibility. They are memories we have to take into account; memories, as it were, with future content” (Metz 1972:15; cf. Metz 1980:109-110). Norman Habel (1999:43) makes a profound connection between the history of suffering in Australia and how these stories may “make demands on us” and mediate healing and reconciliation for the nation:

As we explore the story of suffering in the Australian context, as we search for the Australian soul in our past, as we seek healing between alienated [disconnected] Australians in the reconciliation process, we will also search the stories of suffering for symbols that might mediate healing. This search involves “reliving” the various stories of suffering in our history and asking whether these moments strike more than chords of sympathy. Do they express a suffering with which we identify? Is there an event that brings us closer as we relive it together in rite, memory or song? Or, in Christian language, is the suffering of God discernible in our common Australian history?



This is dealt with explicitly in Part II, particularly in Chapter 5 where we examine whether narrative functions as an interactive dynamic in people's lives.

*The role of forgiveness in reconciliation.* Müller-Fahrenholz (1997:3) points out the ways “forgiveness” is diluted in many circles. This shows up in our language—we expect people to forgive us—we say, “Excuse me” or “Pardon me” presuming that forgiveness is naturally a right of the abuser. This is a cheap notion of forgiveness.

Authors like Müller-Fahrenholz prefer the word forgiveness to reconciliation because they feel forgiveness focuses attention on the human faculty.<sup>12</sup> Müller-Fahrenholz understands reconciliation to be a process that commences with God. Forgiveness is the human part of this process; it is essentially about human relationships between the survivor and perpetrator. Forgiveness prioritizes human responsibility for action and highlights our accountability for inaction. This same understanding lies at the heart of Shriver's (1995) book, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*. Shriver (1995:35, 38ff) argues convincingly from the New Testament that Jesus expected people to learn in community the art of forgiving. Indeed the forgiveness we receive from God is closely connected to the forgiveness we give to others (cf. Matthew 6:14-15).

Both Müller-Fahrenholz and Shriver recognize the social and structural reality of sin. They explore forgiveness in the attempt to force us as persons, communities and nations to recognize the radical change that is

required in responding to the survivors' offer of forgiveness. Survivors do not "forgive and forget," but rather they are able to forgive through having experienced reconciliation with God and their desire to further regain their own sense of subjecthood and power. Bystanders and perpetrators demonstrate their capacity to receive forgiveness by the way they look for holistic reparation of the survivor as well as working towards ensuring that the abuses of the past are never repeated.

A number of writers remind us that the injunction to "forgive and forget," "to become reconcilers," has no credibility—especially when it comes from the mouths of those in power (cf. Müller-Fahrenholz 1997; Jones 1995; Bosch 1986; Wells 1997:4ff). Perpetrators and bystanders have no grounds to call on survivors to forgive. Forgiveness is the one domain that cannot be forced on survivors.<sup>13</sup>

*The role of apology in reconciliation.* Tavuchis in his book *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (1991) examines the process of social reconciliation while often using the language of personal reconciliation. He is convinced that reconciliation commences with the offender apologizing for past wrongs (1991:8). The heart of his thesis is that when the "gift" of an apology "is accepted and reciprocated by forgiveness, [the] world is transformed." The managed process understanding of reconciliation is evident when he reduces transformation to mean "the resumption of normal social relations" (1991:121). There is no sense of a new creation through transformed relationships in this view.

Tavuchis highlights the power of the survivor in the process of social reconciliation. He notes that an apology is only successful when the survivor freely receives it. While not stating it, Tavuchis points towards the reconciling love of God for the survivor when he observes the forgiveness that is required for this to occur is a “mysterious and unpredictable faculty [which] has not been adequately addressed or formulated” (1991:122). He concludes, “we stand in the need of a sociology and phenomenology of forgiveness” (1991:122).

Tavuchis places much needed focus on the difficulty and symbolic power of *apology* at the role of leadership within communities and nations. Australia presently suffers from an uncertainty at the highest level of leadership to come to terms with the powerful meaning and symbolism of apology. (This is discussed at length in Chapter 6.) Why is apology so difficult for people and leaders of communities and nations? Tavuchis (1991:8) suggests it is difficult because it “expresses itself as the painful remembering, literally of being mindful again, or what we were as members and, at the same time, what we have jeopardized or lost by virtue of our offensive [past and maybe present] speech or action.” It requires us to be vulnerable. Tavuchis (1991:8) names this “vulnerable expression” as “a form of self-punishment that cuts deeply because we are obliged to retell, relive and seek forgiveness.” Australia is presently struggling to understand this. Mamphela Ramphele of South Africa believes Prime Minister Howard can learn a lot from South Africa, particularly in the area of acknowledging

wrongdoing and apologizing. Drawing from the South African experience she notes,

It is very important to have a ritual moment in the life of any society to take stock of what has been wrong and to take responsibility. Part of public service is to create an environment for collective action and therefore for collective accountability.<sup>14</sup>

In pointed reference to Australia's current political leadership she adds, "I don't see how a leader can say 'I wasn't involved and therefore I am not going to apologise.'"

The importance of Tavuchis' work for this dissertation is that he highlights the need for leaders of communities and churches to encourage a broader, more inclusive story than is usually told. Leaders must be highly attentive to all the stories of history. Out of this they need to come to a place of security within vulnerability. Tavuchis highlights how difficult this is at the personal and larger social levels. (The role of vulnerability in narrative and reconciliation is taken up in the next chapter as well as in the discussion on fieldwork interviews in Part II.)

### *Psychologists' Contribution to Reconciliation*

Psychologists have much to offer to the discussion on reconciliation (cf. Enright, Freedman, and Rique 1998:46-62). A particular strength of the psychological literature is the way it highlights the role of memory and narrative to help promote healing in the person.<sup>15</sup> It reminds us that remembering is a difficult, yet necessary, component of reconciliation.<sup>16</sup>

Many survivors of severe abuse undergo years of treatment in order to bring

back their memories of abuse which have been damagingly repressed for years. There appears to be something deeply therapeutic and cathartic about remembering, and telling others about these memories. In the telling and retelling, persons' become able to integrate that part of their story into their (new) life. The person becomes enlivened in the process.

For perpetrators, the difficulty in telling the truth is the sense of shame and guilt they may feel about their part in the survivors' story. Remembering the truth helps a perpetrator to become accountable for his or her past behavior. Remembering helps the perpetrator and bystander break through walls of denial and so-called ignorance. (Child sex abusers have in instances claimed that they were not aware that the children were being damaged.) Remembering means being open to the possibility of conversion, that is, radical change based on respect for the others' story and life. Unless perpetrators and bystanders publicly remember, and make apology for their mistakes, there can be no foundation upon which to build.

A major weakness of some of the psychological literature is that it overly reduces forgiveness to the individual psychological narrative. Many psychologists fail to connect the individual with the wider social environment. One example of this is Meninger's (1997) *The Process of Forgiveness*. Meninger's context, is like most psychological literature, that of individual persons trying to come to terms with past pains through psychotherapy. He does not connect persons' narrative with the death-dealing forces that daily and historically oppress them. There is no mention of the need for perpetrators and society to face the truth of their actions and

their need for reconciliation (cf. Meninger 1997:19-21). This is implicit in his advice to the survivor: “Forgiveness means that you no longer blame someone else for the course your life takes. You alone are responsible. How much easier it is to have an evil perpetrator to blame for everything that goes wrong” (Meninger 1997:29). These words do not appear to make much sense to persons who have been systematically oppressed and victimized over a life-time—even generations. How do survivors, like many indigenous-Australians, feel about such thinking?

Two outstanding Western psychologists who understand the wider socio-political nature of survivor recovery work are Judith Herman (1992) in her work *Trauma and Recovery*, and N. Duncan Sinclair (1993) in his book *Horrific Traumata: A Pastoral Response to the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Herman (1992:237) convincingly argues that “the study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise.” Why is it political? She answers, “because it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people” (Afterword to 1997 printing). The individual can only be treated within the context of the broader social reality. Indeed, much of the recovery of the person may be tied up in becoming politically empowered to struggle for lasting social change. She notes that among many of her clients, recovering their full humanity occurs through seeking justice and reparation. There is no sense of just forgiving and forgetting, but rather forgiving, remembering, and being sustained by the experience of connecting with others to make structural change possible (cf. Enright and North 1998).

Sinclair views the person within the broader social framework of history. The person is not an isolate, but rather, deeply connected with the social policies of the time. He believes the processes of recovery for a wounded individual are the same as for a nation (cf. Herman 1992:241ff). The observations of Herman and Sinclair are particularly pertinent. The narratives or lack of narrative of those interviewed at Wadey serve as a bird's eye view into the ways communities and the Australian nation as a whole is struggling in regards to reconciliation with indigenous-Australians.

### *The Relationship between Reconciliation and Liberation*

Schreiter's (1992a:22) claim, "no reconciliation without liberation" is a noble one. It raises up the voices of the poor and oppressed in a global culture that so easily silences them. Social liberation must never be off the agenda of society and particularly not of our churches. Schreiter's position is a healthy reaction to those who wish to spiritualize and sanitize reconciliation by ignoring the wider social framework of reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

Reconciliation is not in conflict with liberation. Nor is liberation a prerequisite of reconciliation (cf. Wink 1998:21-22). As my research will show, survivors can experience the movement of reconciliation *before* liberation occurs. Through experiencing a small part of the unfathomable mystery of reconciliation persons recognize their experience as being sacred. In turn, they realize that the experience of those who came before them and those who come after them are equally important. It is this that stirs them to seek a sustained expression of liberation. This expression of

liberation can only be defined by the survivors who have already experienced some of the reconciling nature of God. This is why reconciliation will look and feel different than what they felt it would be. As such, *reconciliation is greater and more demanding than justice*. It both includes justice, and goes beyond it (cf. Bronkhorst 1995:38). And in some circumstances, where justice can never happen (we can't bring back the dead but we can honor their memory), it makes sense and meaning (and hope) out of terrible madness and alienation. Reconciliation embraces the call for justice. However, in the mysterious way of the cross, it makes renewed (creative) meaning out of seeming tragedy so as to create even greater hope that goodness will indeed win out over evil.

*Reconciliation — God's Responsibility or the Person's Responsibility?*

Does reconciliation properly commence with the perpetrator's apology (cf. Tavuchis 1991), or is it already at work in God's healing love of the survivor? (Schreiter 1992a). As we have already discussed, it depends on whether we are talking about personal or social reconciliation. The literature is split on whether reconciliation is primarily a God-driven process or a human oriented responsibility. The group holding the latter view divides into two categories. One consists of those who advocate a conflict management approach. They see forgiveness as something that people can learn, practice, and master. The other group offers the injunction to "forgive and forget." Early on Schreiter reacted to both of these by emphasizing reconciliation as the work of God.



My sense is that reconciliation is not the responsibility of God alone. Communication is social—at least two-way. As such, the person must respond to God’s gift; the gift is only realized when the person participates in it. (As we will see below the triune God calls persons into *koinōnia* communion and friendship with God.) The person is the active subject of God’s grace: the person has the freedom to reject or accept this offer. Free response is the constant message of the gospel. We have responsibility for the penultimate shape of our world in which the divine nevertheless is active. Like the reign of God, we could say, reconciliation is here, but not yet.

In his earlier book (1992), *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Schreier claimed that “reconciliation was ultimately a spirituality and not a strategy” (1992a:70). At other places he said, “Reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy” (1992a:60). In his book (1998) *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, Schreier further develops the role of strategy in the ministry of reconciliation; he talks more about the need for “a balance between spirituality and strategy” (1998:17). His emphasis nevertheless remains on spirituality, giving over three-quarters of the book to the spirituality of reconciliation. It is out of a deep meditation on the spirituality of reconciliation that he outlines some possible strategies. The emphasis on spirituality is the proper balance between spirituality and strategies.<sup>18</sup> It serves to remind us that we are cooperating with God’s healing initiative, not controlling it.

### *Who Are the Main Subjects of Reconciliation?*

Lastly, who are the rightful subjects of reconciliation? Many of the writers concentrate on the role of the survivor or the perpetrator. This is understandable considering personal reconciliation begins with the survivor, and social reconciliation begins with the perpetrators. Some recognize that persons can fall into both groups. Most writers give no attention to the role of the bystander, that vast majority who feel they have no connection with wrongs committed against others. The bystander usually claims ignorance. For David Bosch (1986:169) this claim is nonsense. He puts it simply; “ignorance is not innocence,” rather, “it is the worst form of guilt.” For nations, like Australia, the biggest challenge for the reconciliation process is engaging the bystanders to see their connection to the historical pattern of abuse that Aborigines have suffered. Unless there is a substantial popular demand, politicians cannot or will not act to overcome institutional violence and discrimination. It is especially true in Australia where the indigenous make up less than two percent of the population.

Regardless of whether we are exploring personal or social reconciliation, reconciliation in each scenario begins with the God-given quality of *vulnerability*. Vulnerability is a challenge for all persons—rich and poor alike; survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders. It is only through vulnerability that the person can fully experience the reconciling love of God.<sup>19</sup> The level of a person’s vulnerability and a person’s openness to

reconciliation is closely connected. This is brought out in the analysis of the fieldwork interviews in Part II.

Since reconciliation begins with persons accepting their condition of vulnerability, only such persons can sense what reconciliation and justice may feel and look like for them. And even then, it almost certainly will surprise them.

Nelson Mandela's reflection below on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission captures some of the surprise and mystery of his own grappling with reconciliation. He ponders:

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

This same mystery is evident in self-help groups for family members of murder victims who advocate forgiveness for the one who murdered their loved one. Where does this forgiveness come from? It may come from the movement of the Spirit in the person's condition of vulnerability. When persons are able to acknowledge and honor their brokenness the power of God mysteriously wells up in them.

The poor appear to be better positioned to admit their human brokenness than those who in the eyes of the world appear "non-broken" (cf. Wells 1997:13). The life experience of the poor has made them more accustomed to brokenness. The rich and powerful, on the other hand get used to their experience of power, wealth, and privilege. They have more

resources than the poor in which to place their security. As such, they appear to have greater difficulty sustaining a level of vulnerability in their lives as the temptation is always to take their power and security back. For example, the phenomenon of Basic Christian Communities in Latin America is only found in slums and rural areas—not in the middle-classes that cannot have *basic* communities. The middle-class has other resources and access to more. The poor only have themselves and their aspirations.

*Reconciliation — Where Have We Come from? Where Are We Going?*

The following reflection intends primarily to place in some sort of theological context the reasons for the apparent polarity of views in the discussion on reconciliation. While this lies outside of the specific focus of this dissertation it serves both as a useful summary of the present debate about reconciliation and, an essential indicator of a possible lacuna in the contemporary theological discussion on reconciliation, namely, the absence of a trinitarian understanding of reconciliation.

We have seen an occasional sense of hostility towards other views within the reconciliation literature. Some argue that only reconciliation is required, not liberation (for example, conservative Catholic Bishops in South America, and conservative voices in church and society in South Africa. Cf. Schreiter 1992a, de Gruchy 1997). Others reply that liberation is a prerequisite for reconciliation (Schreiter 1992a, 1998, Cone 1969, 1975). Some suggest dropping the term reconciliation altogether as it only emphasizes the work of God and ignores the incarnational responsibility of

human agents to change unjust structures (Müller-Fahrenholz 1997). These theorists prefer the term forgiveness, as forgiveness highlights the horizontal or human dimension of reconciliation—this is referred to as “costly forgiveness” (cf. Jones 1995:1ff). Others agree we should drop the term reconciliation for an opposite reason, namely to emphasize the so-called Christian injunction to forgive (and forget)—this attitude is referred to by some as “cheap forgiveness” (cf. Jones 1995:9ff; Müller-Fahrenholz 1997:3; Bosch 1986:161; Wells 1997:4).

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

### *The Need for a Trinitarian Understanding of Reconciliation*

The contextual question has always been an important one. And, there is no doubt that it has emerged as perhaps the dominant issue in our post-modern, so-called post-colonial era. Nevertheless, another theological factor may be at work in the oftentimes confused and antagonistic

discussion on reconciliation—namely, *an insufficiently trinitarian understanding of reconciliation*.

As shown above, the Christian reconciliation literature presently falls into two camps; those who emphasize the role of God (vertical) and those who emphasize the role of the person (horizontal). *The role of the Holy Spirit often escapes mention*. Robert Schreiter suggests this is understandable, as Paul’s writings focus mostly on the first two persons of the Trinity.<sup>20</sup> Schreiter (1994) has also strongly stated that an eschatological argument for mission is a far more convincing motivation for mission than a trinitarian one.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the eschatological argument mostly rests on the grounds that it leaves more room for dialogue and mission with those from non-Christian traditions “than does the more deductive style of the trinitarian argument” (1994:121). There are solid grounds for challenging both his conclusions. First, Paul points explicitly to the vital role of the Holy Spirit in calling human beings to participate in the divine life of God (cf. Romans 8:10-18; Galatians 4:4-8; Ephesians 2:11-21). This obviously involves reconciliation. It should also be noted that when Paul does refer to the Spirit it is very significant: Paul understands the Spirit to have raised Christ from the dead (Romans 1:4; 8:11); and it is the Spirit that allows us to call our Father, “Abba” (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:6-7). Second, while the eschatological dimension of the *missio Dei* needs to be recognized as one motivation for mission, it does not necessarily follow that this is the nature of mission. David Bosch (1991:1) reminds us on the first page of his masterful treatise on mission *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in*

*Theology of Mission*, that up until the sixteenth century the term mission was “used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity.” As we can see, naming the need for a trinitarian understanding of mission is nothing new, it is simply revisiting our foundation for mission.

We recall that the fundamental missiological assumptions of this study are that since mission is ultimately the work of God, *missio Dei*, and that the model of mission is reconciliation, it necessarily follows that God’s mission of reconciliation must be trinitarian. The lack of attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in the reconciliation discussion to date indicates a failure to acknowledge the trinitarian nature of reconciliation and may also be a significant reason for this polarization of views. To put it simply, reducing reconciliation to either the work of God or the responsibility of humankind ignores the trinitarian reality. This creates overly vertical (God domain) or horizontal (incarnational domain) distortions and, as such, misses the relational nature of the Trinity.

It seems that many have overlooked what the great theologian, Karl Barth, laid down in exquisite fashion in his *Church Dogmatics*. Although it may appear startling to readers familiar with Barth, Barth (1962:760) felt just as the Holy Spirit is “the bond of peace” between the Father and the Son, “so in the historical work of reconciliation [the Spirit] is the One who constitutes and guarantees the unity of the *totus Christus*, i.e., of Jesus Christ in the heights and in the depths, in His transcendence and in His immanence.”

This co-ordination and unity is the work of the active grace of God.

. . . The work of the Holy Spirit, however, is to bring and to hold together that which is different and therefore, as it would seem, necessarily and irresistibly disruptive in the relationship of Jesus Christ to His community, namely, the divine working, being and action on the one side and the human on the other, the creative freedom and act on the one side and the creaturely on the other, the eternal reality and possibility on the one side and the temporal on the other. His work is to bring and to hold them together, not to identify, intermingle nor confound them, not to change the one into the other nor to merge the one into the other, but to co-ordinate them, to make them parallel, to bring them into harmony and therefore bind them into a true unity. (1962:760-761)

A trinitarian model of reconciliation must draw attention to the crucial coordinating role of the Spirit; the actions of the Spirit serve to emphasize the relational feature of our trinitarian faith. When we understand this reality we can better recognize the person being a subject who participates with God the Father, through the agency of the Spirit (cf. Acts 15:28; Bosch 1986:168). Theological discourse on reconciliation must recognize these relational, accompanying, conversational, qualities of the Trinity. A trinitarian understanding of reconciliation reminds us that reconciliation is not God's work alone, nor is it only the domain of persons—it is all of these, and more.

We have sufficiently answered the rationale for an eschatological model for mission. The emphasis on the full social Trinity represents a dialogical model for mission. We are now ready to explore more deeply the richness of the trinitarian foundation for mission and see how this better grounds the emerging model of mission as reconciliation.



There has been a plethora of books on the subject of the Trinity in recent times. Authors like Denis Edwards (1995, 1999), Catherine LaCugna (1992), Elizabeth Johnson (1992), Leonardo Boff (1988), and John Zizioulas (1985) are some of the many who have returned to explore the meaning of the Trinity for our times. It is particularly worth noting that theological reflection on the Trinity has emerged in the interface of ecology and theology (like Edwards 1991, 1995, 1999, Boff 1995, 1997, McFague 1987, Peters 1990, Peacocke 1993, and Moltmann 1985).<sup>22</sup> With major environmental concerns being raised in the 1960s (Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published in 1962)<sup>23</sup> it is understandable that those involved in developing eco-theologies have been among the first to intuit the trinitarian underpinning of a God who cries out for reconciliation with all of creation. David Bosch (1995:55) pointed out in his last publication *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (printed posthumously), that missiology "must include an *ecological* dimension." He noted that "Mission and Ecology" was the theme of the 1991 South African Missiological Society congress, and that this congress received more offers for papers than any of the previous twenty-two congresses. While this congress was held a few years before Schreiter began publishing his thoughts on mission as reconciliation it is nevertheless surprising that others have not come forward—particularly those living in a context like South Africa's—to explore the trinitarian dimension of reconciliation. Could it be that the focus on the place of Christ in inter-religious dialogue with non-Christian religions has led missiologists to overlook the role of the Spirit in

bringing about a reconciling communion *koinōnia*? It appears that many missiologists have failed to recognize the dialogical dimensions of a trinitarian model for mission.

It is also worth noting the contributions of those from the Peace Studies tradition (cf. Musto 1986; Dear 1994; Pawlikowski and Senior 1984; Burggraeve and Vervenne 1991)<sup>24</sup> and peace movements like *Pax Christi*.<sup>25</sup> Writers in this tradition have pointed out that in the aftermath of the unprecedented violence of the twentieth century the movement in the world has changed from one of waging war to making peace. Indeed, *Pax Christi* was formed out of the ashes of World War II (cf. Pax Christi 1992, *The History of Pax Christi*). Those in the peace tradition understood that peace is far greater than merely the absence of war. The words of *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II 1965), an official statement of Vatican II, serve as a precursor for the language of reconciliation, “Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after even greater justice” (#78). Ronald Musto is a leading writer in the Peace movement. While drawing from *Gaudium et Spes* his thoughts echo much of ours on reconciliation when he states: “Peace is not a concrete goal that can be won once and for all; it is instead a process, a constant effort to master passions and to heal wounds. It goes beyond justice and is the fruit of love” (Musto 1986:191). The development by a theologian of a trinitarian understanding of peacemaking emerged only as recently as 1994, when John Dear one of the leading contemporary activists in the peace tradition, wrote a chapter “The Peacemaking Trinity”

in his book, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence*. This seems to support the commonly held belief that pastoral practice always precedes theological reflection. In line with this I believe it is only a matter of time before others begin to explore at depth the trinitarian nature of reconciliation in both the reconciliation and peace studies traditions.

For the moment, three particular aspects of trinitarian theology that have special significance to our discussion will be highlighted. First, the triune God is a God of mutual relations calling persons to enter into a communion *koinōnia* of love and friendship. Second, at the heart of this relational loving God, is a God who freely becomes vulnerable, demonstrated perfectly in God's suffering on the cross. Third, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the gift of memory.

*The Trinity as a God of mutual relations.* Recent thinking on the Trinity, particularly from feminist (LaCugna 1992, Johnson 1992), liberation (Boff 1988, Comblin 1989), ecological (Edwards 1995, 1999, Boff 1995, 1997, Moltmann 1981, 1985, McFague 1987), and Eastern theologians (Zizioulas 1985) have highlighted the Trinity's fundamental relational underpinning.<sup>26</sup> The brilliant work of Zizioulas and LaCugna on the ontology of relation has enabled us to see how trinitarian theology points to personhood as the ultimate ontological category of the triune God. Personhood is not understood as being found in an isolated individual rather as the individual finding his her identity proper as person-in-community. This provides us with the lens to see more clearly how the triune God

through being a God of mutual relations calls us to participate in the divine life of the Trinity.

John Zizioulas (1985:41-42) from the Greek theological tradition explains:

If God exists, [God] exists because the Father exists, that is, [God] who out of love freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit. Thus God as person—as the hypostasis of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God. What therefore is important in trinitarian theology is that God “*exists*” *on account of a person, the Father, and not on account of a substance.* (Emphasis mine)

LaCugna (1992:245-246) drawing from the work of Zizioulas notes, “The substance of God exists always concretely, existentially in persons. No substance, *especially* the divine substance, is self-contained or exists without reference to another.” The three persons of the Trinity do not exist as separate individuals isolated from one another. Each points to each other, that is, they exist through relationship. As LaCugna (1992:246) puts it, “The ontology proper to this understands being as being-in-relation, not being-in-itself. The economy [of the Trinity] is ‘proof’ that God is not being-by-itself but being-with-us.” This is demonstrated in Christ who though sharing in the divine essence did not cling to this, but rather demonstrated perfect “realization of personhood and communion” through loving others (LaCugna 1992:246). A love demonstrated through complete self-giving (*kenosis*) that led to death, a shameful death on a cross (cf. Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:17-18).

This trinitarian vision of God clearly reveals God as a God of mutual relations (cf. Edwards 1995, 1999, LaCugna 1992, Johnson 1992, Moltmann 1981, 1985). The three persons work in perfect communion, a divine *koinōnia*. The Holy Spirit calls us to participate in this divine *koinōnia* (cf. Galatians 4:4-8; Romans 8:10-18; cf. LaCugna 1992:296ff). This radically impacts our understanding of being formed in the *imago Dei*. We image God not only through our individuality, but also through the way we are in communion with each other and creation (cf. Mary Catherine Hilbert 1995:200). In terms of reconciliation we can conclude that reconciliation with God only comes to fulfillment in community, that is, through the Spirit calling persons into reconciliation with each other (cf. Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 2:14; cf. Cowan and Lee 1997:81ff).

For Paul, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring about this communion (cf. Congar 1983a, 1983b, 1983c; Edwards 1999:95ff; LaCugna 1992:296ff). He states, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). As stated above, it is through the Spirit within us that we can bear witness and join with Christ and cry out “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15-16). And at the end of 2 Corinthians we see Paul praying for the community: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion [*koinōnia*] of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Corinthians 13:13). Edwards (1999:97) provides an excellent summary of Paul’s understanding of *koinōnia* and the role of the Spirit within it:

For Paul, this communion of the Holy Spirit is the life that the Christian community shares, as a reflection and participation of the divine life through the gift of the indwelling Spirit. This redemptive and liberating *koinōnia* is a central dimension of Christian life. It is also a pledge and foretaste of the reconciliation and communion of all things in Christ (Romans 8:18-23).

Cowan and Lee (1997:43) would agree with this. They understand *koinōnia* in Paul to mean being “about relationships where mutuality thrives, where reconciliation—[though] never easy—is expected to occur.” We can see that for Paul the role of the Spirit in the “ministry of reconciliation” is foundational.

John’s Gospel provides us with the image of God revealing God’s relational nature in friendship. God calls us out of slavery and servanthood into friendship with God (cf. John 15:14-15; Edwards 1999; Johnson 1992:217-218; McFague 1987:172). When human beings experience this profound mystery of friendship with the triune God they have no choice but to work in partnership with God so that all God’s people and creation are able to experience God’s perfect reconciling love (cf. Johnson 1992:217-218).

This friendship within the triune God does not blur individual difference, rather quite the opposite. We recall the words of Barth who pointed to the individual persons being quite distinct yet acting in perfect unity. In reflecting on human friendship Johnson (1992:217) states, “the stronger the bond, the more creative of personhood the relationship is.” That is, friendship is achieved not through collapsing individual differences into some homogenized version of sameness, but rather encouraging the

expression of difference and celebrating each person's uniqueness. This is very important to our understanding of individuals and people's reconciling with each other. Their differences are honored, their stories are told to each other so that all can come to see the fundamental connectedness with each other. It is through experiencing mutual relations with one another that unity is achieved. Johnson (1992:217) succinctly captures this when she says, "In love unity and differentiation are correlates rather than opposites of each other." She continues, "It is the peculiar genius of the relation of friendship to be able to create powerful and beneficent bonds of mutuality among distinct human beings and between people and other realities without regard for origin." This is a significant goal of the ministry of reconciliation, and narrative is a particular gift within that ministry (see next chapter).

*The vulnerability of God as the God of mutual relations.* At the heart of mutual relations is freedom. God has created beings to be free to accept or reject God's invitation. The story of the incarnation vividly demonstrates God's preparedness to allow human freedom to influence God's life. As Edwards (1999:40) nicely puts it, "God is not to be understood as absolutely unlimited, but rather is to be seen as a God who freely accepts the limits of loving finite and created beings." This means that God is committed to a relationship in which God becomes vulnerable. This is truly extraordinary as it seems to go against our understanding of God's omnipotence. Reflecting on the seeming paradox of God's power and God's limitedness Walter Kasper (1984:195) comments, "it requires omnipotence to be able to

surrender oneself and give oneself away; and it requires omnipotence to be able to take oneself back in the giving and to preserve the independence and freedom of the recipient.” Johannes Metz (1998) in his superb manuscript on spirituality, *Poverty of Spirit*, points to the power of God in Jesus’ poverty and powerlessness. In commenting on the temptations of Jesus, Metz (1998:10-11) makes the observation:

Satan wants to make Jesus strong, for what the devil really fears is the powerlessness of God in the humanity Christ has assumed. Satan fears the trojan horse of an open human heart that will remain true to its native poverty, suffer the misery and abandonment that is humanity’s, and thus save humankind. Satan’s temptation is an assault on God’s self-renunciation, an enticement to strength, security and spiritual abundance; for these things will obstruct God’s saving approach to humanity in the dark robes of frailty and weakness.

This is not the sort of power we expect to see in God. Yet, we remember that the wisdom of God as revealed through the crucified Christ also appears to be utter foolishness and absurdity to the wisdom of the world. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

“If Christ crucified shapes our picture of divine power” Edwards (1999:41) comments, “then it becomes clear that what is at stake here is the divine capacity for vulnerable loving” (cf. Kasper 1984:195). We can conclude with Edwards (1999:44) that “[t]he theology of the incarnation and the



theology of the cross point to a God of unthinkable vulnerability and self-limitation.” And yet this same unthinkable vulnerability of God on the cross, becomes the very vehicle through which God seeks to reconcile the world (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. Cf. Bosch 1994; Zahniser 1989).

Vulnerability, when freely responded to becomes a gift as it enables the wisdom of God to emerge. While Jesus’ *kenosis* is painfully revealed on the cross the Holy Spirit is at work in raising him from the dead (cf. Philippians 2:7-11). This captures the way that the persons of the triune God do not act in isolation from one another. And so it is with humans who are invited into friendship, into the divine *koinōnia*, to accept the invitation of the Spirit and share in the vulnerability of the cross.

Trinitarian theologians like LaCugna (1992:296ff) point to the way the Holy Spirit unites persons in communion. As she beautifully puts it,

The achievement of communion (*koinōnia*) is the proper work of the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ. The Spirit gathers together in Christ persons who would not otherwise gather, making possible a true union of hearts and minds, the ground of which resides not in individual differences . . . but in the very being of God. . . . The uniqueness of the Spirit’s personhood lies in what the Spirit does . . . uniting everyone and everything through Jesus Christ. (LaCugna 1992:298)

We have seen above how non-trinitarian thinking can result in the polarized “either/or” categories. Trinitarian theology has revealed that the triune God is radically relational, and calls human beings to share in the divine life. The coordinating or animating principle of unity and communion is the

Spirit. We have also come to see that the heart of this radical relationality is a God who freely enters into vulnerability, shown most powerfully as a God who suffers on the cross. Trinitarian thinking abolishes the horizontal and vertical tensions as noted above. We find in the person of the Holy Spirit the principle that works to harmonize such differences into a perfect unity. We cannot afford to forget this animating person in the ministry of reconciliation. We are now well-positioned to explore a particular gift of the Spirit, namely the gift of memory.

*The Holy Spirit and the gift of memory.* The Holy Spirit is vitally concerned with memory. In a sense the Spirit serves to connect the ongoing Christian community with the memory of the words and deeds of Christ. In John's Gospel we have Jesus saying, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Spirit also serves as Jesus' witness (John 15:26-27). Jesus assures his followers that the Spirit will lead them to the truth. Boff (1988:193) points out, that the Spirit leads "always [from] within the perspective of what Jesus himself has said." As John 16:13-15 puts it:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

As the Spirit is vitally concerned with preserving the memory of Christ, it should not be surprising that the Spirit calls followers of Christ to

imitate his life. We recall that Jesus completely emptied himself (*kenosis*), that is, made himself vulnerable. In that same way, “The Spirit makes us live as sons and daughters in our following of the incarnate son, preventing us from forgetting the simplicity, humility, prophetic courage, will to serve others and intimate relationship with the Father that characterized the Son” (Boff 1988:193). The Spirit calls us to remember Jesus’ vulnerability and preparedness to be led into seeming annihilation. The Spirit is the one who demonstrates the power of the vulnerability of the Trinity, through raising Jesus from the dead. Not only does the Spirit serve to coordinate “the bond of peace” between the Father and the Son, the Spirit also works to preserve the “continuity between ‘that time’ when the Son took flesh and the ‘today’ of history” (Boff 1988:193).

John reminds us that the Spirit calls us to remember the words and deeds of Jesus. Similarly, the Spirit calls us to remember all the past accurately, particularly the stories of the powerless and defeated in history. This is of vital concern in the ministry of reconciliation and will be picked up in the next chapter as we discuss the role of memory in narrative.

### *Summary*

If we accept that reconciliation may be emerging as the most important model of mission for our times, then discovering the trinitarian foundation of reconciliation is perhaps one of the most urgent tasks of the contemporary theological project. The trinitarian model for mission, far from being deductive, has the capacity to be profoundly dialogical. Our

discussion on the relationality and radical vulnerability of our triune God highlighted this. Relationality and vulnerability are also cornerstones of a spirituality of reconciliation. Theologically, God's reconciling Spirit is most at work in the vulnerability of people's lives (cf. Romans 8:26). This is why vulnerability distinguishes authentic narrative from superficial narrative. Pastorally, narrative has far greater power when shared in the context of commitment to meaningful and genuine relationships.

The next chapter, on the role of narrative within our Christian tradition and particularly the role of narrative in reconciliation, further develops this understanding of vulnerability. In this sense the importance of vulnerability that surfaced in the above trinitarian discussion continues in the discussion on narrative and the data of the fieldwork that make up the heart of Part II. In the final chapter, we return to further develop some of the trinitarian points raised in the light of the fieldwork. We are now well positioned to begin our exploration of models of narrative theology and the role of story as a significant component of the journey towards reconciliation.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~victorp/liberals/nsw/howard2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~anzau/threads/arm.html>

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that Robert Schreiter's work has become a catalyst for much thinking on reconciliation throughout the world. His work has drawn particular attention from Chinese theologians like John B. Zhang Shijiang (1997) who in his book *Toward a Wider Reconciliation: A Cultural-Theological Reflection on the Division within the Church in China*, has found it useful to reflect on the contemporary division within the Church in China.

<sup>4</sup> Baum is quick to point out that Protestant theology does not inevitably end with a narrow, personal or private expression of reconciliation. He notes that the lead article by Harold Wells (1997:1-15) brought out and developed the public and social significance of classical Protestant teaching in this area.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Thornhill (1983:260-262). Thornhill (1983:261) highlights that in the Scriptures humankind's expiation of sin "refers to the removal of the estrangement between God and man as taking place, *not* through any change in God" but rather "through a change in man whereby he becomes receptive to God's unchanging love." Thornhill (1983:261) notes that the original sense of the term atonement, "(that is, at-one-ment) was simply reconciliation."

<sup>6</sup> Schreiter acknowledges that he draws from a 1986 paper published in Spanish by José Comblin (see Schreiter 1992a, fns. 2 and 8, p.83).

<sup>7</sup> Schreiter refers to 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>8</sup> James Cone (1969, 1975) says such an attitude has trivialized and ignored the sufferings of African-Americans.

<sup>9</sup> This is captured movingly in two award winning novels, Oscar Hijuelos' (1995) *Mr. Ives' Christmas* and David Guterson's (1995) *Snow Falling on*

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*Cedars*. Both explore the way persons struggle over a long period of time to make meaning out of earlier tragedies and hurt.

<sup>10</sup> Protestant theologian, Harold Wells (1997:5) puts it well, “Jesus’ life and teaching are characterized by a certain dialectic, for he holds together, on the one hand, a radical love of the enemy, and, on the other, forthright confrontation with the perpetrators of injustice.”

<sup>11</sup> The phrase “practical reconciliation” has begun to be increasingly used by Prime Minister Howard in 2000 and members of his government. They argue that the emphasis on “practical” issues is far more important to the lives of indigenous-Australians than symbolic statements of apology. Indigenous-Australians have been asking for apology for many years now.

<sup>12</sup> David W. Augsburger (1992) in his exceptional book *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*, follows the same pattern. Unlike most writers in his field, Augsburger (1992:284) recognizes that reconciliation is about transforming relationships. He observantly points out that in the New Testament one of the most frequently used words for forgiveness is *charidzomai*, meaning an act of grace. Nevertheless, the rest of his discussions centered on the expectation in the New Testament that people were expected to forgive. Yes, there is grace that allows this to happen, but “let’s get on with forgiving” seems to be the argument.

<sup>13</sup> This is not meant to take away from God’s call for us to forgive those who hurt us (cf. Matthew 18:21-35). Rather I am highlighting the human relational component between survivor and perpetrator.

<sup>14</sup> *Australian Financial Review Weekly*, April 2000, p.33.

<sup>15</sup> This insight is one that would need to be included in any “strategy of reconciliation.”

<sup>16</sup> This will be picked up further in the discussion on narrative. Storytelling depends on memory. It is the memory that needs to be integrated into the person’s new story.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. John W. de Gruchy 1997:16-29; Schreiter 1992 a. These writers give examples of how those who benefited from the abuse of human rights in Latin America and in South Africa all urged reconciliation as an alternative to bringing about structural change in society.

<sup>18</sup> While Schreiter is among the first to have written explicitly on the ministry of reconciliation and the need for this ministry to be grounded in a spiritual foundation, it should be noted that the Catholic peace movement, *Pax Christi*—that began in the aftermath of World War II when its founding individuals felt the need for reconciliation between France and Germany—has always prioritized the need for spirituality in the peace movement. Cf. *History of Pax Christi* (1992); *Peacemaking with Pax Christi* (date unknown); *Searching for a Spirituality for Peacemakers* (1988). In the last publication *Pax Christi* (1988:3) notes their “prayer grapples with the agonies of human suffering and violence, and also with the joys and hopes of graced moments and works of reconciliation.”

<sup>19</sup> This overwhelming experience of love confronts the person with having to honor self, others, and all of creation. They realize that their life has to change and very often see the “utter rubbish” of life around them (Paul). This experience of love is transformational. When people experience this love they feel obliged to tell others about it. They want others to experience it too. Some will try to promote their newly acquired vision of transforming love through the public arena. Others will do this more privately. Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous capture this. The alcoholic realizes that his or her own recovery is connected with sharing and helping others.

<sup>20</sup> Personal written communication to me in late May 1999. An excellent example of the point I am making is Harold Wells and Gregory Baum’s edited volume (1997), *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*. In Well’s (1997:1-15) lead chapter entitled “Theology for Reconciliation: Biblical Perspectives on Forgiveness and Grace,” he briefly mentions the role of the Holy Spirit, and never mentions the Trinity.

<sup>21</sup> Schreiter draws heavily from the important paper by Johannes Schütte’s “Why Engage in Mission?” that was presented at the 1969 SEDOS conference on mission. Schütte’s paper both highlighted the eschatological

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dimension of mission as well as notes the “salvific function of mission work . . . is in the service of reconciliation” (Schütte 1972:46). The proceedings of the SEDOS conference were published as *Foundations of Mission Theology* (1972).

<sup>22</sup> It has been through sustained reflection on the interface of theology and ecology that trinitarian underpinnings have begun to be developed. An excellent example of this development of thought is the writings of Denis Edwards. His first book on this came out in 1991 titled *Jesus and the Cosmos*. This was followed in 1995 with *Jesus and the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology*. His latest book (1999) title reveals a further development of thought around the Trinity, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology*.

<sup>23</sup> David Suzuki, one of the worlds leading environmentalists dates his conversion to environmentalism when he read Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. “Good Weekend, The *Sydney Morning Herald* Magazine,” April 8 2000, p.24.

<sup>24</sup> An entire dissertation could be given to the Peace Studies movement and its developing understanding of the trinitarian nature of its ministry. For the moment it is sufficient to point to its existence and note some of the major points of connection that it has to the emerging model of mission as reconciliation.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *History of Pax Christi* (1992), and *Peacemaking with Pax Christi* (date unknown).

<sup>26</sup> Leonardo Boff straddles both liberation theology and the emerging eco-theological tradition. His book titles, *Ecology and Liberation* (1995) and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997) show his fusion of liberation theology and eco-theology and eco-spirituality.



## CHAPTER 3

### **Narrative: Remembering Moola Bulla, Remembering Our Story**

My great-uncle, Alan Goldman, was a person with a “shady history.” He had contested his father’s will and in so doing had attempted to deprive his mother of monies that his father had intended to leave to her. After this he was more or less ostracized from the family. He left the area of his family and eventually died years later in suspicious circumstances (unrelated to the family will dispute) in Western Australia.

It seemed that the “rule” in our family was never to mention Alan Goldman’s name. If this rule was broken, talk would be in very low tones, and the subject changed as quickly as possible. Writing and researching this dissertation, particularly its focus on storytelling, has challenged me to discover the connections that my story and my family story have with indigenous-Australians. As stated in the Introduction, the memory of Ian refused to go away. I had to address it. In a similar way the figure of my paternal great-uncle, began to surface. It too needed to be addressed. Through the hushed family discussions that took place whenever his name came up it somehow filtered through to me—I am the eighth and youngest surviving child of nine in my family—that my great-uncle had gone to the Kimberley in Western Australia, and that he had been involved with Aborigines there. I never knew any details, and whether this was true or not.

One of my brothers has been working with Aborigines in the Kimberley for the past five years. I phoned him and asked him directly,

“What do you know about Alan Goldman?” My brother was initially reluctant to tell me what he knew. He was not taken to the idea of my bringing Goldman family history into the public arena. Nevertheless, he was able to put me in touch with sources that helped me learn about the story of my great-uncle and the Aborigines who lived at *Moola Bulla*.

*The Story of Alan Goldman and Moola Bulla*

Moola Bulla lies to the north and west of Halls Creek in the southeastern Kimberley. The Kimberley remains as frontier country in Australia’s west, northwest (see maps in Appendix B).

*Kimberley history: cattle killing and massacres.* Coastal explorations of the Kimberley region first began in 1837, but it would be over 40 years before the first permanent European settlement in the region came about. (That was in the west-Kimberley, just north of Broome, four hundred miles from Moola Bulla.) Reports eventually reached the south that the Kimberley was filled with glorious grazing pastures. Cattle drovers came to the region in the 1880s in search of properties and fortune.

With the arrival of pastoralists a bloody period of contact began. “As cattle fanned out . . . toward the Kimberley, frontier stories were repetitive in their reflection of a remorseless hunger for grazing land” (Swain 1993:233). Green (1981:115) refers to this period as a “long and savage war” against invasion. The history of the Kimberley from the 1880s through to the 1920s is dotted with massacres of Aborigines (cf. Reynolds 1981; Broome 1982). Aborigines were mercilessly massacred for offences such as killing cattle. (Cattle killing became necessary as traditional hunting game became

depleted in the region; this mostly came about due to the introduction of cattle in the region.) Pastoralists would send out “reprisal parties” to punish the Aborigines for this “crime.”<sup>1</sup> (See “Br. Terrence A. Kingston cfc” in Chapter 5 for one such story.)

The great Australian contemporary historian, Henry Reynolds, gives a chapter of his book (1998), *This Whispering in Our Hearts*, to the massacres of Aborigines in the east-Kimberley and Central Australia which were the result of conflict with pastoralists. His account of the Forrest River massacre in the east-Kimberley in 1926 is chilling. (See maps in Appendix B.) In May 1926 William Hay, a cattle station owner was speared to death by Lumbulumbia, the Andedja elder. As Reynolds (1998:178) reports, “The spearing followed a period of increasing tension in the region as large bands of Aborigines moved over the country at the end of the wet season resulting in an increase of cattle killing still endemic in the Kimberley at the time.” When Leonard Overheu, the joint station owner discovered the body of his partner he reported the matter to the police. Drawing from the original historical records, Reynolds’ account of what followed illustrates a typical response found throughout many other parts of Australia.

Four days later [after the initial report to the police] Overheu accompanied the police party . . . It was made up of two police constables, . . . two special constables, . . . two civilians and seven Aboriginal trackers. The party had 42 horses and mules and carried 400 or 500 rounds of ammunition for their Winchester rifles. As the party cantered out of Wyndham the onlookers shouted their encouragement, urging the police to teach the blacks a lesson they would never forget. . . .

Lumbulumbia was quickly captured without violence and with the assistance of several men from the Forrest River mission . . . But the police party assumed a wider brief. In time-honoured fashion

members of the expedition combed the district shooting men, women and children, none of whom had any part in [Hay's] death.

Commissioner Wood concluded that Aborigines had been killed at four sites and their bodies burnt in specially constructed pyres. He believed that as many as twenty people had been disposed of. The Forrest River missionaries believed the death toll may have been as high as 30, recording the names of Aborigines who were never seen again after the punitive expedition. Aboriginal oral evidence recorded many years after the event suggested a much higher death toll, possible amounting to a hundred and more. . . . Whatever the death toll the impact on the local Andedja people was devastating. . . .

The police did everything they could to keep secret their multiple assassinations. They burnt bodies, pulverised bones, buried charred remains, covered or scrubbed blood stains, silenced witnesses and retreated behind the silence of an approving, accommodating community. It had all been done successfully so many times before. (Reynolds 1998:178-180)

*The story of Moola Bulla.* It is partly out of contexts like the one described above that the then Aborigines Department of the West Australian State government purchased and combined three pastoral properties and created Moola Bulla in 1910.<sup>2</sup> Rumley and Toussaint (1990) are the only persons to have published authoritative research on Moola Bulla. They state, "Most accounts of the formation of Moola Bulla stress its intended primary function of resolving the problem of cattle killing by Aborigines" (1990:81). The Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) team in their excellent book, *Moola Bulla: In the Shadow of the Mountain* (1996) notes there were a number of reasons for the government's decision to establish Moola Bulla (1996:120).

It recognised that Aboriginal people across the region were killing cattle for food, and could not be stopped by the conventional and costly means of capture and imprisonment. The Department hoped

that by establishing a ration station where beef was provided to all-comers it could reduce the extent of cattle-killing.

Aboriginal people were to work the property as a functioning cattle station, thereby producing their own food and learning skills that would be of value to the labour-hungry pastoral industry. It was also hoped that the sick and elderly would be cared for at Moola Bulla, to reduce the cost of providing health services across a wide geographic area. (KLRC 1996:120. Cf. Rumley and Toussaint 1990:82-85)

“Moola Bulla was an institution as well as a cattle station” (KLRC 1996:120). A school opened in 1929. A health clinic was established in 1937 (Rumley and Toussaint 1990:93). By around 1937 Moola Bulla “began to function overtly as a detention centre” for Aboriginal law-breakers from all over the Kimberley (Rumley and Toussaint 1990:93. Cf. KLRC 1996). In 1939 a Presbyterian Mission was established.

The government encouraged Aboriginal people to settle at Moola Bulla. The population steadily increased. “During the 1920s the number of Aboriginal people in the main camp was reported . . . between 140 and 170.” Two years prior to its closure in 1955 “there were over 260” (KLRC 1996:120).

Moola Bulla “had turned in a profit as a cattle station for most of the years of its existence” (KLRC 1996:121. Cf. Rumley and Toussaint 1990:89,92,97). From 1949 to 1955 C. L. McBeath managed it. He was a welcome respite from the shocking treatment administered by its previous manager, Mr. Alf George (1940-49).<sup>3</sup> Despite the treatment received by managers like George many Aborigines who were forcibly taken to Moola Bulla grew to feel at home in it (cf. KLRC 1996:149, 153, 159, 167).

*Government sale of Moola Bulla.* In 1955 for reasons that remain unconfirmed the Department put Moola Bulla up for sale. Rumley and Toussaint (1990) have painstakingly researched the case of Moola Bulla and comment, “Given the optimism expressed in published reports, [the] various schemes being proposed and the improvements effected at this time, [the] recommendation in 1954 to close Moola Bulla comes as nothing short of surprising” (1990:100).

Rumley and Toussaint and Goldson<sup>4</sup> point to economic factors being a significant part of the decision to close the station. Rumley and Toussaint (1990:97) note “that Aboriginal workers at Moola Bulla began to receive cash wages almost a year before most Kimberley pastoralists started paying money to their Aboriginal employers.” In 1950 J. Rhatigan reported to the state government on “matters relating to Aboriginal labour in the [Kimberley] region” and noted his concern that some Aborigines “would not be prepared to continue working on stations for low wages” (cited in Rumley and Toussaint 1990:97-98). Prior to the introduction of cash wages Aborigines were mostly paid for their labor<sup>4</sup> with rations of sugar, flour, tobacco, blankets, clothes, and limited quantities of low quality beef (cf. Rumley and Toussaint 1990:87).

After “[e]xamining archival materials and taking account of Aboriginal reminiscences,” Rumley and Toussaint (1990:103) concluded that the only beneficiaries from closing Moola Bulla “were the Kimberley pastoral industry and the state government treasury.”<sup>5</sup>

My great-uncle, Alan Goldman, was the successful tenderer for Moola Bulla. He acted swiftly on his prized purchase. His plan was to close the

school and only keep young men to work on the property (KLRC 1996:171).

Paddy McGinty, a *Kija* elder recounts in his words what happened:

We didn't stay long with Goldman because he wanted all the young people to stay on, working, and shift all the old people away from there, and I think to shift the school away too, I think. So that was against the young people in Moola Bulla, they didn't want to see the old people go, they had home there. Nobody was complaining, but when Goldman said that he would keep the young people to work and the old people to go somewhere else . . . no one stayed. (KLRC 1996:171)

Goldman broke a key condition of the contract that the welfare of the Aborigines' would be the responsibility of the pastoralist.<sup>6</sup> There were heated arguments between Goldman and Native Affairs. At no stage was there consultation with the Aborigines (cf. Rumley and Toussaint 1990:102).<sup>7</sup> *Kija* elder, Violet Rivers confirms this when she recalls,

Some Welfare, they went and had an argument that night . . . they must have had a row, we all didn't know till the morning, everybody was going for work now. My husband went down to work, and he sent his nephew back to tell me to get everything ready, because we all got kicked out. We gotta all move out.

[Interviewer] Goldman time?

Yeah, Goldman time this was, and I didn't believe. I said, "Oh you must be pulling my leg," I said to him.

"No, true Aunty, we going," he said. "Uncle, you gotta get ready."

Everybody was moving around, you know, even down the camp, poor things. They carted the old people first, anyway, with a big truck. . . . (KLRC 1996:146).

Rumley and Toussaint (1990:101) state plainly:

Despite previous agreements that the welfare needs of Aboriginal people from Moola Bulla would be adequately safeguarded and despite the assurances of Mr and Mrs Goldman, . . . that everyone working and residing on the property would be kept on, and

maintained, the fact was that when the Goldmans took possession of Moola Bulla in July 1955, the Aboriginal population was evicted.

The Department helped transport the Moola Bulla residents almost 200 miles to the then United Aborigines Mission in Fitzroy Crossing, where, as the KLRC (1996:121) states, “the Department washed its hands of them.”

Melvina and Nelson Rowley were missionaries (United Aboriginal Missions) at Fitzroy Crossing from 1955 to 1963 in the aftermath of the closure of Moola Bulla. They confirm the swiftness that my great-uncle acted. “They were all put off, told to get off the station. Within twenty-four hours of the person buying the property” (KLRC 1996:189). As Violet Rivers (KLRC 1996:145) puts it, “Mr. Goldman hunted us all [off the property].” “Hunted” was the word Aborigines there used for “moved off” (cf. KLRC 1996:190).

In the twinkling of an eye my great-uncle had forced the removal of the Moola Bulla community which was made up of the traditional landowners of the area as well as third generation residents. The ramifications of the removal were predictably disastrous for those Aborigines. Their landlocked spirituality and value system was violently attacked, yet another example of the clash of time over place. Many of the traditional landowners died pining away in Fitzroy Crossing. Many had not traveled before. They lived in humpies (see glossary) in Fitzroy Crossing under old corrugated iron, where they eventually died.<sup>8</sup> Rumley and Toussaint (1990:102-103) found the following comments from Colin Barrett of Halls Creek, taken in 1982, to typify Aboriginal sentiments about Moola Bulla:



Oh, really good place Moola Bulla was before, sorry we lost that place. Don't know why they sold that place. Break Aboriginal heart, yeh, Moola Bulla got everything because the white man grow that place up, you know, cattle and everything like that . . . Aboriginals done most job in that place, not white people. Aboriginal done a lot of yard building, fence, they done everything in that station, not most the white people. Yes, we bin sorry we left that place. Don't know why welfare mob sold that place . . . We like to get Moola Bulla back . . . that we thinking about . . . Moola Bulla better country than this one [Halls Creek]. Good place, plenty tucker as well.

Barrett's comments are echoed by Sam Butters—*Kija* elder—when he recounts what happened and its ongoing impact in the community.

When old Alf George left and McBeath took over — that they didn't want to leave that place, it was a home for just about all Aboriginal, didn't matter where you came from.

Why they sold Moola Bulla I can't rightly know. Some say there were too many people on it, I don't know why they couldn't . . . there were two other, small outstations to cater for some of the people. If they had kept a lot of people there, there wouldn't be these social problems here in Halls Creek, you know, in town, if they were still out there at Moola Bulla. *They would have had a place to stay*, but they were all pushed out of there and most people around Halls Creek, all with the same problem, drinking problem, getting in trouble, all, that wouldn't have happened. *They just ripped the place up . . .* (KLRC 1996:159-160) (italics mine)

Kate Goldson confirms that the surviving persons from Moola Bulla are still mystified as to why they were removed. Goldson says she was stunned by the confusion that still exists in the people there.<sup>9</sup>

My great-uncle sold Moola Bulla almost as swiftly as he forced the removal of the people living there—selling the property for a ten fold profit less than three years after buying it. From my great-uncle's time up until the present, the Aborigines from Moola Bulla, which includes the *Kija*

traditional landowners of Moola Bulla, have been forbidden to set foot on the property without seeking and gaining permission from the station owner.<sup>10</sup> Goldson believes that “Moola Bulla is as infamous for nobody being able to get on it, as much as what happened in the past.”<sup>11</sup> It is particularly painful, as the front gates of Moola Bulla lie no further than five miles from Halls Creek where many of the people and their descendants now live.

In 1996, the *Kija* Traditional Owners of Moola Bulla lodged a Native Title claim for the property. The present owner would not sit down with the claimants at a Native Title Tribunal meeting.<sup>12</sup> According to the principles of the Mabo and Wik legislation the traditional owners of Moola Bulla have almost no chance of gaining freehold title. They may be granted some access rights.<sup>13</sup> The *Kija* tribe is now considered by many to be the most dispossessed group in the Kimberley.<sup>14</sup>

### *Conversion from “Bystander” to “Storyteller”*

Up until I uncovered my great-uncle’s story I had thought I had no direct connection with the dispossession of indigenous people in Australia—I belonged to the great number who identified as “bystander.” The story of my great-uncle reveals how closely connected I am. The forced removal of Aborigines from Moola Bulla occurred less than eight years before I was born. It struck me that I could no longer present myself to others as merely an observer of the struggle of indigenous-Australians. By virtue of my family history I am more deeply connected to the struggle and history of indigenous-Australians than I previously had thought. To be sure,

it has been a painful way to become more connected with the struggle of the indigenous people of this land. It shattered the image I had of being a bystander. Through uncovering my great-uncle's story I was being challenged to enter into a broader history and story than I previously had known. (This is a good example of what I see as the difference between experiencing "shame" and "guilt" which I mentioned in the Introductory Chapter. While I am ashamed of the actions of my great-uncle, I do not experience guilt. I am not responsible for the actions of my great-uncle. In a sense, expressing my shame for what happens works to remove the possibility of having associated toxic guilt feelings over the past actions of my great-uncle.)

*Connecting with the indigenous people of Moola Bulla.* In August 1998, I was invited to present at a workshop for a large regional Reconciliation Conference at Mackay in Central Queensland. The workshop was entitled, "The Church and Reconciliation." I decided to share my story about Ian, as well as my great-uncle's story and Moola Bulla. There were around sixty people at the workshop. As the conference was being held in Central Queensland I was not overly surprised that no one had heard of Moola Bulla. The next day, Mr. Mick Dodson, a Commissioner for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission was giving a keynote address to the Conference body. Soon into his review of the Stolen Generation Report, Mr. Dodson began to share a little of his family history. He told the conference that his family was from the Kimberley, and that some of his ancestors were sent from the west Kimberley to a penal sort of settlement called Moola Bulla. He explained that Moola Bulla was a place

where Aborigines who fought the system were sent for punishment. Then Dodson painfully noted that the State Government decided to sell the property to some white pastoralist who proceeded to immediately kick the community off the property. Until this day, Dodson continued, his people are forbidden to visit the land where their ancestors are buried. I was stunned. I wished the conference auditorium could have opened up and swallowed me. The previous day I had given the story from my historical perspective and now the pain and brutality of the story was brought to a deeper level. Nothing could have prepared me for witnessing the pain that I felt when Mr. Dodson spoke. After the session was over, I had an opportunity to see Mr. Dodson. He was busy signing autographs for his many supporters. I felt a need to apologize to him on behalf of my great-uncle. I went up to him and said, "I'm Alan Goldman's grand-nephew. I am deeply sorry for what my great-uncle did to your people at Moola Bulla. I had yesterday told this story at the 'Church and Reconciliation workshop.'" Mr. Dodson stopped, looked up at me, and said, "Moola Bulla?" I said, "yes." And with this more people came to speak to him and have him sign his autograph.

Nothing more than this took place. There was no sense of profound forgiveness. All I knew was that I needed to make contact with him and let him know that I was trying to uncover my family story and connect it with the story of the indigenous people of this land.

### *Stories, Basic to Human Experience*

As stated earlier, narrative cannot serve as a panacea for all the pain and hurting in our world. To be sure, we are increasingly coming to understand the power and mystery of narrative, and as Christians, our theology, witness, and identity is caught up in being people of the story of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are coming to realize that the story that commenced in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection continues through the living body of Christ's believers and followers. Nevertheless, narrative is only one component of the mysterious movement of reconciliation. For example, in the marvelous experiment that is occurring in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been one part of a broader socio-economic and political package of healing. Even though the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may prove to be one of the most powerful catalysts for God's reconciling activity in South Africa it would be unfortunate to reduce the movement of God there to this one human effort. With this in mind we can now turn to a sustained exploration of some key aspects of narrative.

#### *Narrative Theology*

Narrative theologians argue that theology has always been and always will be connected to, and derived from, story (cf. McFague 1975; Navone 1990; Bausch 1984). Sallie McFague points to the story par excellence in the Christian tradition, namely, the story of Jesus of Nazareth. His story unites the mundane and transcendent. God choosing to be with us as we are

serves to honor our human story. Theology must account for this.<sup>15</sup>

McFague (1975:139) declares:

To see belief not as a set of beliefs but as a story, an experience of coming to belief, means that theological reflection ought itself to be shaped by the story, take to itself, both in form and content, the story. Theological reflection of the sort I have in mind would be narrative and concrete, telling stories—after all, even the creeds, those monuments of doctrinal formulation, do this!

John Navone and Thomas Cooper (1981: xvi-xvii) echo this when they point out:

Since story is the only means by which the interpersonal reality of humankind can be expressed in its cognitive and affective fullness and since our relationship to God is fundamentally interpersonal, it follows that storytelling and storylistening provide the most appropriate means of enabling us to live this relationship.

Story form is not only important to Christians. It is important in the lives of all persons. Stephen Crites (1968:68) draws our attention to the link between story and identity. He states a person's "sense of his own identity seems largely determined by the kind of story which he understands himself to have been enacting through the events of his career, the story of his life."

Stories are basic to human experience. McFague (1975:140) adroitly states: "We learn who we are through the stories we embrace as our own—the story of my life is structured by the larger stories (social, political, mythic) in which I understand my personal story to take place." Stories tell us where we are going and where we have come from. The gospel story does this and more; it is highly eschatological, it is "a story of hope."

*Stephen Crites' "narrative quality of experience."* Crites (1971:291) enunciates that "the formal quality of our experience through time is

inherently narrative.” He believes that mundane stories and sacred stories interpenetrate each other. The mundane stories, the ordinary story of life are “among the most important means by which people articulate and clarify their sense of [the] world” (1971:296). He believes the mediating form between sacred and a mundane story is our experience (1971:297).

What gives our experience coherence is our memory (1971:298). Our memory is in a dramatic tension between the past, present, and future. He points out “Memory, containing the past, is only one modality of experience, that never exists in isolation from those that are oriented to the present and the future” (1971:301). We remember that only the present exists, but it exists in these tensed modalities. They are inseparably enjoined in the present itself. Crites here exclaims “Narrative alone can contain the full temporality of experience in unity of form” (1971:303).

While this narrative form of human experience may be “primitive” it is by no means “innocent” (1971:306). Crites insisted that narrative form—not symbol—is primary. Symbols can only be understood in the context of the whole story (cf. Geertz 1973:126ff; Arbuckle 1990:34ff; Luzbetak 1988:266ff; Kraft 1979:54ff). To claim otherwise Crites (1971:307) states is “to presuppose an atomism of experience.” Social revolution or conversion can only come about through a “traumatic change in a [person’s] story” (1971:307). He continues:

The stories within which he has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of his personal story through a new story both the drama of his experience and his style of action must be reoriented. Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness. (1971:307)

Crites concludes:

This revolutionary story has united children of poverty and the alienated children of abundance in a common moral passion and a common sense of the meaning of their experience . . . [The story] makes it possible to recover a living past, to believe again in the future, to perform acts that have significance for the person who acts. By so doing it restores a human form of experience. (1971:311)

*Narrative creates subjecthood.* The genius of narrative is that it enables people to become subjects of their own experience. Stories are about the narrative quality of human experience. McFague (1975:138) advances the point: “in a sense, any story is about ourselves, and a good story is *good* precisely because somehow it rings true to human life.” She continues: “We love stories, then, because our lives are stories and we recognize in the attempts of others to move, temporally and painfully, our own story” (McFague 1975:138-139). As already stated, stories are basic to human experience. They are our identity.

Bausch (1984:33) casts the net of narrative even further when he states: “A person without a story is a person with amnesia. A country without a story has ceased to exist. A humanity without a story has lost its soul.”

Don Carrington (1989)<sup>16</sup> has long been involved in theological education among tribal Aborigines in northern Australia. He felt that narrative had the power to help Aborigines regain an authentic sense of subjecthood.<sup>17</sup> Carrington devised a workshop strategy employing storytelling and storylistening. The goal was to develop community empowerment. He comments:



The workshop was conceived using alternative methodologies and the apparent foolishness of stories in an effort to open the way for the empowerment of Aboriginal leaders, in and of themselves. . . . Biblical and cultural stories were used as catalysts in a process of affirming self-worth with participants who had been “objects” of many development projects over the years. . . . [T]he workshop did in fact succeed in facilitating a “developmental paradigm shift” such that the people . . . [began] to grasp their new role as “subjects” in control of their own history. (Carrington and Hogarth 1989:1)

*Narrative creates and restores common memory and identity.*

Memory, remembering, and identity are key components within narrative. A discussion on their importance within narrative clearly shows the connection between narrative and the process of reconciliation.

People and societies must accurately remember the past in order to move toward the future with an authentic sense of subjecthood and hope of healing. The stories and memory of those who have suffered in the past must be heard. Their stories are often the catalysts for bystanders and perpetrators to begin naming and uncovering their own story. The stories of survivors point us towards the truth. Alex Boraine (1995: xv-xvi), writing from the context of South Africa points out: “Unless society exposes itself to the truth, it can harbour no possibility of reconciliation, reunification and trust. For a peace settlement to be solid and durable it must be based on truth.”

*Acknowledging the suffering of survivors.* Mamphela Ramphele (1995:35) believes that a precondition for a victim’s healing is “an acknowledgment of one’s suffering. . . . Acknowledgment is an affirmation that one’s pain is real and worthy of attention.” Marlene Bosset (1995:89-90) speaking as a clinical psychiatrist reiterates these points. She notes that

recovery for a victim begins by naming and claiming the injury (cf. Herman 1992). Once people name their injuries they can begin the process of regaining their sense of power and ultimately can create a new self out of the old experience.

*Making connection with our past.* Remembering helps us make connection with our past. The past is central to our identity, because we are in a very real sense constituted by our past. H. Richard Niebuhr (1941:117) comments:

Our past is our present in our conscious and unconscious memory. To understand such a present past is to understand one's self and, through understanding, to reconstruct. . . . To remember all that is in our past and so in our present is to achieve unity of self. *To remember the human past as our own past is to achieve community with mankind.* (Italics mine)

“[S]torytellers are out, not to plague our memories,” rather they “help us remember, and in remembering to confess and in confessing to be made whole” (Bausch 1984:36).<sup>18</sup> It seems the more we remember the more we become whole. McFague believes our stories and the stories of others point to *self-knowledge*. That is, we become more conscious of others and ourselves. McFague (1975:150) states: “Not only from my own story do I learn who I am, but also from the stories of others.” This is like John Dunne's understanding of “passing over.” We pass over into the other's story so as to return with more knowledge about our self. *In the listening to the other we are confronted with ourselves* (cf. Dunne 1969:7).

*The link between remembering and conversion.* Niebuhr likens remembering to conversion. When we realize that our being comes from the community that lived before us and the community of the present we realize

that we are deeply connected with our history. Niebuhr (1941:117) says, “Without the integration of the personal and social past there can be no present integrity of the self nor anything like human brotherhood.” Nations and persons must recognize their vital connection to the past. The past is indeed the present because it lives on through memory repressed or conscious.

Connection to and integration of the past does not mean responsibility for the past. One generation does not necessarily have responsibility for the actions of a previous generation. This is a common misconception among many people and is used by those who prefer to ignore the stories of suffering in the past and how that suffering comes into the present. It is particularly evident in the position of Prime Minister Howard when he opines, “we should not have to apologise for something which occurred in the past which was legal at the time and done by people with benign intent”<sup>19</sup> or when he argues, “The issue of indigenous people in this country is very difficult, but the majority of Australians don’t like being told they should be apologising for something they didn’t do [read: not responsible for].”<sup>20</sup> Prime Minister Howard says he eschews an apology to indigenous-Australians because he sees such an apology as being linked to “inter-generational guilt.”<sup>21</sup> The “responsibility/connection” distinction is mirrored in the “shame/guilt” distinction that was referred to in the Introduction. There is however a need to recognize that one generation is profoundly connected to the actions of the previous generation. For example, a future generation can benefit from the actions of the one that went before it. Survivors of one generation may legitimately seek justice, reparation, and reconciliation for their suffering so that the disadvantages and trauma of the past are not handed down completely to the next generation. In this sense

we are responsible for working to ensure that the hurts of the past are not repeated, and that wherever possible those hurts are lovingly responded to.

Attitudes like the one shown above by Prime Minister Howard, though regrettable, are understandable. Prime Minister Howard like many others is unable to make meaningful connection with the stories of those outside his meaning system. Cowan and Lee (1997:86) recognize that “conversation requires a receptivity to otherness which always puts our world of meaning at risk.” The source of that “risk” they say “is clear: the other’s communication has the power to affect our world view, that overarching interpretation of life itself through which we maintain coherent meaning” (1997:86). They conclude with biting insight, “To have the meaning of one’s very existence called into question is the ultimate risk for creatures of meaning. There may be no one with greater power to confirm or disconfirm our identities and values than those in the category of ‘enemy’” (1997:86). This is what Stephen Crites (1971:306) means when he says that narrative form of human experience is not “innocent.” The stories we tell, and those we do not tell, tell us about our identities, about the meaning we apply to ourselves. The stories of the Stolen Generations, the Mabo and Wik decisions, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report, all contain “stories” of Australia’s past that cut to the very heart of much of Australian history and identity; they reveal a story that has either been silenced, ignored, or both.

People such as Senator Herron argue, “You can’t judge attitudes of the past by attitudes of the present.”<sup>22</sup> “The problem with this argument” journalist Tony Walker comments “is that we are living in the present and victims among Aborigines of this [Stolen Generation policy] are still with us, and indeed are among the leaders of the Aboriginal community.” Walker

goes on to point out, “Herron’s paternalistic view [the forced removal of Aboriginal children was done with ‘benign intent’] invites the observation that it is he who is trapped in the past and, like his Prime Minister, [is] unable to make the leap into the present. The two are quite simply on the wrong side of history.”<sup>23</sup>

In order to enter into the truth of these stories leaders and individuals need to enter into mutual relationships with the other, mutual relationships that “requires exchanges in mutual vulnerability” (Cowan and Lee 1997:87). The mutual vulnerability required is the opposite of Prime Minister Howard and Senator Herron’s position. Earlier on in the above interview with Prime Minister Howard he commented on the difference of his stance on indigenous issues to that of his predecessor and justified his position by explaining, “I’m a social conservative . . . I’m not going to change [my position].” Prime Minister Howard has clearly indicated that he has no receptivity to the truth of the other’s story, the truth of the other will be unable to move him.

The positions of people like Prime Minister Howard are unhelpful, particularly when they are in crucial roles of leadership, as persons and nations need to be always on the way to becoming increasingly connected with the past and present. Jean Vanier (1993: xv) believes “that the world will only change as people’s hearts change and as people open themselves to love and tenderness.” He broadens the discussion when he states, “Our political and economic structures reflect our inner fears; they can only be changed as hearts change” (xv). And pointing back to the need to be open to the stories of others he adds, “we must become attentive to . . . the wounded, the fragile and the lonely people. It is as this current of life grows stronger that structures will change” (xvi). Nations and communities require leaders

who can enter into conversation with others and be prepared to change if the weight of evidence points in that direction. This should be viewed as a sign of strength in a leader. A weak leader is one who ineffectually clings to a position that reflects the narrative of a past and refuses to move into the present with a redeeming narrative that has renewed vitality and authenticity for the healing of the nation.

Becoming connected can be equated with conversion, and Niebuhr (1941:118) notes that this conversion must be never-ending. In a fascinating observation that speaks tellingly to such nations as Australia trying to come to terms with their history Niebuhr states: “[conversion] must go on throughout the whole of the life-time because the past is infinite and because sin enters anew in repeated efforts to separate ourselves from God and our fellow-man through the separation of our past from them” (1941:118). He continues, “The conversion of the past must be continuous because the problems of reconciliation arise in every present.” The truth of this statement is glaringly obvious in contemporary Australia’s struggle towards meaningful reconciliation.

### *Creating Common Memory—Building Relationships from Difference*

Charles Villa-Vicencio (1995) in his important article, “Telling One Another Stories: Towards a Theology of Reconciliation” explores the manner in which narrative can help create common memory. Villa-Vicencio (1995:105) asserts that *we need to recognize the reality of human difference*. A result of our differences is that we have lived different histories. Thus, we have different stories reflecting our fundamental differences.

Narrative has the power to transcend the boundaries of difference. Narrative can help us transcend our limitations, broaden our horizons and therefore become able to create a new, enriched story that holds together the disparate pieces of human life.

*Linking common memory and community.* Niebuhr reminds us that where people lack common memory there can be no real community. As such community building means creating common memory. Storytelling has a crucial role in the development of shared memory. Niebuhr (1941:115) warns us: “The measure of our distance from each other in our nations and our groups can be taken noting the divergence, the separateness and the lack of sympathy in our social memories. Conversely, the measure of our unity is the extent of our common memory.” This same point is being discovered again and again in truth and reconciliation commissions around the world. José Zalaquett (1994:13) commenting from Chile’s experience states:

A society cannot reconcile itself on the grounds of a divided memory. Since memory is identity, this would result in a divided identity. . . . Clearly, key aspects of the historical and ethical past must be put on the public record in such a manner that no one can in good faith deny the past. Without truth and acknowledgment, reconciliation is not possible.

*Linking common memory and identity.* Antjie Krog (1995:115) an Afrikaner poet quotes Zalaquett who warns: “Identities consisting of false or half memories easily commit atrocities.” She argues (1995:115) that until we hear the memories of those from another perspective we only have half a memory. Her words about South Africa can easily be applied to Australia:

Every one of us has half a memory. Therefore every one of us has a malformed identity which is unsure of how to deal with the reality as it now opens up to us. That morally corrupt system [apartheid] has corrupted the fibre of our society; no one has totally escaped.  
(1995:115)

Australia presently lies in this state of deciding whether it will have a common memory. Somehow we need to remember the past horrors in a way that endeavors to create a new collective memory. This is the crucial code to be cracked. We must seek to understand how people perceive the past differently. We know that fully objective truth is impossible. But we do know that something incredibly tragic happened. This can not be cast aside into postmodern relativity.

*Listening to the truth, gaining memory.* Cone says that without objective truth all we can do is express to the world our lived story. Cone (1975:102-103) believes that it is only through sharing stories that people can discover that difference is not an impenetrable barrier to relationship. In his words:

What I can do is to bear witness to my story, to tell it and live it, as the story grips my life and pulls me out of nothingness into being. However, I am not imprisoned within my story. Indeed, when I understand truth as story, I am more likely to be open to other people's truth stories. As I listen to other stories, I am invited to move out of the subjectivity of my own story and into the realm of thinking and acting. This same is true for others when I tell my story.

When people can no longer listen to each other's story they become trapped into their own distorted view of reality. When this happens Cone (1975:103) argues: "they feel that they must destroy other stories, which bear witness that life can be lived in another way." We recall that the desire to maintain meaning and identity are the reasons that underpin resistance to



the truth of the other's story. Metz (1972:15) reminds us that the memories and stories of the other can be dangerous for the dominant group as those memories work to "subvert [their] structures of plausibility." As such, persons and communities can only be receptive to the truth of the other if they are prepared to put their interpretation of life on hold. They must risk entering into a place of vulnerable mutuality that can allow for "the painful realization that something else might, and perhaps should, be the case with our life" (Cowan and Lee 1997:88). This is what Metz means when he says the dangerous memories "make demands" on the dominant group. Cowan and Lee (1997:1) drawing from the insights of Metz observe: "Those memories [of the other will] often feel like a danger because they make us face the fragility and mutability of the world we know well and in which we are relatively comfortable." If persons and communities are unable to embrace the "danger" of the other, if they are not prepared for the "demands" of listening to the memories of others, they will remain unwilling to expand their horizon. In this scenario a divided memory will continue to ensue.

Gadamer's understanding of a fusion of horizons is helpful to this discussion. Gadamer (1988:272) says:

[the fusion of horizons] always involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other. The concept of the "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the wide, superior vision that the person who is seeking to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion.

Krog (1995:116) believes we only get to truth through a commitment to listening to “the uninterrupted telling of experiences as perceived by the victims.” She adds:

These stories should be recorded with respect to the individual’s language, vocabulary, accent and rhythm. They should not be written down as detached statistical cases or objective, factual minutes but should be testimony to the humanity of the people who suffered. Only in this way will the entire population, black and white, be part of the healing process and be able to form a new identity as South Africans. (1995:116)

The words of Krog above cut to the heart of the Australian Government’s present response to the stories of the Stolen Generations; a government policy practice where indigenous children were taken from their families and placed into White run institutions or into White families. The goal of the practice was that the Aborigines would be completely assimilated into mainstream White Australian culture. The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (Commonwealth of Australia 1997) released its groundbreaking report, *Bringing Them Home*, that graphically illustrated the devastation of the policies on the indigenous-Australian community. The 600 pages of the report were dotted with the real life stories of survivors from this policy—a policy that only ceased officially in 1971. At the time of the release there was a groundswell of goodwill towards the indigenous-Australian community. Community, church, and some local and all state governments, issued statements of genuine apology and sorrow for what had happened and acknowledged their contribution to those past policies. One million Australians signed “Sorry Books” in which they had an opportunity to register their shame for the past and their support

for ongoing reconciliation with indigenous-Australians. As noted earlier, at the national Aboriginal Reconciliation Convention in May 1997, Prime Minister Howard refused to offer an apology to the indigenous community on behalf of the Australian Government. Recent events in early April 2000 have soured this even further, with the Federal Government Senate submission on the Human Rights Commission Report, claiming “There was never a ‘generation’ of stolen people.”<sup>24</sup> An essential part of the logic for the Federal Government was the understanding that ten per cent of indigenous children removed does not make a generation.

The Federal Government has done the very thing that Antjie Krog warns against, that is, the stories of survivors “should not be written down as detached statistical cases.” The response of the Federal Government has completely failed to recognize the spiritual and moral quality of the “testimony of the people who suffered.” This has led to some indigenous leaders calling the government’s response a “*terra nullius of spirit*.” The Government has reduced the stories of suffering to a semantic discussion on terminology. It should be noted that implicit in the government’s response is the fear of financial compensation for the survivors. As Senator Herron, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Affairs said on 3 April 2000, “If you say every Aboriginal person has been affected in this era [of Stolen Generations], then how much money are you going to pay to compensate them for those effects?”<sup>25</sup>

People need to see their stories in the context of each other’s. (This is the focus of Chapter 5.) It is only in this way that people may be able to start making points of connection between their story and another.

Australians, particularly Anglo-Australians, are in need of hearing the stories of indigenous-Australians. It is only when those forgotten and ignored stories are raised and listened to without interruption, that they can begin to penetrate the narrative of the lie of much of Australian history. When this occurs, a more authentic Australian history can be recorded, understood, and ultimately responded to in an appropriate manner; a manner that brings Australians together, not separates us from each other.

The dominant view of history attempted to silence the truth of others' experience. It is impossible, however, to ignore the past successfully. Niebuhr (1941:113) explains: "We do not destroy this past of ours; it is indestructible. We carry it with us; its record is written deep into our lives." Many try to repress the past; they try to stamp out any evidence that certain actions in the past ever happened. This becomes a matter of repressed shame. (See the discussion on this in Chapters 5 and 6.) Niebuhr (1941:113-114) continues: "this unremembered past endures. . . . Our buried past is mighty; the ghosts of our fathers and of the selves that we have been haunt our days and nights though we refuse to acknowledge their presence."

The voices and stories of the oppressed must become part of the fabric of the whole nation for reconciliation to occur. Their story is going to erupt again and again until it is heard. It is in uncovering their story that the possibility of healing occurs. This is courageous for persons and nations to do. Transcending our own memory and being open to the other's experience requires openness to a vulnerability that is rare in leadership and people (cf. Villa-Vicencio 1995:114. See Part II for further discussion of this).

### *Storytelling Requires Vulnerability*

It is hard to tell stories about our intimate memories. Narrative requires a certain amount of vulnerability in both the teller and the listener. Almost to show the power of God at work in reconciliation it is invariably those who have been most wounded who take the lead in narrative (Schreier 1992a:43). Perpetrators of abuse, and bystanders, are almost always initially reluctant to tell their story. They mostly tell their story because they have discovered the humanity—and often the offer of forgiveness—of the survivor. This is the power of narrative. As stated earlier reconciliation can never be forced or manufactured. While reconciliation is ultimately pure gift from our triune God we know that the Spirit desires our participation in the reconciling mystery of God. We have seen that the Spirit is particularly at work in the gift of memory. Memory is activated in a special way through storytelling and storylistening. This is why we have chosen in Part II to examine storytelling as potentially the sacred ground of reconciliation.

### *Summary*

On one occasion when I presented the story of my great-uncle at a reconciliation retreat to a gathering of Christian leaders one responded by saying, “You have laid down a challenge for me. I don’t know if I want to discover any skeletons in my family history.” This comment captures precisely the heart of this dissertation. Does storytelling increase the likelihood that people will make connections with the other’s story? And if we are able to share our story with one another, does it increase our shared and common memory?

These questions are an excellent bridge for us between Parts I and II. We are now ready to begin Part II to test whether my hunch that narrative is an important tool in promoting reconciliation is accurate or not. Part II begins with an explanation of my fieldwork practice and how those results shaped the way the three chapters in Part II were written. I will show the methodology that I used as well as the types of questions asked during the interviews. Chapter 4 looks at the potential level of difficulty that persons may have when talking about their experiences around reconciliation. Chapter 5 explores whether people experience narrative as a relational and interactive dynamic in their lives. Chapter 6 examines whether narrative produces any change in a person's perception about what reconciliation actually means, particularly in the person's perception of what is needed for reconciliation between indigenous Australians and the broader Australian community.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> It appears that not all the cattle killing was done by Aborigines. In a remarkable case in 1914, two Halls Creek police constables were charged with “improperly using police equipment for cattle killing” (cf. Rumley and Toussaint 1990:90). The two police constables pleaded that their offence was “established custom.” As Rumley and Toussaint (1990:90) note, “The questions of established by whom?” and “for how long?” remain unanswered. They conclude, “while the scale of cattle killing by police may not have been extensive, it nevertheless remains that numbers of reported incidents of cattle killing by Aborigines in the area over the years could well have been exaggerated and Aborigines wrongly accused and convicted.”

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, “Moola Bulla today is one of the largest and most valuable pastoral properties in the Kimberley” (Kimberley Language Resource Center 1996:120).

<sup>3</sup> It was not uncommon in Alf George’s period of management for Aboriginal men to be given electric shocks by having wires attached to the men’s testes. This was done so as to discourage them from escaping back to their communities, or killing cattle for extra beef (cf. KRLC 1996:136-137). On one occasion Mr. George kicked a young girl so hard that she died a few days later in hospital (cf. KRLC 1996 150-151). In 1950, the first year of the new Commissioner for Native Affairs, “George was convicted of an offence under the Brands Act and dismissed as manager of Moola Bulla” (Rumley and Toussaint 1990:96).

<sup>4</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson was a researcher and project officer for the Kimberley Land Council. She believes the introduction of limited wages for “half-caste” workers in 1953 was a significant economic development in the Kimberley that most pastoralists resisted having to pay. Telephone interview 16 February 1999. All other information from her was gained from same telephone interview.

<sup>5</sup> There is much anecdotal evidence to support this claim. The missionaries who were swamped at Fitzroy Crossing by the Moola Bulla evacuees stated at the time: “Many were the telegrams received from the managers of cattle and sheep stations throughout the Kimberleys, seeking employees. . . . The demand was so great that not all the stations could be supplied with labour.” (Cited in Rumley and Toussaint 1990:101).

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<sup>6</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson.

<sup>7</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson.

<sup>8</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson.

<sup>9</sup> Goldson believes it reflects the lack of control these people had to determine their own lives.

<sup>10</sup> Goldson noted that “the people in the town [Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing] are locked out of their cultural home [Moola Bulla].” She believes “access to the station would bring immense psychological help to the people.” She explained, “The cultural trips [day trips that occur rarely] are amazing. The people seem to let go of their town problems. It reinvigorates them. Makes them alive. People talk more when they are out there.”

<sup>11</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson.

<sup>12</sup> Ms. Kate Goldson.

<sup>13</sup> This is the considered opinion of a lawyer who knows the case very well. For matters of confidentiality, this person must remain an unnamed source.

<sup>14</sup> Statement by Mr. Bernard Goldman, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council Regional Coordinator, East Kimberley, telephone conversation 13 February 1999.

<sup>15</sup> For many other examples of narrative theology see: R. Chopp (1995); G. Comstock (1987a, 1987b); S. Hauerwas and G. L. Jones, eds. (1989); G. Hunsinger and W. Placher, eds. (1993); P. Killen and J. de Beer (1995); J. McClendon (1974); G. Stroup (1981).

<sup>16</sup> There are two authors for this article, Don Carrington and Johnathon Hogarth. Carrington is the senior partner in this article. While they list two authors, the model emerged from Carrington’s long history of ministry in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.



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<sup>17</sup> Under the forces of colonialism indigenous-Australians have long suffered from being seen as objects for others' use. Others felt "they knew what was best for them." Government policies of paternalism and assimilation were put in place for the latter half of the twentieth century.

<sup>18</sup> Bausch acknowledges the influence of the writings of Henri Nouwen for this thought.

<sup>19</sup> *The Australian Financial Review*, 7 April 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Interview in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 9 April 2000, p.94.

<sup>21</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April 2000, p.6.

<sup>22</sup> *The Australian Financial Review*, 7 April 2000.

<sup>23</sup> *The Australian Financial Review*, 7 April 2000.

<sup>24</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 2000, Editorial, p.14.

<sup>25</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 2000, p.1. In the same Senate submission, Senator Herron wrote, "the Government believes there is no practical or equitable way of paying cash compensation."

**PART II:**

**RECONCILING NARRATIVES,  
RECONCILING HISTORY**

## **INTRODUCTION TO PART II:**

### **Collecting Narratives, Working Narratives**

This dissertation sets out to examine three particular areas of narrative and reconciliation: the level of difficulty people experience in telling their story (Chapter 4); whether narrative functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in people's lives (Chapter 5); and, whether narrative actually serves to promote the possibility of reconciliation between peoples (Chapter 6).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 each draws from the data of the fieldwork interviews (see "A Walk through the Interview Schedule" below). In each chapter, representative interviews are used to shed light on the particular area under focus. Each chapter will commence with narratives by Aborigines, followed by those of Anglo-Australians, and finishing with narratives by Anglo-Australian missionaries. A glossary of Australian words and expressions used in the interviews can be found on the last page of the dissertation.

As stated in the Introduction, I interviewed twelve Aborigines, ten Anglo-Australians, and nine Anglo-Australian missionaries (one of whom would be classified as a lay missionary). These interviews were done during a six-week fieldwork period in June and July 1998. While the interviews for the fieldwork took place in June and July, I had made two brief visits to the community in the first half of 1998 so as to renew relationships with the Aborigines and missionaries there.

All the Aborigines interviewed fell into the category of “survivor,” with one Aborigine having the “perpetrator” label applied as well. All Anglo-Australians interviewed could be labeled “bystanders,” as could all the missionaries. As it turned out, only one missionary came under the “perpetrator” category.

The method for the following three chapters has been influenced by the work of Robert Bellah and colleagues (1985) in their book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Following along the lines of Bellah and colleagues, each chapter will open with a series of narratives. These narratives will be divided and subtitled in the following manner; “Aboriginal Voices,” “The Voices of Anglo-Australians,” and “The Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries.” Each group of narratives will be briefly summarized and discussed before the next group of narratives is presented. The final component of each chapter will be a synthesis of the points raised from all the groups of narratives.

Chapter 6, while continuing along the lines of the above mentioned methodology, has employed a slight stylistic change from the other two chapters. The method of opening with a series of narratives is altered in favor of snippets from the total pool of narratives gathered as part of a commentary on the main themes that emerged. Those persons heard from in Chapters 4 and 5 return. We also hear from others for the first time. The other slight change is the decision to group “The Voices of Anglo-Australians” and “The Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries” together. As this chapter dealt with the national issue of reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians it seemed more appropriate to hear the

views of all Anglo-Australians as one group. Any differences between missionaries and other Anglo-Australians is noted and commented on.

While I interviewed thirty-one people it needs to be pointed out that I do not quote from all of these. Eleven of the twelve interviews with Aborigines are directly referred to. Nine of the ten Anglo-Australians are referred to, as are eight of nine missionaries. This brings a total of three of the thirty-one interviews not being directly referred to. My main reasons for not referring directly to all interviews was to avoid repetition for the reader and to make best use of those interviewees with greatest degree of articulation of ideas and feelings. The three that I did not directly refer to were not ignored because they were contradictory to the thesis. Those interviews were consistent with the others. As such, those selected are representative of the whole corpus of the interviews.

In the short conclusion to this study, I will return to pastoral action where the findings of the research will be summarized, with suggestions for what this may mean for the ministry of reconciliation in Wadeye, Australia and further abroad.

### *Overview of the Interviews*

As the next three chapters draw completely from the data of the fieldwork, it is helpful to indicate the types of questions used with each person. (A full interview schedule is included as Appendix C). I also would like to highlight attention to the “imagination exercise.” This exercise became quite a powerful experience for many of my interviewees, both indigenous and Anglo-Australian. I have included both of the scenarios that

I used, the one given to Aborigines, as well as the one given to Anglo-Australians.

For the sake of avoiding repetition I present the questions in the form that I did for an indigenous person. For example, where I asked, “What is your earliest memory of a White person?” the same question would have been asked to an Anglo-Australian with the only change being “indigenous person” instead of “White person.”

### *Overarching Themes in the Interviews*

The interviews had two overarching themes. The first is the person’s understanding of reconciliation. It begins by uncovering the person’s understanding and experience of reconciliation in his or her life. From this starting point I move the person to explain how he or she perceives the reconciliation process in the broader social context, both at the level of the local community and in the nation as a whole.

The second overarching theme in the interview is the movement from early memories, reflection on those memories, and finishing with the person talking about recent experiences. The movement was from the past to the present, with an opportunity to talk about their hope for the future.

Interviews ranged from one and half-hours to over four hours. The average length of an interview was just over three hours.

### *Confidentiality and Interview Setting*

People were offered the opportunity to speak “off the record” at any time. This was taken up by most at different times in the interview. It is also important to mention that interviews took place in settings chosen by each individual interviewee. For some this was in the privacy of their own

home, others chose a work environment. A number of Aborigines chose the “Old Museum,” some preferred to talk on their tribal land in front of others listening. I believe storytelling is only helpful if told in an environment that the storyteller considers to be safe.

There are some stories that I wish I could tell, but the people specifically said I could not publish these. The stories contained within this dissertation are published here, therefore, with their consent. It needs to be noted that the stories that are not recorded here mirror the essence of the stories and principles presented. Not only were they not contradictory to the points that have been made from the other interviews, they would have powerfully supported those stories and insights. The major reason given for not wanting a particular story to be published was to protect the identity of people, both living and deceased.

#### *A Walk through the Interview Schedule*

*Cultural understanding of conflict.* I began each interview with questions around cultural and personal understanding and experience of conflict. Some of these questions were, “Could you talk about what would happen if someone did the wrong thing or broke the Law in your culture? How would people react to that person? Could the person ask for forgiveness for what he or she did wrong?” With that start I moved to their personal experience of conflict. I asked questions like: “Can you tell me a time when you have been hurt by someone? What did you do when this happened? How do you feel about this now? What have been the worst ways you have hurt someone else?”

*Earliest memories, latest memories.* I then explored their earliest memories of Anglo-Australians through questions like: “What is your

earliest memory of a White person? What is your earliest memory of a church person?"

From there I asked questions about their present and past relationships with missionaries or other Anglo-Australians. These questions included: "What is your best experience of relationship with a White person or missionary at Wadeye? What is your earliest experience of hurt feelings with missionaries or Whites? Has there been a missionary that you have been close to? What do you remember about this person? Has there been a missionary that has hurt you? What do you remember about this person? How did you feel when this person hurt you? How do you feel now about this? (If changed) Why do you feel differently now?"

*Returning to cultural understanding of conflict.* I then returned to explore again their cultural understanding of conflict as well as introducing them to considering the way Anglo-Australians deal with conflict. Oftentimes it is good to have questions return in a different form. This assists the interviewee who may have remembered something from earlier, or provided an opportunity to expand on something that he or she had said earlier. Contrasting behaviors also helps people see differences they may not have first thought about. Some of these questions included: "What do you do when you disagree with someone in your culture? What do you think of the ways Whites handle problems? Who or what has influenced the way you handle disagreements or problems with people? Do you have any favorite cultural stories about hurt feelings and disagreements? How do you feel about the missionaries at Wadeye? How do you feel about the Whites at Wadeye? Have your feelings towards missionaries and Whites at Wadeye changed over the years?"



A question that often evoked significant response was when I asked, “Can you remember a time when you spoke to a White or missionary about something you were upset with them about? What happened? How do you feel about this now?”

Another question that evoked considerable response and gave an idea of the cultural differences operating between both groups was: “What has been the best experience of establishing peace in your life?”

*Imagination exercises.* The imagination exercises below became a very important exercise for most interviewees. I was surprised and delighted by the way people were able to enter into this exercise. I was uncertain about how effective this exercise would be as I was unsure whether cultural factors may make this difficult for indigenous-Australians. Nothing could have been further from the case. It seems that the story aspect of the exercise helped allow people to enter into the exercise easily. Most found the exercise disturbing for them, or enlightening. None seemed to indicate neutrality about the experience.

#### 1. Imagination Exercise for Aborigines

The following is told for a male. If it were a female, I would have changed “priest” to “sister” and “dormitory” to “convent.”

“I would like you to imagine being a White person, maybe a priest who worked in Wadeye. It is over 30 years ago. You are working in the dormitory. You are worried that Aborigines are experiencing health problems as they move from the bush into the town. You believe they need to learn English so as to better handle the problems that the White person will bring them. You believe they deserve to learn about Jesus and his church. It is hard working at Wadeye. You have left your family many

thousands of miles away. Many of your friends and family think it is a waste of time working at Wadeye.

How do you feel being that missionary? How do you feel being that missionary as you look back on all your work, prayers, and efforts?"

## 2. Imagination Exercise for Anglo-Australians

The following is for a female. If the person was a male I would have changed "convent" for "dormitory" and "girl" for "boy."

"Could you for a moment imagine being in 1960 when the church was operating the dormitories at Wadeye. You are a young Aborigine girl. You are six years old and you are now living in the convent which government policy strongly supports. The goal of the policy is to help Aborigines assimilate into the community. That is, to largely give up your cultural ways and become like Whites. It is still seven years before you are considered a citizen of Australia. Your people have no political power. Everything is controlled by Whites. You stay in the dormitory for ten years, up until the age you were about to marry. You were largely removed from your family and culture. The discipline in the convent was very different from what you had previously known. You were strongly encouraged to speak English. You had to learn new ways of praying, cleanliness, church duties, and domestic duties like sewing and western cooking. It felt quite strange. These new people and their rules seemed very strange to you. You struggled to understand what was happening.

How do you feel being that young Aborigine girl? How do you feel now thirty years later?"

*Social reconciliation.* The interview would conclude with a general discussion about reconciliation. The interview began with questions on their

personal understanding and experience of reconciliation. It concluded with their understanding of social reconciliation. Some of these questions included: “What do you think of the debate in Australia about reconciliation with the Aborigines? Do you care about this issue? How would this look in places like Wadeye? How do you feel toward other Australians in general? How has this come about? What, if anything, do you think needs to happen in Australia in regards to reconciliation?”

### *Summary*

I have shown how I collected the narratives, and in a sense how I worked with each person in the interview. The next three chapters reveal the results of this collecting and working. It is now time to hear their stories and to begin exploring what they may mean for us all.

## CHAPTER 4

### How We Tell Our Story

#### *Aboriginal Voices*

##### *Kunyep Bunduck*

Kunyep Bunduck is a Murrinhpatha man, belonging to the family of traditional landowners of Wadeye. He is in his mid forties, married, and has a number of children. He has experienced being taken as a child to live in the dormitories; he also had three years as a teenager in a high-school in Victoria. He has been a teacher at the local school for over a decade. At the time of the interview he had just recently resigned from teaching to take up an unskilled position in the community store.

Kunyep's first memories of a white person were when the mission placed him and all the children in the dormitories. This happened when he was four or five years old. He remembers that he "wasn't allowed to go down and visit his mum and dad. The only time was during the weekend, like Saturday or Sunday. The priests would come down on Sunday evening and pick us up and take us back to the dormitory again."

He remembers the years in the dormitory as "brutal." He recalls, "the priests and brothers were very strict. They used to give us hiding. If you got caught doing something wrong, they would belt us with the strap. They were that cruel to us." Like many of those interviewed, Kunyep recalls the times he was scared, having to pick up rubbish in the middle of the night. This may have been a common punishment during those years. Why it is particularly terrifying is because Aborigines around Wadeye do not go past

the light of the campfire at night, they are scared of snakes in the dark, as well as the presence of dangerous spirits and “wild Blackfellas” that may take you away. Either the missionaries were being really cruel to them, or they had no idea of the culture.

Despite the pain of the past, and not having had much opportunity to talk about those experiences, Kunyep has a great generosity of heart towards the missionaries and church in general. He demonstrated great empathy for the missionaries, and what life must have been like for them during those earlier years. He said he has much less fear of the missionaries than he previously had, and looks forward to the day when the local church can acknowledge all the history of the mission, both the good and the bad.

### *Alanga Dumoo Nganbe*

Alanga is in her late thirties. She is married to Ngardanithi Nganbe who we will meet in the next chapter. They have three children in their late teenage years. Alanga has completed her teacher training, and now has her own class after being a teacher assistant for over fifteen years at the local school.

Like Kunyep, Alanga’s earliest memory of a white person is when she was put in the girls’ dormitory (known as the convent) at around eleven years old. She recalls she was “crying and crying for my family.” She corrected herself, “Not put in the dormitory. The nuns would come and *take us* away from the family.”<sup>1</sup> The people allowed this to happen because of the great respect they had for Fr. Docherty and the OLSH sisters.

When Alanga was asked to recall a time when someone had hurt her she immediately recalled a time when she was fourteen or fifteen in the dormitory. She returned to the dormitory after the 6 p.m. deadline on a Sunday evening. She had been helping her family with child-minding, cleaning, and the like.

I thought I was the only one walking down the street going back. There was a girl walking very fast behind me. She caught up with me, just near the dormitory. We were very scared that sister would find us. Sister was there, with her hands on her hips. We were frightened and scared, so we walked in with our heads down. When we got inside, the sisters got hold of us, and took us to the toilet area; gave us a good hiding from head to foot. And I guess that was the very first time I felt really scared, I sort of felt different in myself. I was all mixed up. I wasn't sure whether I did the wrong thing, or whether I did the right thing by my family side. But then again, I felt very bad, about the naughty things; for coming back late on the sister's side.

Alanga's story captures the confusion and uncertainty of being split between two cultures. The punishment that they received would be considered unethical by modern standards. The confusion is accentuated by the much more relaxed methods of indigenous discipline—Aboriginal children are given a remarkable degree of freedom by their family (cf. S. Harris 1984).

What makes Alanga's story above more dislocating is that one of the nuns she referred to was a local Aborigine. As Alanga put it, "this Aboriginal sister learnt from the Whitefella side, from the other sisters. If she wouldn't have done it she would have been in trouble for not doing the job properly." When asked how she feels now about that person, she exclaimed, "I could *choke* her. Every time I see her I feel so angry."

When asked how she feels when she looks back on her time in the dormitory Alanga replied:

What they did was wrong, that's how I feel. I feel I wish I had been born after the dormitory, because there was never a free life for us to do anything. They never let us do anything. They were always behind our backs. The discipline was *very strong*, very strong, and cruel I guess. Very often the ladies sit together and talk about the olden days. And there would be so much laughter and at the same time filling up with bad news and anger would come back.

Alanga's last comments capture the mixed feelings that many of the Aborigines have towards their years in the dormitory. They are glad they survived it, they hold onto the memories of the camaraderie of being young people together surviving difficult times. Many though are still recovering from the trauma that they experienced. It is as though the chance to talk about these memories served to partly release a pressure point in their lives.

Alanga identified the missionaries today as being unlike those of her youth. While she still feels considerable anger and pain towards the missionaries of the past, she is happy with the present ones, "because they are not doing what they did before."

Despite all the pain that the OLSH sisters and other missionaries gave her, Alanga has been for a few years now a lay associate of the OLSH sisters. Her association with the OLSH sisters did not prevent her from telling the stories of abuse and pain she experienced while under their care.

### *Tcheyunga Namarluk*

Tcheyunga has been the principal health-worker at Wadeye for many years. He is now in his late forties and currently is the Manager of the Wadeye health clinic. He married in 1975.

Tcheyunga Namarluk is the grandson of the famous *Namarluk*. His grandfather is remembered for his escapades with the police (cf. Pye ca. 1975). One person told me, “The police were always against *Namarluk* because they were worried about him. He was always on the run. He was always disappearing from the police or from the cattle station manager. He would kill the cattle then he’s off again. Everyone was against him.” *Namarluk’s* story echoes some of the history that was mentioned in the Kimberley in Chapter 3.

The police wanted *Namarluk* for murdering a Japanese crew that landed on the coast of his country in 1933. The police and Aboriginal trackers hunted him all over the Daly River Reserve. My informant continues,

And, so anyway, a police tracker from Katherine way, they caught up with *Namarluk*, handcuffed him. Took him into Darwin. He didn’t really get on well with them. But then the war comes into Darwin. All the police who were against him changed. They knew that *Namarluk* could help with the war. So they caught up with *Namarluk* and told him, “This is our country now, you go back to your country and do what is best for this country. Kill all the Japanese. Kill all of them if they come and land here.” That’s what they did.

I asked, “All was forgiven?” My informant replied, “It didn’t last long. After the war, they took him back in. He died of TB. Died in jail. He was baptized.”



Like most of the Aborigines interviewed Tcheyunga's first memories of a white person go back to when he was in the dormitory. His first memory of conflict was with the OLSH sisters bossing him in the clinic. His worst experience of conflict with Whites was in the late 1980s after the OLSH sisters left the clinic. He recalled an incident where one of the white nurses publicly shamed him. He said, "I could have smacked her face. I threw her the work keys, and left the job for a few months." He returned that same afternoon to talk with her about what happened. He recalls, "she went all red, sat quietly, and didn't say anything. She never apologized to me." He still feels anger towards that nurse.

Tcheyunga spoke a great deal about his memories of the dormitory. He recalls they were kept away from their families. They had to stay in the dormitory; "there was no going down to camp at lunchtime, even in the afternoon we weren't allowed to go down." If he tried to sneak down and got caught, they would get hiding with a cane or electric wire. He said, he's "still got the scar from the priest who hit him. I cried like hell. It hurt like hell." The only good memories Tcheyunga has were of Christmas days, "they give me present, that's the only good time I remember." Many others repeated this comment. The memories of the "good old days" referred to those infrequent good times. Others mentioned that the happy times were when they had the weeks break out bush with their families.

I asked Tcheyunga how he survived the dormitory. His reply gives an insight into the struggle of many at Wadeye, particularly the men. He said, "I've been going through hell with grog, socially with friends. I survive with grog and tobacco." I repeated the question and asked, "How did you

survive the actual dormitory days?” He answered, “The friendship with the boys, relations, fun, not television or disco, rather the sound of the wind and birds, and laughter. It was hell, but we kept laughing and playing.” Again, the camaraderie that developed during the years in the dormitory seemed to hold them together.

When asked how he felt talking about these times Tcheyunga replied, Talking with you about these times, going through these memories, thinking of those times in the dark picking up rubbish, it is still scary. We were there from little boys to big boys. Little boys should have been with their mothers and fathers, but we were kept in the dormitory.

Tcheyunga had not spoken about these times before. He said,

No, it’s all sitting in this brain box. Sitting here, going through this with you. It is very difficult to get at those memories and talk about it. I’ve kept all these memories locked inside. Kept all my fears, and now we have just released it, through sitting and talking. It has gone from my head to this paper you are writing. It is like a book that has just been released. I just want to cry for all those years, especially for those times at night, going around picking up that bloody rubbish.

Tcheyunga’s story reminds us of the pain that many survivors relive when telling their story. It also demonstrates the way storytelling can work to integrate past painful memories into the life of a survivor. Tcheyunga is an excellent example of the way survivors can overcome oppression through beginning to recover their voice and telling their own narrative. We recall that silence is the deadly partner of oppression (see Introduction, p.24; Chapter 3).

Tcheyunga was able to tell his story—despite the considerable pain within it. He would like to forget what he went through as he does not

“want to go though all these things again.” He wants to let go of the anger that he feels towards the church, however this is difficult as “the priest who gave us hell is still here walking around. We might say ‘hello’ to him, but inside we remember the things he did to us.”

### *Xaverine Ninnal*

Xaverine Ninnal is a *Tiwi Islander* from *Nguiu*, Bathurst Island. She married Wudarnthale Ninnal (whom we met in Chapter 1 and will hear from more in the next chapters) a Murrinhpatha man, over twenty-five years ago, and has lived nearly all her married life at Wadeye. She has three sons, who range in age from twenty to thirty. Xaverine is in her early fifties.

Normally a very shy person, Xaverine wanted an opportunity to talk about her past. The great bulk of her conversation centered on her time being brought up in the dormitory in *Nguiu*, Bathurst Island. Like Wadeye, the OLSH sisters and MSC priests and brothers ran the Bathurst Island dormitory. Her story helps illustrate how the dormitory system replicated itself on missions throughout Australia.

In the course of her interview, Xaverine described the dormitory as being “like a prison,” “like a refugee camp.” She can remember singing out for food, “give us tucker now, we’re hungry.” She continued “We were fenced in like we were refugees.”

She spoke about the hidings she received from the sisters and priests. She believes that her present sickness is partly due to what she experienced in the dormitory. She recalls, “I used to get biggest hiding, biggest hiding. I

got hiding with the electric wire. I also get hiding with the hose. That's why I got sick."

Like others, she has fond memories of times like Christmas and Easter. These were "special days for us." She also mentioned the special time that was given to a girl when she had her first menstruation. Interspersed with these memories were the memories of the hard times she had. When asked, "What is your main feeling looking back on your time in the dormitory?" she answered "Sad and lonely. Feeling hopeless. No hope to get out. I'm still thinking of my time in the convent."<sup>2</sup>

Like nearly all Aborigines interviewed Xaverine displayed great generosity of heart to the missionaries. She said,

we are sorry for the missionary. They brought God's word to us. God sent them to us. The missionaries came to help us, but they were cruel to us. We forgive them. We forgive them because they tried to look after us, care for us. Tried to put us on the right road. But they didn't know, they didn't understand.

She added, "The missionaries have changed now. Before they used to do cruel things, but they don't do that now."

Despite the apparent concern for and forgiveness of the missionaries, and the appreciation that they have changed their practices so much, Xaverine expressed several times a desire for an apology from the missionaries. She noted that no missionary has talked to her about her experiences in the dormitory, and that she has not heard the sisters apologize for what happened. By the number of times Xaverine related her present sickness to these times it was as if she was inferring that an apology would

not only go to assisting her spiritual and emotional healing, but also it may tangibly affect her physically.

### *Mark Ninnal*

Mark Ninnal is the second son of Wudarnthale and Xaverine Ninnal. He is 26 years old, and has a girlfriend. With the dormitories closing in the late 1970s Mark would be among the new generation to have been raised in the post-dormitory era. He was comfortable in telling his story and able to make considerable connection with the stories of others.

His first memory of being hurt by someone was by his father when his father had an alcohol problem. He recalled the pain of not having Christmas toys during those years. He would sleep at his grandmother's house so as to keep away from dad when he was swearing and fighting. Despite his dad being sober for over fifteen years now, he acknowledges that his childhood has affected him. He has found it difficult to work through the memories of his childhood. He still gets angry and lonely, still finds the memories of his childhood hard to deal with.

He recalled a time in primary school when a Sister "growled" at him over some work he was doing. As he recalls,

Every time I did work experience she started to growl at me. I couldn't say anything to her; I just stood there and looked at her. When she started using rubbish words, I started to get rough, smashing and throwing around things. I walked away, and then threw a rock at her. I went home and told my dad. He said to go back and apologize to her for what I did. I apologized to her. I said "sorry sister, I will never do that again." She apologized to me for what she did. She asked me to forgive her.

Mark has a great love and concern for present day missionaries at Wadeye. When asked how he feels about them he replied,

I worry about the missionaries. They don't seem to be really happy. They seem sad, like they don't know what to do. The missionaries knew the Aborigines before in the olden days. They knew them before white Europeans came. We like the missionaries. They are really kind to us. We love them very much. We don't want them to leave.

When asked about the Whites in Wadeye he responded, "We teach them our culture. They are like family to me."

Mark demonstrated empathy towards the missionaries and white population in general. In an imagination exercise he was able to identify with being an old missionary. When asked, "How would you feel being that missionary as you look back on all your work, prayers, and efforts at Wadeye?" he responded, "I would feel happy. I would feel proud of having worked here. Real proud, because I would be an old fella, and they would have known me for a long time. I would be proud because I have taught them my culture, and have let them teach me their culture."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kunyep, Alanga, Tcheyunga, Xaverine, and Mark reflect the ability of Aborigines at Wadeye to tell their story. Despite the considerable pain that was present in their stories and memories, and despite most of them never having been asked to tell their story before, they demonstrated a tremendous capacity to talk openly about what happened to them. I never felt during the interviews that persons were hiding parts of their story, or covering up their pain. There were tears, nervous laughter, and plenty of silences. There was

also a remarkable degree of good humor. Some of the most painful memories were interspersed with funnier stories of the antics that they got in to.

It struck me that they just simply told their story. They neither defended their memory of what happened, nor explained away the actions of others. Things simply happened. This is what happened. This is how I feel about it now. They did not feel a need to protect the missionaries. They freely named those who abused them. Nevertheless, there was little sign of malice toward the missionaries. They recognized the great efforts of many of the past missionaries, and acknowledge the ongoing efforts of present day ones.

While Mark experienced a significant degree of pain in his life, there are identifiable differences between his story and the others. I did not detect the same degree of confusion or mixed feelings that were present in the others. The story of his conflict with the nun at the school captures the fundamental differences between his experience and those who went through the dormitory. Whereas those who suffered during the dormitory era were told by family members and friends to keep quiet about it for fear of upsetting the missionaries, Mark was told by his father to go and talk directly with the sister concerned. That he could return home and talk about it was an important difference to the others. The fact that he was encouraged to talk about it also indicates a new sense of subjecthood and power that his father's generation was beginning to claim.

*The Voices of Anglo-Australians**Liam Clancy*

Liam Clancy is twenty-four years old. He came to Wadeye to be part of the Christian Brothers work with post-school aged young men. He is inspired by Edmund Rice's work, Rice was the founder of the Christian Brothers and spent his life devoted to young people; Liam sees education as liberation. He sees himself giving twelve months to the Brother's youth ministry in Wadeye. Even though he is living with the Brothers, he himself does not identify as a missionary. This was his first experience of crosscultural ministry.

Liam, through his family ancestry, has early memories of Aborigines. His great-grandmother is Mary Durack, and her paintings are the first memories he has of Aborigines.<sup>3</sup> He recalled that her paintings depicted Aborigines "as part of the landscape, they were very basic. They seemed to be able to get along with nothing." He recalled early conflicts with Aborigines in the suburbs of Brisbane. As a petrol station attendant he remembers two young Aborigines shoplifting right in front of him and "taking the bolt." When asked "What is your worst experience of conflict with Aborigines?" he responded, "Steady niggling frustration, I could never get to know the kids' situation." Referring to the earlier shoplifting episode he added, "They never drove off without paying for the petrol though!"

Liam used to think that his role was to help the Aborigines "catch up." Having recognized the consumerism of his lifestyle his thinking has shifted considerably. He admits that there is a certain romantic notion of Aborigines that attracts him. "I know I don't want to go through my life as a



consumer leaving big ugly scars all over the place. Before White men came, Aborigines would go through and not leave a single mark—and still have a happy life.” Since coming to Wadeye he has felt a stronger desire to be connected to his own family. He’s uncertain whether this is “because of the isolation or due to being surrounded by people who have a strong sense of family.”

Liam used to think that Aboriginal reconciliation meant “they wanted the whole bloody place back.” He feels his understanding has increased much since being with the people in Wadeye. He believes the reconciliation issue is “still to do with land.” Adding, “There is so much that Australians need to understand about Aborigines because they need to be understood.”

The failure to give a national apology to the Aborigines confuses Liam. For him, National Sorry Day “has become a massive, political thing.” Nevertheless, as much as he wishes Australia did not need to give an apology, he cannot understand why the government refused to. For him, “by not saying sorry means it may happen again.” He bases his opinion on “putting himself in the same shoes as the Aborigines.” As he states, “If I was an Aborigine, I would want some recognition from *everyone* of what had been done to me and my family. And then have a fair-go after that.” He continued,

I guess if I was stolen, the fact that you already know in advance that you have had a stable umpteen years, and I haven’t. Yeah, for sure, I would expect you to be sorry for that. And that means a big deal, I think that would mean a *big deal* to me, to hear some other people say that they were sorry.

What makes Liam's story particularly fascinating is that he has connected his family history with the history of Aborigines. According to him his family benefited considerably from the dispossession of the Aborigines. As he puts it,

Where the Blacks were wiped out and run off their land, and all the other stuff that happened, my family was able to find beautiful grazing country in the Kimberley. My ancestors got there before the police arrived. They had a lot of interaction with black people. My great, great-grandfather had a vested interest to get on well with and understand the Blacks, because he was in the business of being pioneering in the way of graziers. He always *planned* to be among the first people to meet the Blacks. The laborers and other staff would come out for a season, do a bit of shearing, ride a horse. You get the feeling with them, "let's have a bit of fun, go hunting, shoot a couple of Blacks, we'll go back to the city tomorrow, no problem."

As Liam puts it, "that's what *my kingdom* is built on."

These stories have been passed down to him through the writings of his great-grandmother, Mary Durack. He has never spoken to his own parents about this part of their family history. The only reason he has been able to uncover his family story is through his great-grandmother's book *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959). Liam explains,

You can just read the book like it is a story, if you don't know anything of that part of the world. Dad might read it because of his interest in his family history, but he will probably not connect with the Aborigines story. I'm sort of involved in the whole debate of reconciliation with Aborigines and everything. Every time there's an Aborigine mentioned in the book, I can connect with that, dad probably can't.

Liam showed a capacity to both tell his family history straightforwardly as well as make significant connection with the story and history of Aborigines. He explained his connection in the following way:

Not that we have any land any more, but we have a standing. I'm not from any rich family; dad's just a civil engineer in Brisbane. But still, I got a level A education and skills because dad was able to give it to me. Dad got a level of education and skills because his dad was able to give it to him. Those people who were pushed off the land, I guess in some way, in the littlest way, I benefited. I benefited through their dispossession.

When asked, "How come you have made these connections to Aborigines and your father has not, even though you both read the same book?" he responded immediately, "he hasn't done the school. That really wakes you up." The "school" he referred to is a ten-week crosscultural awareness program offered by the Center for Spirituality and Justice (CSJ) which is run by the Christian Brothers with indigenous staff in Brisbane. Listening first hand to their stories significantly affected the way Liam understood his history. Liam is an excellent example of the power of narrative to create common or shared memory. It was through listening to the truth of indigenous-Australians that Liam was able to gain a more accurate memory of his own family history. His horizon became broadened, more inclusive (cf. Chapter 3, "Listening to the truth, gaining memory," pp.181ff).

### *Dean Sparey*

Dean is thirty-one years old. He is married and expecting his first child. He is a mechanic and had his own well-established business at Mornington Peninsular, 100 miles east of Melbourne, before travelling around Australia and finding work in an Aboriginal community around two years ago. As he puts it, "I needed to settle my restlessness." He has been at

Wadeye for just under two years and will return south when his present two-year contract is completed.

Dean's first memory of an Aborigine was during his time traveling around Australia. In Derby, Western Australia, he saw an Aborigine "flaked out in front of a bottle shop." His first impression was "these are just alcoholics these people." His first conflict with an Aborigine was over land; he had been on someone's land from Wadeye without asking permission and got told off by one of the landowners for doing so.

Dean believes reconciliation with Aborigines is mostly about making everyone equal. He adds, "But it also seems that the Aboriginal community wants the European community to realize and understand what happened in the past. Things at the moment still aren't up to a decent standard. Still not up to an equal standard." This understanding influences the way Dean goes about his work at Wadeye.

Dean spoke at length about the struggle he and his wife had with other Anglo-Australians in Wadeye. It seems their commitment to working for and with Aborigines as the primary part of their work has made others consider them "a bit different." They have had "more conflicts with Whitefellas, European fellas, than Aborigines out here." It is "these conflicts and dramas" with Anglo-Australians that has mainly contributed to their decision to leave after two years. When asked, "What is giving you the strength to keep going?" he answered,

The fact that I know that I'm doing it right, that alone. I talk to my boss in Darwin and get support. I talk to my wife; she's very supportive. At the end of the day you have to live with yourself. But it has got really hard to hang in there with it. When I go I will know I have done the right thing.

He is affirmed by his decisions through the friendships that he has developed with Aborigines. He has been struck by the genuineness of their friendship. Dean puts it:

I suppose it's simply, I am not racist. If that man is good to me, he responds to me, that's terrific. I couldn't give a bugger if he's green, red, yellow or white. If they're prepared to be nice to me—we all want someone to be nice to us—to be friends without conditions. Without conditions, that's a big thing. I have found in my life with most European people that friendships basically run under conditions, unspoken conditions. I haven't found that with these people, you know your friendship is genuine.

Dean continued,

When you become a genuine friend you've actually joined, you've become a part of them, they've accepted you. Not only that, you've accepted them, it's unconditional, it's very full, it's like a type of love basically. It's in its most pure form. It's great, and that's why they know you would genuinely feel for their family. You've *connected*—and these people like that.

Dean demonstrated this “connectedness” in the imagination exercise of being an Aboriginal child taken through the experiences of the dormitory. He imagined that the person would feel “a massive sense of loss.” He continued:

You were robbed. You've had the “real you” taken away. I didn't get any feeling of anger, just devastated; it's just gone. What really matters is your natural life. That's what I'm saying, your natural sort of future has been changed, actually physically changed by someone. I mean, you need to make your own destiny, not let someone do that for you. And this is like, in a big way it's a different culture, a different people. It's not as if you've been put into a different school and made to choose a different career. This is your whole life. And at that stage of their life—that was a big thing. It wasn't just changing your career or whatever, it was changing your actual life.

*Brian and Maryanne Esmonde*<sup>4</sup>

Brian and Maryanne are in their late fifties, married, and teach in the local school. They are landowners, having two hundred acres on a family farm, from East Gippsland (around two hundred miles east of Melbourne). They had been teaching at Wadeye for eighteen months and were leaving at the end of the year.

Brian's earliest memory of an Aborigine was when he was sixteen, seeing an Aboriginal community living on the outside of town in the Riverina region. He remembers the segregation at the movie theatre. Maryanne remembered the "appalling humpies and squalid housing conditions" of the Aborigines.

Both Maryanne and Brian receive great joy from working with the young people at school. They both struggled to name adult Aborigines as persons they are particularly close with. Maryanne finds them "very hard to get to know, because they are so shy, they don't initiate any interaction, there's no real conversation. I would just love to develop a more open relationship with the Aboriginal teachers here." Brian was able to name one teacher as someone he gets on very well with. He added, "because he talks very good English, he's a thinker, and he speaks his mind."

Brian and Maryanne were initially very reluctant to talk about their personal experiences of reconciliation in their life. Brian began with, "we sort of had our differences with our son and daughter-in-law last year." Maryanne quickly added, "not having suffered any great conflict I suppose."

Later Maryanne spoke of the physical abuse she received from her father. It is interesting to note that she gave this story when I asked, “Have you unexpectedly forgiven someone?” Maryanne replied, “I’ve never had any feeling like that to anybody. I think you have to experience forgiveness yourself. You have to experience a family where forgiveness is shown.”

Then she told the following story:

My father used to strap us. That was the way he disciplined a child, I won’t ever forget it, not ever. I will never forget it as long as I live. There was one particular incident when our next door neighbor came in when he was embarking on the punishment and she roared at him. And I can still see her too. “If you do that to that child I will never speak to you again, you’re cruel, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.”

Maryanne said she was around five or six when this incident occurred. I asked if her father ever apologized at any stage. She replied emphatically,

He never did. He never did. He wasn’t, I guess he never ever thought there was anything wrong with what he did. I guess being so much older he thought you strap kids to make them behave. Mum used to apologize. She used to apologize for us being strapped. She’d cuddle us and say she was very sorry, blah, blah, blah. I used to think this is stupid. One minute they’re belting you and telling you they hate you, and the next minute they are saying how much they love you, and that they’re sorry. I used to find that strange. I can remember thinking that.

I asked, “Would it have helped you as a child or even as a grown-up if your father apologized for what he did?” She replied, “I never had that closeness with him. I guess a person would like that. But then, sometimes you think you shouldn’t dwell on these memories. You ask yourself ‘What’s the point?’”

Maryanne described in detail and visualized the incident above. Her voice changed markedly on several occasions during the telling. She whispered at times, as if her father was somehow present. It struck me that Maryanne was reliving some of her experiences as she told her story. I failed to ask whether she had told the story before. My thinking is that she may not have, nor received counseling for these memories. In many ways she and Tcheyunga told their story in a similar way.

Both Brian and Maryanne do not feel that they, the local church, or the Australian Government has any need to apologize to Aborigines. As Maryanne put it, “If you did what you thought was right at the time, you shouldn’t be sorry, none of us should be sorry. Otherwise we are going to go through life apologizing for everything that has gone on in our past that we are finding we now need to correct.” This is an ironic statement given the fact that she wished her father had been able to give her an apology.

Brian’s view is similar to Maryanne’s. He believes,

life has been so bloody cruel to so many people. Let’s go on forward and treat people as equals. I just find this apology business *such a waste of energy*. Aborigines are saying, “poor bugger me, I’m an Aborigine.” I’m saying, “That’s rubbish. You are equal to anybody; you are wonderful people. Let’s get on and learn to be happy. We can learn from the past, but let’s not  *dwell on it*.”

The comments of Brian and Maryanne graphically illustrate the concern of most Anglo-Australians about “dwelling on the past.” As stated in Chapter One, this fear of looking back may be partly attributed to the Anglo worldview of being future-oriented. In this worldview, looking back can be considered to be a “waste of time.” This view is backed up by Newspoll, who recorded 77 percent of Australians as feeling they should



stop talking about the past in regards to Aborigines and get on with the present.<sup>5</sup> There is a need to reverse the perception that apology is a preoccupation with the past. For the power and symbolism of apology to be understood, it will need to be presented to Anglo-Australians as future-oriented. We apologize for the past in order to go forward together better into the future.

\* \* \* \* \*

Liam, Dean, Maryanne and Brian reflect the great variety of connections, or lack of connection, that Anglo-Australians are making with indigenous-Australians. They are all good, decent Australians who are genuinely trying to help and support indigenous-Australians in their present struggle. They each bring with them their personal history and family history.

Brian and Maryanne never talked about the land they have in the East Gippsland. They made no connection with the stories of Aborigines from that region. Liam, on the other hand, was in the process of learning more and more about his connection with the Aborigines of the west-Kimberley. He acknowledged that his family had benefited enormously through their contact with Aborigines there. It did seem that the more an Anglo-Australian knows and is able to talk about his or her family and personal history, the greater connection he or she can have with the experiences and history of Aborigines.

*The Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries**Sr. Mary Williams*

Sr. Mary is in her early fifties, and belongs to an Australian religious order of sisters. Her name has been changed at her request. She has been working at Wadeye for just under two years, and would like to stay another three or four years. She is the first of her religious congregation to work at Wadeye. She lives with the OLSH sisters in their convent. She said she always wanted to work with Aborigines in this part of Australia, "but was channeled off into another direction." She has worked for many years in aged care nursing and is working in that ministry in Wadeye. Her religious congregation gave her a good preparation for crosscultural ministry. She participated in the CSJ course in 1995; she also experienced an exposure program run by her order in the east-Kimberley in 1997.

Sr. Mary spoke freely about the niggling conflicts she experiences with Aborigines in her work.

There's a lot of little events that could be conflict situations here. Just even with the staff. You kind of rely on them to do things, and you come back and find half the stuff gone out of the fridge. You find the place all upside down. They've been here for a good while, you think, I've got to rely on them. When you ask them, nobody knows anything. And they could easily be the ones who've taken it all. "You let it happen." I feel like screaming at them, "You do know, you know what I'm talking about. You do know a few words of what I'm saying. That food was in the fridge for tomorrow's dinner." Then I wake up to the fact that their relations have come in and demanded things. They sort of prey on them, and they just have to give it to them.

Being new to Wadeye I asked "What stories have you been told about the mission here?" She replied, "I feel as though I've only got it very

generally. I don't feel as though I know the story. I've heard lots of times how Fr. Docherty came here and how he was asked to come here. They seem to be happy stories." She confided that in living with the OLSH sisters she has been surprised that she has not been told stories about the dormitories in Wadeye. She told me, "My questions to the sisters weren't being answered. It was like I was banging my head and getting no answers. Like a 'no talk rule' was operating. I was told to 'wait and experience and listen to the people.'" The only thing she can remember the OLSH community telling her was that "the Aborigines were pleased to have their children fed and brought here."

Sr. Mary was able to deeply empathize with the Aborigines in dormitory imagination exercise. When asked, "How she was able to empathize so much with the dormitory experience?" she responded with a painful personal story that occurred in her work environment when she was in her late thirties. She related the pain of the Aborigine's story to what happened in her own life. She noted her "situation was different." As she put it, "I was never taken away. I don't know how I would have coped if I had been that young Aboriginal girl. Robbed of virtually everything. Controlled by other people."

Sr. Mary had been surprised by the degree of acceptance she has been given by the people. She has already been invited to a woman's ceremony that celebrated womanhood. During this time she experienced a profound feeling of freedom. As she put it, "Here I am, well past my prime, and these Aboriginal women in the remote outback taught me about my womanhood!"

Sr. Mary said she was glad she had been given the opportunity to talk, adding, "I have had no opportunity otherwise." Sr. Mary chose to be interviewed at work, during work time. The longer the interview progressed the more comfortable she seemed to become.

*Sr. Ellen Fraser*

Sr. Ellen is in her late forties, and belongs to the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) sisters. Like Sr. Mary, her name has been changed at her request. She chose to be interviewed in her principal's office during school time. She has been at Wadeye over fifteen years, and has been principal of the local school for the past decade. She "always wanted to work on the missions." She recalls that when she was sent to Wadeye fifteen years ago she was commonly asked by members of her own congregation, "What have you done wrong to be sent there?" Sr. Ellen added, "The missionaries called Port Keats the pits."<sup>6</sup>

Sr. Ellen admires the old missionary sisters of her religious congregation. She said, "They made mistakes, but the people loved them." Adding, "The missionaries in the dormitories, perhaps they would be up for child abuse and something like that. That was the discipline of the time. The people knew they loved them. They had given their lives for them. The people keep saying, 'they were very happy days.'" I asked her to clarify what she meant by the child abuse reference. She replied,

The Aborigines will laugh, because they were made to sit under a tree and not move because they killed a chicken or something. Or someone jumped out of the window and went out with a boyfriend and something like that. They'd be caned or something. We all went through that growing up too. Do as you're told.

Sr. Ellen mentioned briefly, and without details, a time when a church person had hurt her, when she was “treated like dirt.” Through healing retreats over the last number of years she feels she has worked through this experience. She added, “The memory still hurts, I am not angry about it.” When asked, “Talk a little about what happened on the healing retreat? What helped you work through the pain and anger? Was it naming it, telling somebody else, doing something about it?” she talked about a ritualizing activity. Her healing “came through the ritual action.” She has never received an apology from the person involved. I asked, “Would it have helped if the person had apologized?” She responded, “I think it would have helped if the person could face the truth.” She added where an apology has not come forward she “remains wary that it may happen again.”

In the wake of this experience of not having an apology it is kind of astounding that Sr. Ellen does not think that she, the church or the Government needs to apologize to Aborigines for what went wrong in the past. Regarding the government she observes, “It’s like me apologizing for your great, great, grandma because my great, great grandfather did something to you.” Regarding her own religious congregation she comments,

I suppose my vision of the Stolen Generation is from all the people that were brought up with our sisters on Melville Island. And the love and the care they received from the sisters. I mean these sisters *are hurting deeply* from what’s been said, because they know that the children that were brought to them would have died. *I know* one of the sisters *knew* one of the people who stood and said “I was taken away from my mother, and blah, blah.” *That was wrong*. That mother came and virtually begged for us to take her. Sure, there are

instances in other places I know. I can only talk from our own mission.

On the question of whether missionaries at Wadeye have anything to apologize to the Aborigines, Sr. Ellen responded:

I find that a really difficult question to answer, because with hindsight you could say “yes.” But the missionaries acted out of the very good of their own heart. They may have treated Aborigines as if they were of lower mentality or intellect, and I think we still seem to do that. I think that is probably to do with the language barrier or cultural barrier, we tend to think of our White culture as the dominant one. I just don’t think it’s an apology that is needed, what is needed is recognition that we’re not dealing with inferior people, that we’re all equal.

*Br. Vince Roche cfc*<sup>7</sup>

Br. Vince is fifty-one years old, a Christian Brother, and has been working at Wadeye for just under ten years. He first arrived at Wadeye in 1983 after beginning in the field on Bathurst Island in 1980. He completed a year of crosscultural mission training in 1984 after having a few years at Nguui, Bathurst Island. When he first came to work at Bathurst Island, he said he “carried on like a Whitefella. It took me probably eighteen months before I realized more was going on than I first thought.” He commented, “The Brothers first came to Nguui in 1977 and ran a paternalistic set up, exemplified by an edifice that I think of as a monument to our naiveté—a handball court!”<sup>8</sup> Br. Vince enjoys the ministry at Wadeye and has “no immediate plans for leaving.”

During 1979, discussions were held with the Christian Brothers Queensland Provincial, Bishop O’Loughlin, Catholic Missions, and *Kardu Numida Council*. It was decided that the Brothers would come to help in the

education of the older boys; the community expressed the desire that these boys be educated separately from the girls.<sup>9</sup>

The first Christian Brother, Br. Kevin, came to Wadeye in late 1980. He returned with another Brother in May 1981 after they had participated in a crosscultural mission training program during the first part of that year.<sup>10</sup> Br. Kevin began the teacher education program in 1984. Br. Vince became the teacher educator in 1989. The Brothers maintained a presence in the community through teacher education, teacher linguist, and family alcohol recovery work up until the end of 1996. In 1997 their Provincial leaders had discussion with *Kardu Numida Council* about their future role in the community. It was decided that the Brothers would work mainly with the *kardu kigay*, the young men who had left the school. When the council of elders was formed, known as *Memelma* (see Chapter 5), they had further discussions. In 1998, Br. Terry Kingston and two “lay volunteers,” who are members of the friends of Edmund, arrived. They began ongoing consultation with *Memelma*. Br. Vince returned at Easter of that year, and became the adult educator at the end of July.<sup>11</sup>

Br. Vince’s first memories of Aborigines go back to 1970 when he was living in Mackay, central Queensland. He remembers “a group of black people who lived in tin sheds.” His next memory was around 1974 in Mt. Isa “seeing the Aboriginal women of an evening with a cask of wine with a Whitefella.” He recalls “the main stories of that time would be that a house would be destroyed by the Aborigines for firewood.” Around this time, Br. Vince recalls a time when he was at a Normanton hotel in the gulf country of northern Queensland, “we were charged might be a dollar for a stubby of

beer. There were a few Aborigines drinking there. Their going price started at a dollar, as the night wore on, they got drunker, it became two dollars a stubby, up to five dollars a stubby.”

Br. Vince believes the missionaries need to apologize for what has happened in the past, particularly for “the treatment of the Aborigines during the dormitory era.” Echoing some sentiments stated above, he feels missionaries need to apologize also for “the way that we actually relate to the people now. For the way we have not taken their culture into the liturgy; for the lack of encouragement or recognition of the language; for the cultural insensitivity that is still around.”

In the dormitory imagination exercise Br. Vince remembered a short time in his childhood when he was placed in a boarding school. He was around seven or eight years old, and was “absolutely petrified.” He “hated every moment of it, and was glad when it was all over.” He related his experience to what it may have felt like to be an Aboriginal boy. As he put it, “I think I would be too scared to even sort of buck the system by being a troublesome kid or anything like that. I’d be just towing the line and petrified.”

Br. Vince said his attitudes towards Aborigines started to change in the late 1980s when he “started to hear some stories from people about the early mission life, particularly of their experiences in the dormitories.”

Those stories made him “*shudder*.” He said,

Not that the stories were over the top in any way. But looking back now I’d say, “well, I’m glad I wasn’t around then doing these sorts of things.” And then, with the *Bringing Them Home* [1997] document, knowing people had been taken away, that’s when it started to hit home. Whereas prior to that I just saw them drunk on the streets or



living in tin sheds, and I guess it was my ignorance of what they had been through. During those earlier years you might hear the odd joke or two about them, but there wasn't the expression of human stories that we have now heard. And then, so I have already said, having experienced life at a boarding school, I was able to start to empathize with them.

Br. Vince made particular and repeated mention of the importance for him of hearing the stories of Aborigines. He reflected,

In 1984 I saw films like *Lousy Little Sixpence*. I had a notional idea of what went on, but it was only when it dropped down to the heart that I could feel. I was still aloof from it; I couldn't empathize with them at that time. Even though I already had had a few years on Aboriginal communities, I still hadn't heard their stories. It was only when I started to hear some of the stories of their treatment on the missions, and began making connection with my boarding school experience, that I began to feel what they had been through.

Br. Vince is a great example of someone who has experienced, through storylistening, a broadening of horizon. That is, through listening deeply to the experiences of the Aborigines he has received a new vision of what he previously had known to be true (cf. Chapter 3, pp.181ff).

#### *Fr. John Leary msc*

Fr. John Leary first came to the Northern Territory to work on Aboriginal missions in 1952. He has remained since that time. He has been for the past decade the Vicar General for the Aboriginal Apostolate for the Diocese of Darwin. He established the mission at Daly River in 1955 after spending two and a half years at the Garden Point Children's Home for children removed from their Aboriginal families. He was a dormitory

supervisor at Wadeye. He has vast experience of the Wadeye, Daly River, and Tiwi Island communities.<sup>12</sup>

When Fr. John was professed he wrote to his superiors asking to go to one of the missions, preferably Papua New Guinea. As he put it, “the Territory was the last place I wanted to go to. I had visions of heat, and Aboriginal kids with runny noses and flies. I suppose I’d seen pictures of all this; deep down I didn’t feel a natural urge to go there.” When he was told to go there he thought, “well, I’ll see how it goes.” He came to the Northern Territory after teaching for three years down south. As he recalls, “I had a terrible thought, I was destined to be trapped in a school for a long time.” He was glad to be “sent up to the Territory.” His introduction to the Aboriginal missions was brief. His recollection is that the bishop said the priest at Melville Island was sick and asked him to “take his place until he gets better. So I get on the medical plane, they land me at Melville Island, Garden Point. I got off and he got on. That was my introduction to Garden Point.” He stayed for two and a half years helping supervise the dormitories for the Children’s Home.

Fr. John gave many long and fascinating stories of the early years of the missions at Wadeye and Daly River. Sometimes these stories had no connection with the questions that I asked. His answers revealed a reluctance to answer particular questions. For example, a number of times I came back to the original question, only to be told another delightfully crafted story of an old mission experience.

When asked, “What are the main problems between Aborigines and missionaries at Wadeye?” he talked about the number of wives the men had

in the old days. He then spoke about how the founder of the mission, “Dick Docherty never learnt the language.”

I asked Fr. John how he sees the role of an apology at Wadeye. After a significant pause he stated, “I trust having been brought up so long with them, with people who have language, land, ceremony, I’ve never seen the need to apologize because I’ve been with that group so long.” He acknowledged that the church at Wadeye has been “accused of hurting people here and that the mission has in some ways brought on the problems that have arisen here in recent years.” He does not think that is true. He gave many stories of the heroic work of missionaries like Sr. Marita who worked tirelessly as a nurse to save the children from dying from diseases. As he put it, “We wouldn’t have all these children around today, except for Sr. Marita. They would have all died.”

Fr. John mentioned his time at Garden Point and gave an emotional story of one man whom he helped to find his relations (see Appendix D, “Peter Brogan’s Story”). Immediately after this story he added, “A lot of those who came to Garden Point were not stolen, they were sent there by their parents, and they went home for holidays; some of the White fathers, not many of them, sent a bit of money to their children.” I repeated the question, “Does the church need to apologize?” He replied,

I was only there two and a half years. People had great admiration for people like Sr. Annunciata, she gave her life for those kids. I find it *impossible* to apologize for a situation like that, because I would be apologizing for someone who was completely dedicated to people who they saw were in a very unfortunate situation; people who were condemned by White society; an assimilationist government policy where they had to get the Aboriginal out of them. So I can see why

the church has to apologize that that situation originated, that we had to be back-stops for the government policy.

So for Fr. John, the church needs to apologize because of its complicity with the government policy of removing the children, not because of what they actually experienced in the dormitory.

Fr. John's reluctance to discuss his time in the dormitories did not stop him from criticizing recent MSC priests who had been to Wadeye. When asked, "What would be your worst experience of the church?" he replied,

I'd have to condemn some of our blokes that have been here. Unfortunately they weren't prepared. In latter years we've been sort of running out of men. Some would volunteer. One person who recently came here, he put up big fences, guard dogs, it got worse and worse.

The priest Fr. John was referring to was forced to leave by the Aboriginal community. The year was 1997.

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Fr. John, Br. Vince, Sr. Mary, and Sr. Ellen reflect the different voices of missionaries at Wadeye. Their stories provide insights into the ways missionaries talk about and understand their experiences of life in indigenous communities. Their stories reveal what helped or hindered them in making deep points of connection with the lives and stories of the Aborigines among whom they came to live and minister. Each of their narratives touched on their capacity to speak about painful experiences in their life. The ability to integrate these experiences into their lives seemed

to show correlation with the ability to empathize with others and allow their understanding of history to be presented.

Unlike Maryanne, Sr. Ellen would not tell her story of being hurt. (She indicated a couple of times that she also did not tell her story on the healing retreats. Her healing came through the “ritual action” not through naming the experience and talking about it with someone.) Nevertheless, their stories are similar in that both failed to receive an apology from the perpetrator. They both felt they would have appreciated a personal apology, and that this probably would have helped them heal those wounds. The narratives of Maryanne and Sr. Ellen seem to indicate a connection between not receiving an apology and not being able to give one.

There also may be a connection between being able to talk freely about past pain, and being able to empathize with the pain of another. One common factor in Maryanne and Sr. Ellen’s narratives is their struggle to integrate their past painful experiences into their life. Their narratives provide a glimpse into the ways people struggle to come to terms with pain in their lives. Real integration is revealed when a person is able to experience freedom when telling her or his story. The more a person has experienced personal reconciliation and healing the more he or she can understand other’s need for reconciliation and healing.

Despite his considerable ability as a raconteur Fr. John struggled to tell his story of his time at Wadeye. He never once referred to his time as a dormitory supervisor, either at Wadeye, Daly River, or Garden Point. Mention of the dormitories is basically absent in his responses to questions. It is striking that he did not refer to such a significant and lengthy piece of

his mission experience. Nearly all Aborigines interviewed raised his name in relation to the dormitories. It is from listening to their stories that Fr. John could be considered to be both a bystander and a perpetrator. A number of them had told me that they had tried to talk with him about their experiences of these times, however, they found Fr. John reluctant to talk with them about it. He made little connection to the Aborigines experience of pain and hurt in the dormitories at Wadeye and the Garden Point Home. The stories and experiences of earlier missionaries, as well as his own stories are given much greater dominance in his narrative than the voices of Aborigines.

The failure to acknowledge the pain caused to indigenous-Australians in Fr. John's narrative is a glimpse into the difficulties that perpetrators have in coming to terms with their own past abusive behaviors as well as being a member of an abusive system. (On the stories from interviews with the Aborigines, Fr. John could be categorized as having perpetrated violence against the Aborigines.) As one interviewee told me, "Fr. John's personal pain for the past colors his ability to connect with others' pain."

Fr. John never mentioned any personal pain in his life. He did note that he was only given a literal fly-by instruction at the airstrip as his preparation for a lengthy period of time in very difficult and demanding work. He did not indicate any resentment for that. When asked, "Has there been a church person that has hurt you?" he mentioned he had differences of opinion with an earlier bishop. These differences were over statements that the bishop made about the Aboriginal ministry. It is striking that in over forty-five years of ministry, in one of the most difficult regions in Australia, Fr. John did not talk about any other painful experience. Fr. John, more than

all the other missionaries, struggled the most to make personal connection to the pain of Aborigines—perhaps he believed the mission must remain invulnerable. Sr. Ellen at times came across in a similar manner, defending the memory of the earlier nuns.

The genuine love and respect that the Aborigines have for missionaries like Fr. John is a complicating factor. In one way their protection of him and his memory makes it even more difficult for him to recognize the pain he and his confreres have caused. The Aborigines love and care for him, combined with his unwillingness to talk about their dormitory experiences with them, makes it difficult for them to claim their own history, to be true subjects of their experience.

Missionaries like Fr. John need to let go of their interpretation of the past and encourage Aborigines to talk freely about their past experiences. In a sense, the missionaries need to give permission to the people to freely talk about what happened, and how they feel about it, without fear that this will hurt the missionaries. This is not patronizing. Rather, it acknowledges the social importance that Aborigines at Wadeye place in maintaining good relationship. One Aboriginal elder captured this when he explained regarding the problems between Blacks and Whites, “We don’t like disagreeing. We like to be connected together. Not to be angry—to be one.” It is their desire not to offend, to maintain good relationship—especially with the missionaries—that is making it problematic for them to openly reclaim the truth of their mission history.

Br. Vince and Sr. Mary were both able to draw from their personal experiences so as to be able to connect with the stories of the Aborigines’

experience in the dormitories. For Br. Vince, this meant recalling his early childhood experience at boarding school. For Sr. Mary it meant recalling a painful work experience from twenty years ago. The experience of pain in itself was not what helped them to empathize. The important factor was that they had come to terms with their particular experience, they were able to freely talk about it, describe it, and remember it without reliving it.

Considering how the responses of Br. Vince and Sr. Mary contrast so markedly with the responses of Sr. Ellen and Maryanne, we could conclude that the more comfortable we become with our own personal memory and narrative, the more we are open to the truth of the other's narrative. There may be a correlation between the integration of personal memories and the ability to integrate the stories of others, which leads to developing a sense of shared history and common memory (cf. Crites 1971; Niebuhr 1941:117).

### *Summary*

This chapter examined the potential level of difficulty people have in telling their story. All the Aborigines interviewed displayed a great capacity to tell their story, even though for many of them this meant talking about significant experiences of abuse and pain. Most Anglo-Australians interviewed, including the missionaries, were also able to speak freely about their life. It was evident that Anglo-Australians who struggled to talk about their own experiences freely, were also less likely to make connection with the life experiences of Aborigines. There seemed to be a significant correlation between those two areas. It is also important to note the Anglo-Australians who struggled the most also identified strongly with or belonged



to the religious orders that began the Wadeye mission, namely the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) priests and brothers, and the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) sisters. The Christian Brothers and their lay helpers at Wadeye did not experience difficulty in identifying with the Aborigines experience of pain in the dormitories. This possibly suggests that corporate memory, like that of the MSC and OLSH at Wadeye, can work in a way that lessens their members' ability to hear and respond to the experiences of others.

We heard from Zalaquett (1994:13) in Chapter 3 that a community or society "cannot reconcile itself on the grounds of a divided memory." He suggested that the antidote to this is that "key aspects of historical and ethical past must be put on the public record in such a way that no one can in good faith deny the past." The data from my fieldwork suggests the need to present the truth of the past in such a manner that breaks down the need for people and groups to feel a need to protect the (corporate) memories of those who came before them. Perhaps the distinction between shame and guilt could be particularly useful in this regard (see Introduction, pp.34-35; and Chapter 3, p.168, 176ff).

Chapter 5 continues our drive back towards practice as it explores the second area, namely whether narrative functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in people's lives.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> As stated in the Introduction, emphases in quotes are the interviewees.

<sup>2</sup> “Convent” refers to the girls’ dormitory.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Durack is a well known Australian. Her book *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959), and paintings are widely respected and known.

<sup>4</sup> They chose to be interviewed together.

<sup>5</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 April 2000, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> Wadeye was previously known as “Port Keats.”

<sup>7</sup> The initials “cfc” represent the Latin initials of the Congregation of the Christian Brothers, *Congregatio Fratrum Christianorum*.

<sup>8</sup> Email communication from Br. Vince Roche, Wadeye, Northern Territory, 12 April, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Email communication from Br. Vince Roche, Wadeye, Northern Territory, 12 April, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> This program was held at the *Pacific Mission Institute* in North Turramurra, Sydney, NSW. This program attracted Catholic missionaries from all over the world, particularly from the Pacific region. It employed the disciplines of missiology and anthropology. I participated in the full twelve month program in 1987.

<sup>11</sup> The Christian Brothers are the only male religious order, apart from the MSC, to be permanently stationed at Wadeye.

<sup>12</sup> The Tiwi Islands refer to Bathurst Island and Melville Island, just north of Darwin in the Northern Territory. The indigenous people of those islands identify as *Tiwi* Islanders. There has been significant number of Tiwi Islanders who have come to live in Wadeye through marriage.

## CHAPTER 5

### How We Relate to Another Person's Story

#### *Aboriginal Voices*

#### *Palibu Nudjula and Memelma Council of Elders*

Palibu is an elder in the Wadeye community. He is from the *Murinke* tribe; his land lies approximately fifteen miles northeast of Wadeye. Palibu has very clear memories of what life was like before White people and missionaries arrived in the Wadeye region. He was well into his childhood by the time Fr. Docherty arrived in 1935.<sup>1</sup>

It was very clear from Palibu's interview that he was "at home" with storytelling. He learnt his culture through "watching and listening to his relations." Aboriginal Law and teaching is passed down through storytelling.<sup>2</sup> A common expression in the community regarding elders like Palibu is "they have all the stories."

A movement in which these stories are being told which is bringing about a great renewal of Aboriginal life in Wadeye is a movement called *Memelma*. At the time of my fieldwork, the elders of the different tribes, like Palibu, were coming together, recalling their memories, and telling their stories. Through this process of storytelling they have begun to reinterpret their past. This has been very empowering for both them and the rest of their community. They are beginning to pass down their knowledge and memories to the next generation. This is creating significant feelings of well

being and hope for the community—particularly for the middle-aged generation.

While major decisions of a cultural nature have always gone through the elders, one of the affects of mission and government policies has been the diminution of the elders' authority. *Memelma* is working to restore the social structure of authority that the elders previously had. *Memelma* has become an official structure of the community.

During the time of my fieldwork at Wadeye *Memelma* was composed only of the male elders. It is now composed of two groups; the men, known as *pulen pulen*, and the women, known as *muthingan*. This follows the cultural norms of the indigenous people of Wadeye.

I was allowed to be present at some *Memelma* sessions. There were a number of middle-aged Aboriginal men attending the *Memelma* meetings. They told me that they come to *Memelma* so they could learn from the elders (see Ngardinithi's story below). As one White person close to the *Memelma* process eloquently put it, "When the old people look back they are providing something for young blokes to look forward." He added, "the young blokes are now looking forward with hope."

*Memelma* is working to restore the cultural and historical memory of the people—to reclaim levels of subjecthood and power that they had before White contact commenced. It was evident that they were undergoing a significant project—perhaps for the first time since the mission and White people arrived they were developing their own interpretation of their past. What follows below is a condensed version of their story and findings.

*Memelma: recording history through sharing memories and stories.*

The elders remembered they had a “way of life” before the missionaries and other White people came to Wadeye. They had social structure, economy (internal) and trade (outside), religious rites, language, and processes for conflict resolution. They could talk about the relationships that were formed when hunting and gathering; their close connection to land and people.

Fr. Docherty and the missionaries arrived in 1935. They brought with them foodstuffs. Br. Quinn msc would distribute the rations of flour, sugar, tea, and tinned meat to those who came into the mission. They remember it was Fr. Docherty who distributed the tobacco—and that this would take place after Sunday Mass. Kunyep and his father Stephen disclosed, “If you didn’t go to church you weren’t allowed to get any ration.”

Two ways of life began to develop, the elders recalled. The “tribal way of life” and the “missionary way of life.” The goods of life symbolized the split between the two. The “tribal way of life” and the “missionary way of life” traveled together more or less comfortably, though not without occasional tensions. Palibu remembered one occasion in the early 1940s when “the priest was telling my people they were wrong.” He recalled a time when “one fella tried to hit Fr. Docherty” because he was so angry at the way the priest was talking at them. Palibu adds with typical good humor, “The missionaries did not understand us properly.”

As they told their story together they remembered that in 1941, the OLSH sisters arrived, and with the MSC priests and brothers established the girls dormitory. The boys’ dormitory had to wait until after the war. It was through the experience of the dormitories that the people began to consider

“their tribal way of life lacked something.” They learnt that they could not read or write, therefore, there was something wrong with their previous way of life. They made connection with Christian baptism, with the result that they discarded their own religious rite of initiating a baby.<sup>3</sup>

The elders identified the dormitory as the time when the two ways of life began to diverge. The missionary way of life became the public persona, the tribal way of life gradually began to go underground. As one put it, “The missionaries were good people, therefore what they did must have been good, therefore the tribal way of life went underground.” Many of the middle-aged generation listening to the elders commented that the whole experience of the dormitories led to them feeling incomplete (see Chapter 1, pp.97ff). It was not just the missionary behavior and discipline that confused them, they also could not understand at the time why their parents were not teaching them the cultural knowledge.

The dormitories continued; and the Second World War gave the Aborigines further experiences of White people through contact with the army and navy.

The elders remembered the lay missionaries who came to help the missionaries. The Aborigines made very strong connection with the missionaries, both lay and religious. Their close relationships made it difficult for them to question what was happening. They recalled “If we go to the bishop and talk about what was happening he will think that we are criticizing him.” The 1960s and 1970s saw the tribal way of life pushed further underground as the position of missionaries became ever more powerful.

The missionaries handed over control of the mission to the government in 1979. Up until then, missionary priests or brothers were paid by the government to be Superintendents of the mission. *Kardu Numida Incorporated* became the new town body established to deal with government and all town infrastructure and planning. Because there had been no preparation for hand-over the Aboriginal community employed people—mostly Anglo-Australians—to come into the community to help run the town. *Kardu Numida Incorporated* collapsed in 1994.

When the church started to give up control of the community it was giving up a formidable position of power. The church struggled to adjust to a new way of ministry. It became “at sea” (see Chapter 1, pp.97ff). Out of this framework the missionaries began to view the previous years as “halcyon days” (cf. Pye ca. 1975, 1977, ca. 1978). Xavier Desmarchelier, whom we will meet below, is working with *Memelma*. He believes, “The missionaries have not given up without a fight. The more the missionaries seem to enter into today’s world the more they reflect on the so-called glory days of the past. The more the elders think about the future, they see the past with new eyes.”

The elders spoke with great enthusiasm about the way they reestablished the tribal ceremony groups in around 1992. These continue strongly.

*Memelma* is attempting to bring the divergent ways of life together. They believe the tribal way of life needs to be brought back to its proper place in dialogue with the missionaries and broader Anglo-Australian society and culture. They believe a better balance between the competing

worldviews needs to be reestablished. I asked one Aborigine, “Why is *Melmelma* just starting to happen now?” His reply alludes to the dominating pattern of behavior they received from past missionaries and Anglo-Australians over many years, “we are beginning to realize that it’s about time we did things for ourselves instead of non-Aboriginal people coming in and telling us what’s best for us. We’ve had that happen for a long time. We just want to do things for ourselves now.”

### *Ngardinithi Nganbe*

Ngardinithi Nganbe is forty-one years old. He is married to Alanga, whom we met in Chapter 4. He is a Murrinpatha man; his tribal land is just ten miles away from Wadeye. Like Tcheyunga whom we met in Chapter 4 as well, he is a grandson of Nemarluk. Although Ngardinithi has been teaching at the local school for almost twenty years, he has only completed his teacher training in 1998.

Ngardinithi is typical of the middle-aged Aboriginal men who missed out on a significant amount of cultural knowledge through being removed from his family to the dormitories. Ngardinithi also had the added removal from his culture by being sent to have three years in a MSC run high school in Victoria. He said,

the three years down south were the biggest hurts of my life because in those three years I could have learnt from my father. The White teacher took me away from my father. *We had no choice*, because he was a White man. Everyone, everyone trusted the White person.

Today, Ngardinithi spends as much time as possible with the *Memelma* elders. He now brings the elders into the school to talk to the



children and the teachers. While he is appreciative of his western education, it is the education that he is now receiving from *Memelma* that is contributing to his optimistic outlook. As he put it,

I feel I now know what the *Memelma* structure is all about. You learn from these old people, what they are seeing, what their goals are. It makes me think I can really do it. Before they came together I didn't know what was going on. The old people are now feeling they are in control, they are taking their authority back.

Ngardinithi gave many practical examples of how *Memelma* has helped him work through problems in the school and community.

Ngardinithi also listens closely to what is going on in the broader Australian community. He sometimes feels angry about the way people like Pauline Hanson talk about Australians<sup>4</sup>. Pauline Hanson believes Aborigines need to forget the past and get on with their lives. She believes minorities like Aborigines and Asian peoples are receiving too much “special treatment” from the government and should be treated “just like the rest of the [Anglo-Australian] community.” In a speech given in Federal Parliament on 2 June 1998 on the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>5</sup> she argued:

For many years the activists of the Aboriginal industry and those who peddle their lies have preyed on the collective conscience of other Australians. We have seen the distortion and blame-filled confrontation of the so-called stolen generations, sorry days, sorry books, and the list goes on. We are witnesses to the ongoing PR campaign aimed not at reconciliation but remuneration.

Hanson seems to understand her adopted slogan of “One Nation” to mean “one culture.” Her idea of “one nation” gives little recognition or

respect for cultural differences. In her view the unique role that indigenous-Australians have in the country should be cast aside.

Regarding Pauline Hanson and her style of “bringing people together” Ngardinithi commented, “There’s got to be a better way for people to come together and learn. We need to learn each other’s way, instead of always jumping on each other, always pointing out, ‘you’re no good’—all that rubbish coming out.”<sup>6</sup> Ngardinithi believes people need to understand “what’s happening both ways—black *and* white—and put these two together and work on it. We need to make people understand that we are all Australians. It’s not only for Aborigines, it’s for the Chinese community, the Asian peoples.” Ngardinithi continued, “This rubbish talk has got to stop. But that depends on people’s point of view—eh?”

Ngardinithi believes he is “really lucky to be an Australian.” He is proud of all Australian achievements. He is pleased there are all sorts of Australians living here,

Asian, Japanese, Americans, whatever. Every time I hear people achieving and saying “I am Australian” there’s a big lump that I feel. It doesn’t matter whether he’s a White man, African Australian. As long as he’s Australian and doing something for the country, good thing for the country, then I’m really proud of him.

I asked, “Have you always felt like that?” The significance of hearing other people’s stories is brought out in his reply. Ngardinithi answered,

My thinking has just come about recently. This stuff on reconciliation came up. People started to talk about “let’s bring this country together.” I went to help work on a “Walking Together” conference over at Broome [west Kimberley].<sup>7</sup> Hearing all the stories of people there made me aware that there’s more to being an Australian than

just being a White person or an Aboriginal person. There is something special that brings us all together as one.

### *Kevin Tipiloura*

Kevin is thirty-five years old; he is a son-in-law of Palibu Nudjula. His mother is from the Marringarr tribe, their land is about thirty-five miles east of Wadeye, and his father is a Tiwi Islander from Melville Island. Kevin has four children. He has lived most of his life at Wadeye, and on Palibu's homeland at Kuy.

Kevin talked freely about his experiences. He talked about the times he had been hurt by others, as well as the times when he had hurt others. He named the White people he gets on very well with, as well as ones whom he is very angry about. His biggest frustration is with not "being treated as equals." He told a lengthy story about his treatment by one of the White community store managers. When asked, "Has there been a missionary that has hurt you?" he replied, "Not me, but my old man." He said,

There was a priest with a collar who hurt dad.<sup>8</sup> The priests didn't want to say Mass at dad's outstation. He would never stop at dad's place. One time at Christmas, old man asked him would he say Mass here.<sup>9</sup> The priest said he was going to say Mass at Rencoo.<sup>10</sup> Old man said, "Are you going to say Mass for the wallabies and possums? There's nobody staying at Rencoo!" He never said Mass at dad's place.

Kevin spoke openly about the times he had hurt others, specially times when he had been drunk. He recalled one incident, "When I was at Bathurst Island Club I got drunk and called this woman names. When I woke up the next day, I sobered up, went to the club and apologized to her." As it turned out, the woman also apologized to Kevin, apparently she felt she had been

driving her car too close to Kevin at the time of the incident. Kevin also talked freely about a variety of family problems that he has been involved in, and how he was hurt by some of them, and how he had hurt others as well.

### *Kerry Charleton*

Kerry is an Aborigine from Stradbroke Island. The Stradbroke Islands are just off the coast south of Brisbane. She's in her early forties, and proud to be a grandmother. She is the "community development / reconciliation indigenous worker" for the Northern Territory and Queensland province of the Christian Brothers. She commenced that position in June 1998. I interviewed Kerry on the first of her quarterly visits to Wadeye.

Kerry spoke freely about her past and present situation. Her grandparents on Stradbroke Island brought her up. Her grandparents never allowed her to share her culture with White persons. As a child she remembers being warned not to tell Whites about their hunting and cultural activities. Her grandparents spoke the Stradbroke Island language, but did not teach it to her parents because of fear of the White authorities.

Her mother placed Kerry and her sisters in a children's home. Her mother died at the age of forty-seven. She has had a number of family members die of alcoholism in their forties. She spoke about how she "worked through the 1980s trying to reclaim her story, to discover why she was raised the way she was; to come to self understanding." She has worked through an enormous amount of grief.

Discussion of grief featured prominently in the interview. We talked about the Human Rights report on the Stolen Generation. She noted,

With every new issue that comes up, say when the Stolen Generation report came up, my feelings around being in a home and all the issues that go with that, a whole lot of grieving happens. You grieve then because you realize your mother was very powerless, that she did the smart thing, because she put us in the home, so that she could then take us out. Whereas if she stayed where she was she would have ended up being evicted from her home. Because if she stayed in that situation and had been reported to the authorities, and they came and took us, it would have been much harder for her to get us back. So then you grieve for her having to have made that decision.

“Getting her story together” has been an important ingredient in Kerry’s healing. As she put it, “You certainly need to have yourself together inside.” She says this not just from her own experience, but also through her awareness of others. She said,

I spoke to friends who were all part of the stolen children, or who grew up in homes and didn’t know that their brothers and sisters were with them as well. They didn’t know their own brothers and sisters. Until they come to terms with that sort of stuff they are really messed up.

Her observations on reconciliation reveal the importance of story in her own life. She would say,

I think that people who’ve worked with reconciliation have come to a point of reconciliation within themselves about our *history*, and about their experiences, about their responses. They have been able to come to a point of looking at wider society and also seeing the humanness and the inhumanity. They have been able to come to some sort of reconciliation within themselves.

She continued, “There are indigenous people that *I know* who have been faithfully part of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, who have had major experiences, and have every reason to be hateful and revengeful.”

The federal government under Prime Minister Keating established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) in 1991. Its charter is to run for one decade. Under the remarkable indigenous leadership of people like Mr. Pat Dodson the CAR entered the lives of people in many communities. Through its process of a “sharing circle,” meetings in local communities became occasions where indigenous and other Australians could tell their stories about past and present hurts and conflicts in a safe and respectful environment.<sup>11</sup> The Mackay Reconciliation Conference mentioned in Chapter 3 was a large gathering that drew from the CAR’s approach.

Kerry talked about the way some Aborigines had

gone onto the Council thinking, “well, we’ll give it a go” but are not sure if they truly believe it and who’ve come out, then come out and said, “I’ve been working with these Whitefellas, people who truly have hearts.” It’s changed their way of looking at Whitefellas as well.

Kerry’s story illustrates vividly the healing power of narrative work. Her healing, demonstrated through her ability to handle the pressures and challenges of the present, has come about through being able to grieve and integrate the painful memories of the past. We recall from Chapter 3 that the process of recovery for survivors begins by naming and claiming the injury. This is not an obsession or over-dwelling on the past, rather, it is witness to the courage needed for victims to reenter that place of vulnerability, so that they can create a new self out of the old experience. This is what Schreier (1992a: 37) means by the survivor creating an *orthopathema*, that is, “a right

way to suffer.” The suffering present in the person’s narrative becomes the very thing that is transformed into hope. Survivors like Kerry do not simply retrieve their suffering memory they reconstruct their memory through putting new meaning onto old wounds, thereby reclaiming their inalienable sense of power and subjecthood (See Introduction, pp.21-25).

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The stories of Palibu and the *Memelma* Council of Elders, Ngardinithi, Kevin and Kerry clearly demonstrate the vital ways that narrative functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in the lives of Aborigines, both in their individual lives, and in the broader community context.

The reemergence of the social authority of the *Memelma* elders is due to the respect given to them by the rest of their community for their power to remember the old stories. The memory of the elders and their capacity to retell their stories is serving to educate a generation of women and men who missed out on vital years of cultural education. We could see through Ngardinithi’s interview that this generation is gaining in confidence through the process of listening to and learning from the elders.

The rise of *Memelma* at Wadeye serves to highlight three key aspects of reconciliation. First, it captures the profound capacity for narrative to effect changes in a whole community, and move it forward, through accurately remembering its past. Second, and implicit in the first, is that *Memelma* serves to highlight the crucial role of leadership for a community. The elders of *Memelma* serve as symbols of wisdom and healing for the

entire community. They demonstrate through their commitment and ability to accurately remember the past, particularly in their efforts to recall those parts of the community's history that had previously been silenced or ignored that the truth of the community's history can come out. Third, the impact of *Memelma* on the community indicates that there is a correlation between truthful retelling of history and an increase in personal and community identity (cf. Chapter 3, pp.174ff).

The interviews with Ngardinithi, Kerry and Kevin serve to highlight some of the ways narrative can function as an interactive dynamic. It was very evident from Ngardinithi and Kerry that the narratives of others have changed the way they feel about the reconciliation process in Australia. For Ngardinithi, coming together with a group of strangers in the west Kimberley could have been an alienating experience. As he listened and shared with them it had the opposite effect. Ngardinithi affirms the value and power of bringing people together to talk about their different experiences.

Kerry said it was hearing the positive stories of other Aborigines experiences on the CAR that have inspired her to continue working in the area of Aboriginal reconciliation and crosscultural awareness education. Her ongoing work in Aboriginal reconciliation and crosscultural awareness education is an excellent illustration of the way recovery for survivors can be tied up with ongoing work for social and political change (see Chapter 2, pp.131-132; cf. Herman 1992).

Kerry gave a glimpse into the way narrative works at the personal level of healing for survivors. She was emphatic that it was only through



working through the trauma and pain of her past that she has been to reclaim her story, and through that come to a place of healing. Kerry's story is particularly powerful as she speaks with the authority of having been one of the many survivors of the stolen generation. An important insight we learn from Kerry is that healing for survivors comes through personal and communal processes of recovery. Narrative work features in both these processes.

The interview with Kevin was the first time he had been asked to talk about his experiences. While his responses were brief they did not come across as an attempt of cover up pain he may have caused others, or pain that he has received from others. At the end of the interview, he shook his head sadly and relayed, "This is the first time I have been asked questions like this." It seemed that the actual process of the interview was helping him claim aloud his story for the first time. Kevin was glad to have had a chance to talk about these things. He helped introduce me to Dean Sparey, (one of the Anglo-Australians we met in the previous chapter), and persuaded Dean to be interviewed. It seems that Kevin saw the whole process as very valuable for all persons, Aborigines and Anglo-Australians.

### *The Voices of Anglo-Australians*

#### *Xavier Desmarchelier*

Xavier Desmarchelier is in his late forties; he first came to Wadeye as an MSC priest. He was parish priest from 1988 through to 1993, when at that time he went on leave from the priesthood. In 1998, the *Memelma*

Council of Elders employed him as their support person and facilitator. He continues in this role.

Xavier reflected a lot on the importance of understanding history and knowing his own personal story. He believes the past clearly influences the way he is in the present. For him, “History is not just a lot of events. They are events that shape people’s behavior, beliefs, directions, decisions in life.” He adds,

we are more than just our past. It is a past that is still with us. My early childhood still has an impact on me now, many, many years later. There’s stuff that I’ve denied and saved up until adult times. It can affect me both positively and negatively, depending on how I embrace it, basically. So, if I leave my past back there and keep it at bay all the time, I’m not accepting the way it’s impacted me; that’s the negative way. If I have the courage to embrace these things, I will take that with me in terms of accepting that it is part of me.

Like Kerry above, Xavier spoke at length about the need to come to know his story more fully. He continued,

For me the *truth* of my life is in the past. That is the only thing that I know is really true. Because it’s the only thing that has been. I can evaluate, I can say, “my father did this at such and such a time,” “my mother did this at such a time,” “my mother died at such a time,” “my father died at such and such a time.” Now, that’s truth. It’s truth in the sense that it happened, it’s reality. I wouldn’t have a clue what’s going to happen in the next five minutes, but I do know about the past. To me, it’s relating to the truth of the past that’s important. Some of that truth hurts. Hurts like bloody hell. Only by embracing it does it shift and the hurt becomes something that probably still hurts, but becomes positive. It is not something to shy away from.

Xavier made a connection of his personal need to embrace the truth of his past with the broader Australian situation, particularly in regards to the treatment of its indigenous people. His connection occurred as follows,

I'm not saying that I race up and embrace the past all the time. Sometimes it takes quite a while to be able to embrace it, because it does hurt so much. It helps bridge the past into the present. With Aboriginal people, I guess having done a fair bit of study on the past in terms of the history of Aboriginal people, it is amazing what did happen. I think when we talk about reconciliation with Aboriginal people there is a need to acknowledge the hurtfulness of the past, and say, "This did happen. I wasn't part of it, I didn't *do it*, but it did happen. I am part of the culture that did."

While being able to connect to the past mistreatment of Aborigines Xavier clearly does not feel guilty for the past. This is another good example of the distinction between shame and guilt. Xavier indicated that he is able to make connection with the past because he has learnt the stories of the past through studying Aboriginal history.

Xavier's grandfather came to Australia from Europe in 1920. With that in mind I, "How do you make the connection that you are part of the cultural group that did violence to the Aborigines?" He replied,

Because of two reasons. I am part of it because I come from the same stock, European stock, that came to Australia. The other reason is that I feel at times that I'm capable of doing it myself. Quite capable when I get angry. I'm not saying I'll go out and shoot them or anything like that. But I'm conscious that within myself there are elements of that. I have a capacity to see them as "black-skinned" people. To me that seems to be the basis for the whole lot of disruption of the past. Aborigines weren't seen as people, they were seen as "*black* people." The blackness caused a lot of the value systems that developed. I find myself taken aback sometimes, when I'm capable of seeing them, not just as people, but as "black people."

*Lysbeth Ford*

Lysbeth is a linguist and is writing a dictionary on the unwritten languages of the Wadeye region. She is in her early fifties, divorced, and

just completed her Ph.D. through Australian National University, Canberra. She and her husband came to Australia from Wales in the mid-1980s. She has lived for long periods of time as a minority, firstly in Ghana, then in Aboriginal communities in Australia. At the age of twenty-three she discovered, after her father had died, that her father was a Jew. She felt an outsider in boarding school at Oxford, because “everyone was rich.” She was twelve at the time, living in a Church of England boarding school, and “wasn’t even baptized!” She “absolutely hated it.”

Lysbeth was well aware of her family history. Her ancestors came to Scotland in 1880 as an attempt to cover up their Jewish background. It is perhaps this dimension of Lysbeth’s life that has nurtured her in understanding the importance of story and knowing history. When she first arrived in Australia, she felt “there was something wrong.” She recalls driving from Darwin to Alice Springs, a trip of approximately 900 miles, and feeling, “where are they all?” It was at this point that she sensed “something dreadful happened here.”

Lysbeth said she’s witnessed storytelling change people’s lives. She spoke about her experience in a mediation center where she “saw people change through hearing each other’s perspectives.” The stories of the Stolen Generation were also named as important in helping her understand the experience of Australians—both Blacks and Whites.

She could relate the dormitory imagination exercise with her own “stint in boarding school.” Her comment, “You wanted to please those in charge but you *didn’t know* how to do it” hauntingly echoed some of the painful experiences told to me by Aborigines. The dormitory imagination

exercise reminded her of a story she was given by one Aboriginal woman from Wadeye. She was told the story of a young girl;

When “Mary” was thirteen she was staying with the sisters in the convent. She became pregnant, and ran away from the convent to be with her family. All she was looking for was her mother and father. She wanted to go back to her country.

Another person informed me that the father of Mary’s child was white. This seems to be the case as Mary’s daughter returned only in 1989 to see her mother for the first time since she had been taken away at birth.

Lysbeth enjoyed the interview. As she put it, “You made me remember a couple of things from my own life that I had forgotten, that I hadn’t really thought about. You made me think about me, and my reasons for being here—that’s important. It keeps things in perspective.”

### *Jude Vincent Lane*

Jude Lane is thirty-one years old, single, and from Brisbane. Like Liam Clancy, he is a member of the “friends of Edmund” Christian Brother community. Originally he thought he might stay twelve months to two years at Wadeye, and is now considering lengthening his time to around five years. He is a member of the team working with the post-school aged young men.

Jude stressed the importance of relationships in his interview. For him, “developing relationships with people helps to break though barriers that separate people from one another.” As he put it,

Stereotypes will remain safe and secure as long as there’s no personal contact, no ongoing development of relationships with another human being from another culture. We can *remain* detached and uncaring

and bitter and angry towards those persons as long as we only see each other in a stereotypical way.

He sees reconciliation through the same lens. As he puts it, “Reconciliation springs from relationship,” adding, “I don’t think you can have reconciliation without relationship.”

Jude’s first memory of an Aborigine was when he was in Grade Seven in “an all-White male Catholic school.” He recalls, “I suppose at that point in time I hadn’t thought much about it. Up until then I had learnt only White history, ‘fighting back the savages.’” An Aboriginal boy joined his class that year. Jude remembers “he copped a lot of racism. He didn’t stay long, less than a year. At that point in time his leaving or his being there didn’t mean much to me.”

In recent years Jude has made a significant effort to learn some of Australia’s Aboriginal history. He believes all Australians need to “have a more complete understanding of what really did happen.”

Jude’s thinking shifted considerably during the 1990s. He recalls an experience he had in 1992 in which he had participated in the ten-week CSJ crosscultural awareness course. At the end of the course there was a ceremony where people “were given the opportunity to say sorry to Aborigines for past wrongs.” Jude recalls feeling very uncomfortable with that and declined the invitation. As he put it, “I felt if I had done it I wouldn’t have been sincere. I just didn’t want to feel insincere about apologizing for something that I wasn’t responsible for.” He realized how much his position had shifted when he was present at the May 1997

Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne to see the Prime Minister Howard speak from the convention platform. He recounts,

John Howard got up, and *did* offer a personal apology, but totally refused to offer an apology on behalf of the government. The apology from the government was far more relevant than his personal apology. So I think I must have changed a bit, because I was really angry that he had not been able to say sorry. At the end of the convention we had the opportunity to say sorry, I knew that I was now able to do that.

When asked, “What was happening in those intervening years that changed your understanding?” he said,

The growing awareness through the whole Hanson phenomenon that the White community is benefiting from the past injustices. Unless I acknowledged my sorrow, unless people who know better start talking, they are creating space for people like Hanson. People like Pauline Hanson were a sort of catalyst.

Jude’s comments here echo those of Ngardinithi. It seems that the eruption of Hansonism in the mid-1990s and statements by Prime Minister Howard and Senator John Herron in April 2000 questioning whether there ever was a “Stolen Generation” serve as a catalyst for much rethinking among many Black and White Australians—both negative *and* positive. While the eruption of Hansonism has also brought about an increase in attacks on Asian and indigenous-Australians, it has also brought about an increase in grassroots community groups for social justice and reconciliation. Consider the following letter to the editor of *The Australian* newspaper on 6 April 2000 which was written as a response to the comments of Howard and Herron:

I cried yesterday. For myself and my country. In the late 1950s and early 60s I was employed by the NSW Child Welfare Department

and was a party to removing children from their families. Because they were part-Aboriginal it was thought that they would grow up white, non-Aboriginal, to get them out of poverty.

The indigenous children were put into “good white homes” or left to languish in “orphanages.” The poor whites were put into middle-class homes of matching religion (our inadequate attempt to acknowledge cultural heritage) or languished with the others in institutions.

I accept responsibility for my role in implementing race and class-based policies and am truly sorry. Good intentions do not absolve me from that sense of responsibility.

Others at the time were not actors in the awful drama. Are they less responsible for being bystanders? John Howard was qualified as a lawyer by then. Did he question the policy or advocate for change? Senator Herron was a qualified medical practitioner then. Did he look to the physical and mental wellbeing of these children and work against the policy? We each are now privileged members of this society. What is our responsibility now? These two men [Howard and Herron] wish to conduct a debate about terminology and in other ways perpetuate the arguments of denial, and are doing so in the name of my Government. I now feel shame.

I thank them for making me realise that acknowledgement of my past responsibility is not enough. Yesterday, after I had cried, I took steps to become involved in the reconciliation process in my community. I cannot allow this Government to speak for me on this issue.

It seems that Hansonism, and ill-formed Government opinion can work to force people to make decisions about where they stand on social policies and attitudes to minorities, and indigenous-Australians.

Jude has become increasingly aware of the importance of land for indigenous-Australians. He believes Aborigines have much to teach all Australians on spirituality—particularly on developing relationship with the land. I asked, “What has helped you make these deeper connections?” He said,



Just being with the people, being with the local people of Wadeye. Traveling out to their land, seeing the way that they are in their land. They are much more at ease. They tell stories about the different parts of their land, it is as if the land was like a storybook for them. They know where everything is in their land, like a White person will know where everything is in their *house*. Their home is their land. They can navigate through, what to me just looks like dense scrub. I can't see any difference from this piece of scrub to another piece of scrub. It is like they are on a kind of radar or something. They *spot* things in it that I'm totally blind too. Even though I am staring at something in the bush, I can't actually see it. At times it is like they have these superhuman abilities on their land.

After taking Jude through the imagination exercise I asked him how listening to that story might shape the way he understands the people of Wadeye. He replied,

It helps to take away a harsh, White perspective. Like, without that knowledge, you could see behavior and react to it only in terms of a perspective from the outside. With that knowledge you can react differently to these things, react more compassionately I suppose. I've grown in understanding. It shows there are reasons behind these symptomatic actions. It creates more space to relate to other people as people. You can put yourself in the situation that they have gone through. The exercise gives some *idea* at least of what those experiences would do to you.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like the stories contained in the "Aboriginal Voices" above, the narratives of Xavier, Lysbeth, and Jude also demonstrate the powerful manner in which narrative can become a catalyst for changing people's thinking and behavior. Three dominant themes emerged in the narratives of the "Anglo-Australian Voices." These were comprehending the importance of how history shapes a person; the way a person's personal history serves to connect him or her with broader social history and contexts; and thirdly, the

way relationships serve to break down cultural and historical barriers between different groups of people.

All three acknowledged the value and importance of knowing Australia's history in order to understand better the contemporary situation in the nation. For Lysbeth, she was confronted almost immediately on arrival with the need to find out "what happened here." She knew she needed to have some knowledge of Australia's Aboriginal history in order for her to begin to understand the indigenous people she was working with. This was mentioned in other Anglo-Australian interviews.<sup>12</sup>

Xavier, through embracing the pain of his own personal story, illustrated the way personal narrative can deeply connect with broader social narratives. The more people understand their personal and family history the more they recognize the importance of learning both the personal and broader socio-cultural history of others. This dynamic also happens through the reverse process; that is, the more people understand another's history the more they are confronted with needing to learn their own history. In Jude's interview, I told him the story of my great-uncle (see Chapter 3). At the close of the interview, Jude said,

I think I've just realized after your story of your great-uncle, what I've been doing over the past eight or so years. I've been putting a lot of energy into learning about indigenous stuff, hearing a lot of indigenous stories, and I know a lot about them, but I don't know my own story so well. I know the glossy parts of my story. But I haven't explored my own history in that way, more particularly my family history. Your story has given me the realization that I should be exploring my own family's history a bit more.

Jude's reflection mirrored many that were given to me after I had disclosed the story of my great-uncle, Alan Goldman. People's responses to the "Alan Goldman story" seemed to provide evidence of the power of narrative to engage bystanders, to enable them to consider the ways they may have detached themselves from their own personal and family history, as well as the history of Australia's indigenous community.

Finally, all three interviewees raised the significant ways being in relationship with Aborigines had impacted their understanding. Jude highlighted the way being in relationship served to break down stereotypical images that had been given to him over the years, and that still abound in much of the media and many conversations of other Australians today. Xavier pointed to the need for vulnerability in relationships, particularly in crosscultural relationships. He said,

To be reconciled with Aboriginal people is to allow them to present me to myself the way they see me, and to *accept that*. A little more personally, the old women used to, and still do; they're very, very cagey and very, very clever often. They read you like a piece of paper with a light behind you. They know when I'm not feeling good, they can see that, and they just say something. And in a sense I don't like that. I hate people seeing that I'm like that, feeling like I'm that transparent. And if it were a White person, I would probably tell them to "piss off." But these people do it with such humor, such laughter, that you just got to laugh with them. To me that's reconciliation.

### *The Voices of Anglo-Australian Missionaries*

*Br. Terrence A Kingston cfc*

Br. Terry Kingston arrived to work in Wadeye in March 1998. For the previous six years he was the provincial leader of the Queensland and Northern Territory province of the Christian Brothers. He was part of the

negotiations with the *Memelma* Council to discuss the role of the Brothers within the community, particularly on the work with the young men. He expects to be at Wadeye for a further three to four years. Br. Terry is sixty-years old.

Br. Terry was raised in Blackall, a small country town in the heart of central Queensland. His father was a shearer, and spent a lot of time in the bush. His father “talked about Aborigines a fair bit” when Br. Terry was growing up. Br. Terry recalls that his father and the Aborigines shared “the best fishing holes. All dad’s contacts out there were positive.” He described Blackall as being “fairly racist” and has “no doubt there would be plenty of anti-Aboriginal stuff there.” He remembers his father as a very tolerant person, “certainly not racist. A Chinese family and an Indian family used to visit regularly. Never detected a sense of any difference. We would have been unusual in the area to have had such contacts, sharing meals together.”

Br. Terry believes the “indigenous issue is *the* issue that is confronting Australia at the moment. It is the benchmark about how we are as a nation. As a nation we will start to grow or fall depending on how we respond to indigenous reconciliation.” He said,

Did Germans take responsibility for what happened? Australians are responsible as a race for what happened to the Aborigines. Some atonement for that is needed, and it has to be tied up with land. *I can't* understand at an intellectual level that I'm not responsible. Where Australia is now financially is due to what we did to the indigenous people.

He talked about his years with street kids (some of whom were Aboriginal) in Kingston, a suburb of Brisbane. He recalls that during those years, he was

struggling to even ask the right questions, the only resource you had was *yourself*. This is what those kids were *wanting*. The only thing that I had was the possible *interaction* with a person in their life, companion to them in a certain period of their life. I know for me that these intersections changed me. It was in those cases of being *absolutely powerless* and to be *present* that were the most revealing. I couldn't do anything other than *be there*.

Setting up the youth work in Kingston was “an experience of alienation from the church” for Br. Terry—he was challenging the middle-class assumptions of the church and his own religious community.<sup>13</sup> Br. Terry’s main motivation for working with these people was “following strong gospel values, [and building] relationships with the poor and marginalized.”

Like with the street kids, Br. Terry also spoke movingly about the different relationships he has developed with Aborigines. These people were vital to him, they helped him “bridge the gap.” Br. Terry is struck by the “incredible dignity of Aboriginal friends like Marlene and Hector.” Marlene met her daughter twenty-seven years after she had been told her daughter had died at birth. (This story is typical of one of the many scenarios of forced separation experienced by families of the Stolen Generations.) He recalled “the complete lack of bitterness” in both Marlene and her daughter; “the qualities of forgiveness were all around.”

Hector is from Warrmun (also known as Turkey Creek), in the east-Kimberley (see map in Appendix B). Hector’s mother, along with many of his relations was killed in the Mistake Creek Massacre of the late 1920s. Sr. Mary told me the story and her experience of hearing about the Mistake Creek Massacre.

When I was on retreat recently in the Kimberley, we went to a place called Mistake Creek. We stood around there. There were about four of these people, and they stood there and told us the story. I was just stunned. I was really stunned. I only found out about all these massacres, all those massacres in Western Australia, last year [1997].

It was over a cow. It certainly was a mistake. The cow had run off somewhere. The White man sends these two Queensland trackers, Aboriginal trackers, out to find his cow. They came across a group of Aboriginal people who were having a bit of a picnic. They'd been hunting. They had this kangaroo cooking under the ground. The trackers thought it was a cow, so they went back and told the man these are the people who stole the cow. So he came back with them and told them to shoot them. They shot them all—*it was kangaroo meat, not the cow*. So the Aboriginal trackers were the ones who were shot by the police, and the White man was told to go somewhere else to live. And then the cow came back.

Hector has forgiven those who killed his mother and other relations. Br. Terry remembers Hector telling him, “If I didn’t forgive I wouldn’t be a strong man.”<sup>14</sup> Sr. Mary recalled thinking, “The Prodigal Father was prepared to forgive a son who had taken everything, White man has taken everything. Hector and his people are forgiving like the Prodigal Father.” “Developing relationships with Hector and Marlene, and listening to their stories, and reading books like Henry Reynolds’ [1998] *This Whispering in Our Hearts*,” have been the catalysts for changing the mind and heart of Br. Terry Kingston.

#### *Fr. Peter Wood msc*

Fr. Peter Wood is an MSC priest, and has been coming out on brief visits to Wadeye since 1995. He has been mostly involved in AIDS education work and related pastoral care. His contact with Wadeye goes

back to 1978 when he was teaching in the MSC run high-school in Darwin. He recalls there were Aboriginal boarders from Wadeye during that time.

Fr. Peter's position on Aboriginal reconciliation in Wadeye was sharply different from the other MSC and OLSH persons that were interviewed. He believes the missionaries should apologize for what happened. While the Aborigines were not dispossessed at Wadeye, and most still have a close relationship to their land, he believes the missionaries need to recognize the notions of Western Anglo-superiority and Aboriginal inferiority that "infected them to one degree or another." The church needs to make "some sort of an apology for that, or an admission of the fact that *we didn't get it right*. That we weren't faithful to the gospel."

Just a few months before this interview Fr. Peter had discovered the convict origins of his family history—that had been completely buried by his forebears. He connected the buried shame of his family history with the buried national shame of Anglo-Australian's historical treatment of indigenous-Australians. He began,

Only a matter of weeks ago, I discovered some of my great-great-grandparents were convicts. They were transported to Tasmania for thieving. They had a daughter who married an Irishman (they were English) who had been transported for life for assaulting someone with a pistol. That Irishman had a son, he was my grandmother's father. My grandmother died in the 1970s at around the age of ninety-two. But that story had been kept from my generation, in fact from my father's generation. They just never mentioned the fact that we had anything like that in our family. They were wealthy people in Melbourne, who were up the social scale. They sent their son and daughters to exclusive schools. It was her *father* that had been transported for life. She came to Melbourne in 1896. Why was that hidden from us? Because now it's acceptable to have convict

ancestors, but in my parent's generation it was not talked about—it was something that was really buried.

I asked, “Why was it buried?” He continued,

They didn't want to acknowledge (a) there may be a criminal strand in the family, and (b) that they were *lower class*, criminal class really, and (c) what would other people think if they knew that we had this in our background? So they buried it. I found that out eight weeks ago, and I read four weeks ago, *This Whispering in Our Hearts*. And we just *cannot deny* what we have done, what the non-indigenous have done to the indigenous. Some of it is so shameful it made me weep. It's disgusting. But, we buried the knowledge of it, we have pretended that it didn't happen, we *don't want to know about it*. We say, “that's the past, forget about it, let's get on with our future,” “you're wearing a black armband view if you think like that, etc.” But there were people who were conscious of it and did protest. That's what Reynold's book is about. People *can't* claim they didn't know about it. The vast majority is simply silent about it, but everybody, including right up to us now, have benefited from what they did.

Fr. Peter's interview illustrated the way narrative serves to help the person see the interconnectedness of his or her life. His interview highlighted the way narrative can work as a means of increasing a person's social memory as well as helping the person make connection with his or her corporate relationships. He said,

To forget, to *deliberately* forget—you're not based on reality—you're not talking the truth, you're not claiming the wholeness of life. We have to accept shame for that. I don't find any difficulty in admitting that. For me, it's *exactly* the same kind of shame I feel about the sexual abuses in the church. I've not been involved, not known anybody, or aware of anyone, but these are my people, these people who are committed to the same sorts of things as I am. And they have betrayed that trust, and done awful things.



*Lisa Smith*

Lisa is a schoolteacher in her mid-thirties. Her name has been changed at her request. She was due to be married the year after I interviewed her. She wished to be interviewed under the category of lay missionary. She visited Wadeye for five weeks in 1991, and came to teach here in 1996 after teaching four years on Nguuu, Bathurst Island. She was leaving Wadeye at the end of 1998. Prior to coming to Nguuu, Lisa had spent four years training to be an OLSH sister in their formation convent in Bowral, New South Wales. She has remained close to the sisters through her work at Nguuu and now Wadeye.

Lisa has a high respect for the work of the OLSH. When asked, “What are the best parts of the church’s mission at Wadeye?” she answered,

I think the pastoral care work that especially the nuns do, purely because they have been the most consistent and the people know them and they go to them for anything that’s happening. A lot of the time the sisters are the first point of call. They’re helping hands, they’ve seen the best and the worst.

Lisa does not feel “the old missionaries” had caused the people to feel dependent.

Lisa struggled with the imagination exercise. She found it “a bit hard answering these questions” because she had heard “so many stories about when the Aboriginals talk about the missionary days and they glorify it something fierce. They really glorify those days, they say they were ‘the best days of their life.’” After further conversation Lisa disclosed she was actually talking about the Tiwi women from Bathurst Island. She had not

heard the Wadeye women talk about the dormitory time “as much as the Tiwi mob did.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Lisa, Br. Terry, and Fr. Peter reflect the whole group of Anglo-missionary narratives given to me at Wadeye. There were similarities within all three interviewees: each acknowledged the need to recognize what was wrong in the past; and, each believes there needs to be some sort of national apology for what has taken place. There were however, some significant differences within the group. These differences of view revolve around the relationship of a person’s story to the broader social context and history; and, what a person does when she or he hears contrasting narratives.

Fr. Peter and Br. Terry, like several of my informants, made striking connections between their personal and family story and the broader social story of the nation. The more they came to terms with their family’s position in history, the more they felt connected to the stories of Australia’s indigenous people. This was similar to what was observed in the previous chapter: the more individuals have integrated their personal pain into their narrative, the more they are able to empathize with another person’s suffering. That is, vulnerability promotes the possibility of conversion; a person who experiences healthy vulnerability has an increased likelihood of being open to the truth of the other’s story.

Lisa’s interview, like Sr. Ellen and Fr. John’s interviews, revealed the tension of claiming a new narrative in the context of holding onto a competing narrative. One of the reasons Lisa struggled to connect with the

feelings of an Aboriginal girl taken to the dormitory was that the previous narratives she had been given by the sisters, and apparently also by some indigenous women, contrasted sharply with the one presented. Lisa's personal history includes having spent a considerable amount of time with the sisters absorbing their corporate story and memory. In many ways, her difficulty was actually hearing the story of the Aboriginal girl in the light of the (previous) competing narrative. She had already internalized the previous ones as "true." This parallels Sr. Ellen's and Fr. John's narrative in Chapter 4. Sr. Ellen, Fr. John, and Lisa were the only missionaries interviewed, stationed at Wadeye, who failed to connect with the pain of the people's dormitory experience. All three were members of or closely tied to the founding missionary orders of the Wadeye mission.

Individuals' narratives are neither naïve, nor "innocent" as their narratives reflect their consciousness at a particular point in their journey (cf. Crites 1971). The narratives of Sr. Ellen, Fr. John, and Lisa reveal the complicating factors of working with narrative when the corporate memory is such a constitutive dimension of an individual's identity. This points us to what Br. Terry and Jude highlighted, namely, the need to build relationships with others. The power of narrative to increase connectedness in people is maximized in the context of relationship.

### *Summary*

This chapter set out to explore whether narrative actually functions as a relational and interactive dynamic in people's lives. It became evident that narrative does not serve as a panacea for all the pain and hurting in people's

lives. The power of narrative to effect personal healing and increase people's ability to connect deeply with each other is maximized through the context of the type of relationship the person has with himself or herself and with others.

The more individuals have integrated past experiences, family history, and cultural history into their life, the more they are able to understand others. The closer the relationship with the other, the deeper people are able to connect with each other.

The Aboriginal narratives revealed the power of reclaiming narratives of the past in order to construct a more hopeful narrative for the future. The social and cultural memory of the Aboriginal elders was assisting an entire community to re-negotiate its present and future direction. Narratives for Aborigines clearly contain the truth of the past. The truthful narratives of the past, while necessarily looking back, serve to educate and prepare the next generation for the future. The Aboriginal narratives remind us that if narratives are to be redeeming, they must be constructed on truth, on facts.

Lastly, this chapter shed light on the phenomenon of what to do when forced to hold competing narratives in tension. The narratives told by some Anglo-Australians, including missionaries, were clearly in tension with the indigenous narratives. To be sure, many had not heard the narratives of Aborigines before. The imagination exercise served only as a "second-hand" version of what had been given me. Nevertheless, the imagination exercise served to confront each interviewee with sharply differing narratives. What is a person to do when confronted with such sharp contrast? On first appearance it would appear glib to suggest that the person

needs to simply give preference to one set of narratives over another set. Yet, this is what the gospel points us to do; we must listen to the most disenfranchised and powerless. In this context, the stories of indigenous-Australians confront all Australians to consider their own narrative again, and, uncover the possible deaf points in it.

This chapter set out to explore the way narrative functions in the lives of individuals. We should not be surprised that the above question on what to do with competing narratives is emerging as one of the major issues for Aboriginal reconciliation in Australia. Reynolds (1999:171) considers this issue and concludes, “Without some reconciliation of stories, some convergence of histories, it is hard to see how the broader agenda of reconciliation can be advanced.” He asks, “Is reconciliation possible between two peoples who fundamentally disagree about their shared past, who differ widely in their explanation of the reason why things are as they are now?” Reynold’s question lies at the heart of our next chapter. Chapter 6 explores the fieldwork from the perspective of whether narrative actually promotes the possibility of reconciliation between peoples. This is examined from both the personal level, as well as the social level in the contexts of the local community and the overarching national scene.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> As Palibu was born before the missionaries came to the Wadeye region we do not know his exact age. Palibu estimates that he was around seven or eight years old when Fr. Docherty arrived. This would place him around seventy years old at the time of the interview.

<sup>2</sup> Aborigines refer to their philosophical and social system of beliefs and teaching as “*The Law*.” “*The Law*” and “*The Dreaming*” are used interchangeably at Wadeye.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1, pp.65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline Hanson is a politician who had been elected in a Federal seat. Her attitude to Aborigines and Asians was fundamentally racist. She became quite a public figure in Australia. She has since failed in her efforts to be re-elected.

<sup>5</sup> URL: <http://www.gwb.com.au/onenation/speeches/landttle.html>

<sup>6</sup> In this context, “rubbish” refers to stupid words or hurtful words that come out of the mouths of some of our politicians. For example, Ngardinithi feels Pauline Hanson speaks a lot of “rubbish.”

<sup>7</sup> The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in its efforts to bring Black and White Australians together sponsored a series of gatherings all over Australia called “Walking Together Conferences.” The conferences were an opportunity for people to hear each other’s stories. Cf. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1994a), *Walking Together: The First Steps*; (1994b), *Valuing Cultures*.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin was certain this priest did not belong to the MSC. He was probably a member of the “neocatechumenate.” This is a conservative group in the church with little to no crosscultural training and appreciation of the relationship between culture, gospel, and church. Apparently the bishop has been happy to have neocatechumenate priests—with little crosscultural background and sensitivity—on Melville Island. A number of missionaries mentioned the disastrous impact this was having on the Melville Island Catholic communities.

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<sup>9</sup> The expression “old man” is a very respectful one for older persons. While Kevin was using the expression here for “father” or “dad.” He also uses this expression to cover “father-in-law.”

<sup>10</sup> Rencoo is a place on Melville Island where people like to have picnics, or camp when it is school holidays, mostly in the dry months of May to September.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1993b), *Australians for Reconciliation Study Circle Kit*.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Lawler spoke in a similar vein, “What happened in the past shapes our future. You need to be able to look at the past, come to terms with the good and the bad, so as to move forward. Prejudice doesn’t just happen over one lifetime. We have to deal with all our history.” Barbara is a twenty-year old university student from Brisbane who was visiting her uncle, Br. Vince Roche cfc at the time of my fieldwork.

<sup>13</sup> He remembers being struck by a report by the Human Rights Commissioner, Brian Burdekin who he recalls saying, “in all his traveling around, the thing that struck him was that the people who were working in marginalized places were disenchanted church people.” Br. Terry commented, “The church wasn’t there, but disenchanted church people were there.” He noted, “The people who worked with me at Kingston had given up on religion—they had not given up on God.”

<sup>14</sup> Br. Terry also recalls Hector saying, “I feel really sorry for that man, [Prime Minister] John Howard. That person will be smaller. I will keep my dignity.”

## CHAPTER 6

### Story and Reconciliation

The distinction between the way reconciliation occurs at the personal level and the way it occurs at the broader social levels is very helpful as we negotiate the reconciliation process. By personal reconciliation, I mean reconciliation between those who have experienced significant trauma and pain through the actions or inaction of others. The common-sense understanding that reconciliation begins with an apology by the perpetrator is actually far from the reality of the lives of most survivors. The stories of survivors throughout the world indicate that the personal process of reconciliation actually begins with the survivor, not the perpetrator or the bystander.

As in the case of my experience with Ian, personal reconciliation seems to begin with the survivor offering forgiveness to the perpetrator. In this sense we could say that the process of personal reconciliation is as follows: “reconciliation→forgiveness→apology.” This process is evident in many indigenous-Australians; they come seeking reconciliation with all Australians, not with revenge or hatred, but with offering the gift of forgiveness and healing.

Social reconciliation seems to function in the reverse pattern. It follows “the common-sense process of *repentance* → *forgiveness* → *reconciliation*” (Schreiter 1998:64). It is essential that people recognize the ways these two processes operate in people’s lives. It is particularly



important for communities like Wadeye, and nations like Australia, to have leaders who understand the two, particularly the process of social reconciliation. Leaders need to recognize the power and symbolism of apology (this includes repentance and meaningful reparation) so as to support and promote processes of social reconciliation. The role of apology in social reconciliation is tied up with the need for an historically accurate memory: apology and remembering the past accurately are siblings. Social reconciliation cannot progress unless there is a genuine apology grounded on the truth of the past (see Chapter 3).

Community and national leaders need to take the first step in social reconciliation through apologizing or repenting for the mistakes of the past. This helps establish an environment where personal reconciliation is more likely to occur, thereby promoting personal and social reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians throughout local communities and the nation.

We recall that in this chapter we have chosen to merge the Anglo-Australian responses of both missionaries and other Australians into one group. Differences that may exist within those categories are signaled. The narratives of the Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian voices are presented under the categories of “personal reconciliation,” “local reconciliation,” and “national reconciliation.” The last two come under the category of social reconciliation. Organizing the data this way, helps us see the way Australians perceive reconciliation in their personal and social contexts.

*Aboriginal Voices*

*Personal Reconciliation* (Reconciliation→Forgiveness→Apology)

*Forgiving relationships.* In what may seem a remarkable finding, every Aborigine interviewed at Wadeye said they had wherever possible, personally forgiven the missionaries for the past. Time and time again people would say things like Wudarnthale Ninnal: “The missionaries did not know what to do. We forgive them. They thought they were doing the right thing. But we can see it now, they wasn’t doing the right thing for us. They were doing cruel things. We have to forgive these things.”

If the one who hurt them had their genuine interests at heart, then they would be forgiven. Though to be sure, they expected that person to change that pattern of behavior. As Wudarnthale said, “the missionaries need to look back to what they did, not keep making the same mistakes.” If the person does not have their interest at heart then direct action occurs. Sometimes this results in the person being ordered to leave the community. As Palibu said with a chuckle, “If that fella does not do the right thing again, he’ll be sling-shot back to Darwin!”<sup>1</sup>

*The need for “good relationship.”* Palibu told me, “We don’t like disagreeing with White people. We like to be connected together. Not to get angry with each other, but to be one.” He continued, “We are all one. Doesn’t matter if you are white or black. We are all one. If you cut your finger, you have the same color blood, that right? We have to make it one together. We need to come together. Skin color is different, blood is one.” When asked where he got the understanding that we are all meant to “be one” Palibu replied, “Picked it up bit by bit from the missionaries.” This

desire to be “connected,” “to be one,” drives their responses to past and present hurts. Comments like those of Palibu’s reveal their cultural need to be in “good relationship” with others.

Palibu’s desire to be one and in right relationship were echoed by nearly all Aborigines interviewed. It seems that the Aborigines desire to be in right relationship is a cultural pattern (prevenient grace within the culture) that is reinforced through their commitment to the Christian faith. It should be noted that over ninety-five percent of Australia’s indigenous population are Christian (Barrett 1982:152).

*Face-to-face conflict resolution.* The need to maintain good relationship is evident in the way Aborigines’ negotiate conflict. They prefer to handle conflicts directly. They call this approach, “straight talk.” As Palibu said,

Straight talk is the best way. Never talk to them in the back. Nah, nah, that’s not fair. If you talk to their face, that’s really good way. If you talk to their back, talk to somebody else, then that’s not fair. They can’t listen to you when you talk to their back. They have to listen to you—then you have fair argument.

The person would only be “sling-shot back to Darwin” after having had the opportunity to engage in a “fair argument,” and after being given sufficient time to “change their behavior.”

*Cultural understanding of reconciliation.* The need to be at peace in life was also stressed in many of the interviews. All mentioned they are most at peace and happy when they are near their *Dreamings* (that is, sacred sites) on their land. Alanga revealed the personal and cultural significance of this when she spoke of,

sitting and listening to my dad, my old dad, and grandmother around the campfire. They would tell stories about the red kangaroo—which is our *Dreaming*—and how it jumped from one place to another place and rested. And as he left he made great waterholes, which are still there. Every time we go out to hunt there. It is a very special place for us, not to swim in it, but to get water. There is one waterhole we can swim in. It is the last meeting place [of the red kangaroo]; the other holes are only for drinking water or making damper. It is very special because water is like a source of *life*. We can swim in the last waterhole, and wash ourselves, and become “clean,” like, umm, how can I put it, like going to, when we, do bad things, we go to confession. It’s like that.

*Aboriginal memory and reconciliation.* Aborigines have great capacity to remember—they tell stories easily about the past—the good and the not so good. Their oral culture has steeped them in memory.<sup>2</sup> They remember *The Dreaming*. *The Dreaming* is passed down through the ongoing storytelling of the elders and through visiting and caring for the *Dreaming* sacred sites in their land. They do not forget them.

It is the same with their memory of past relationships. The Aborigines revealed a remarkable memory of what happened in the “olden days of the mission.” As Palibu said, “We never forget what Fr. Docherty done for us.” They told stories from the 1930s and 1940s like they happened yesterday. Those who were not even alive at the time of the mission’s founding, spoke with a great familiarity of the historical details of the mission. Even particular years were named at times. It was very clear that they place great value on remembering the past.

Ngardinithi stated, “It’s a bad thing to say, you know, ‘to forget the past about the Aboriginal people.’” When asked, “Why is it bad?” he replied,

You can't do that to any people. You can't do something bad to them and then just forget them. You can do that to an animal, you can say "you're rubbish." But to a human being, you can't do that. If you do that you are just saying, "I am better than you. I am more special than you."

He said this is wrong because, "In God's eyes we are all equal." This is why the phrase "forgive and forget" is so offensive to Aborigines (cf. Habel 1999:4; Cone 1997:207).

*Apologizing through actions.* Aborigines apologize through actions, not words. It does not make a great deal of sense "just to say sorry." Mark Ninnal captures this cultural understanding when he said, "If you want to be forgiven *you have to give something* [to the person you hurt]. In the olden days they tried to give something, like boomerangs, spears, fish nets." An apology is considered to be genuine when the person changes their behavior, and makes active reparation.

This section explored the way Aborigines at Wadeye talk about personal reconciliation. The need for personal reconciliation, or as they put it, to be in "good relationship" is viewed as extremely important. This is evident in they spoke of forgiveness for the missionaries that hurt them. We can conclude that at the personal level of reconciliation, Aborigines have a great capacity to forgive. We now turn to explore their attitude to reconciliation in the social contexts of local and national reconciliation.

*Local Reconciliation* (Apology→Forgiveness→Reconciliation)

*The question of apology.* The differences between personal reconciliation and social reconciliation emerged at the level of local

community reconciliation. The main difference focused on the role of apology in the local community. Different opinions were expressed on how to respond to the pain of the past at the local community level. Some Aborigines felt it was important for the missionaries to apologize. Others were uncertain how the elders would feel about the missionaries apologizing as it is “outside their cultural norms to expect others to ask for forgiveness” (Alanga). Kerry talked a little about this from a context different to Wadeye. She said,

I feel very uncomfortable in these big reconciliation forums when they ask White people to get up and go to an Aboriginal person and apologize. I feel very *uncomfortable* with that. And I have never worked out whether I was uncomfortable with the fact that it was being put on Whitefellas at such a time and such a way. They'd look bad if they didn't, and they'd still look bad if they do. Anyway, I 'spose that's a bit of caretaker stuff with Whitefellas which we also have to get out of.

There was a real need to clarify if people were talking about their own personal process of reconciliation or if they were talking about the need for reconciliation in the local community and nation. When Aborigines said they did not need an apology, they were speaking from their personal journey of reconciliation. This makes sense as they had already experienced reconciliation and forgiven the perpetrator. We recall that apology works to *complete* the personal process of reconciliation and healing: personal reconciliation follows the process of: reconciliation→forgiveness→apology.

The power of apology becomes much more important in social processes of reconciliation within communities and nations. In social reconciliation, apology serves to *begin* or promote the process of

reconciliation. It is important to be clear what individuals are referring to when talking about apology.

*The role of apology in remembering the departed.* Kunyep spoke clearly, “I reckon they should apologize. We should get an apology from the church.” One of the reasons why he felt an apology was needed was “because of the hardship that the missionaries brought to the Aboriginal people who have already passed away.” Kunyep wants an acknowledgement from the missionaries of all the work that the local people did in helping build up the mission; that is, he wants all the past to be remembered accurately, including his forebears. He was pointing to a painting of Fr. Docherty when he said,

This old fella [Fr. Docherty] here gets the credit for the mission, yet we all helped, did the work. Instead of being paid, Aborigines got rations. They got nothing from the missionaries; Aborigines did not get anything. He didn't find Wadeye. There were Aborigines from Wadeye on the boat that came with him from Darwin.

An apology at Wadeye must include setting the history records straight.

The need to remember those whom died defending their land from invasion, or were injured through the cultural imposition of government and church policies, has often been raised by indigenous-Australians. Honoring the memory of the dead is an important component of enabling society to accurately remember its' past (cf. Reynolds 1999:172ff). This is why reconciling the memories of the dead is profoundly necessary in the reconciliation process. In order to reconcile the memories of the dead the process of social reconciliation must be firmly grounded in the truth of the

past. Nations must pay particular attention to those often forgotten or shunned voices.

Metz (1972:15) words that “the memory of accumulated suffering [works] to resist the cynics of modern political power,” has a particular potency for Australia at the turn of the new millenium. The stories of indigenous-Australians, like those living in Wadeye, serve to remind us that the memories of the past will not go away. Leaders need to have the courage and imagination to enable the repressed voices of the past to be heard. When this occurs, we will become open to transcend our own corporate memories, and draw from the truth of suffering from each other’s story, so that we can come to a place of healing and reconciliation with each other. This is precisely what President Nelson Mandela was able to bring about in South Africa.

*Apology and addressing the wounds of the past.* Wudarnthale would like a public apology in the church for what happened. Just after he said he had forgiven the missionaries Wudarnthale added,

They’ll have to say sorry because what they did was wrong. They tried to stop our culture, tried to stop our language. We never stopped the missionaries from speaking their language, but they were trying to stop us from using our language, and to *forget* our language, and use only one language. They should say sorry for everything they did to us.

Wudarnthale added, “I would say, ‘Thank you’ if those sorry words came out.” There is a sharp difference between Wudarnthale’s personal experience of forgiving the missionaries and his hope for an apology to the community. This succinctly captures the difference between personal and social reconciliation.



### *National Reconciliation*

People mostly respond to others through the filter of their own particular life experience. This was particularly evident in the Aboriginal responses to questions on national reconciliation. They had heard about the loss of land that many indigenous-Australians had experienced, and were hearing about the widespread forced separation of Aboriginal families. A number said how lucky they felt to have their land and family.

*Listening to the experience of others.* Wudarnthale had been to gatherings of indigenous-Australians around different parts of Australia. When he met with other Aborigines in those places, he was sorry to discover that many

did not know where their *Dreaming* was. I seen them with tears coming out, they are unlucky people now. They were unlucky because people were shooting them, because they were fighting to keep their *Dreaming* places. We are lucky people. We thank God for that part. The other mob, they have tears for that, really sad. They were shot, poisoned, killed, their lands were taken, *and Dreamings* destroyed. Perhaps they had *Dreaming* like us. They are still wandering around for *Dreaming* sites down south, at Sydney. They got any left? Should be some around, eh? Might be under houses.

Palibu spoke in a similar vein. He felt very sorry for what happened to other indigenous-Australians:

People shouldn't have been pushed off their own land. They were given this land from the beginning. The government should be sorry for them. They should be sorry for those people, and give them their land back. Government should say sorry for those people. Government should say sorry to those people who were pushed around so that they can come back to their land.

*Leadership, apology, and national reconciliation.* While Kerry Charleton and Ngardinithi Nganbe are from dramatically different contexts, one in urban Brisbane, the other in the remote outback of the Northern Territory, their sentiments on national reconciliation are almost identical. They both highlighted the important role that leaders have in setting the national agenda. An important part of the national agenda is to present truthful information that challenges prejudice and ignorance. They believe this is done by presenting the basic historical facts of the nation, and through displaying sensitivity to their religious and cultural beliefs.

While Aborigines strive to “be one” with other Australians, they do not want this at the cost of forgetting their unique cultural and historical position. Aborigines are able to forgive at the personal level, but they refuse to forget at the social level.

Concerning the government apologizing for what happened to indigenous-Australians Kerry commented,

It is actually stating that the government is recognizing and acknowledging all the pain of those acts. By telling millions of Australians, they are saying something of very important feelings for Australia. It would be a *statement*, and it would be leadership.

Don't you follow your leadership? So therefore, wouldn't millions of people start to think there must be something that maybe this leader's saying. Maybe getting people to think about it. Then, on a day to day basis, the perpetrators of racism, perhaps more of them would start to think, “hang on, hang on, this statement was made, what does it mean to me?”

The Prime Minister would be saying to the nation and to the *world* that, “we are sorry for what happened. We've acknowledge it, recognized it, we don't understand your pain, but we know that you've been feeling pain for a long time. And we want to be part of getting you out of it. And we know we are not responsible or being held responsible. Australians are not to be made to feel guilty. We

are sorry for what's happened to your people." I don't think that's a real hard thing to do."

Ngardinithi commented,

The Government has to see what's best for the people. It must come from the top. They have to recognize that we've been here before them. It's not bullshit, it's not. We are not making it up. There is a *Dreaming* place on the reef [near his land] that has been there since the beginning of time. The people know about it. Our ancestors knew about it. We're not telling bullshit. People have to understand that. The Prime Minister has to come around and listen to the people—not make decisions by himself *up* there. He has to come *down* to wherever the situation is happening—he's just got to listen, listen to the people. It's only fair and right. I don't know why people want to take bits of it [land] away from us. We are not doing any harm to them, eh? But they are doing it to us. Look at Jabiluka<sup>3</sup>—they want to take everything away from us. (emphasis added)

*Remembering the past, protecting the future.* Indigenous-Australians have survived. Wudarnthale reminds us that the Wadeye community is “lucky” compared to other indigenous communities throughout Australia. It is this experience of survival that is partly pressing their desire for a better future. They do not want past mistakes repeated. Through this lens, indigenous-Australians see reconciliation with other Australians as necessary for establishing a more secure future. Their offers of forgiveness for the wrongs of the past are not shallow or lukewarm—they come from the heart. Their only condition is that the lessons of the past are learnt.

*The Dreaming* has taught them the past is an integral factor in shaping the present. The future for their children and grandchildren is more secure when the past is remembered. It is when the past is forgotten that the identity of communities and nations fragment. The previous chapter noted

the emergence of the *Memelma* Council of Elders at Wadeye. The power of *Memelma* lies in the capacity of the elders to remember the stories of the past so the new generation can build a firm foundation. In this sense, narrative is truly *life-giving*.

Indigenous-Australians know that their past, present, and future, will continue to be shaped deeply through their family life and relationship to the land, and other peoples' in Australia. The need to restore shattered families, and their relationship to the land lies at the heart of indigenous-Australians struggle. Their priority for reconciliation is an effort to ensure their survival and cultural revitalization.

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The Aborigines saw a public apology as an important means to ensuring an accurate memory of the past is handed down. While nearly all revealed significant levels of forgiveness for those who had hurt them, they saw the need for apology to assist with wider social healing.

Apology was very much tied with active reparation. Thus, at the personal level of reconciliation, they would show their sorrow by doing something or giving something to the person they had hurt. This pattern was mirrored in the way they understood social reconciliation. At the community level they wanted missionaries and other Australians to cease treating them as if they were not equal. At the national level, they saw a need for some sort of active reparation for indigenous-Australians that had lost land, or assistance for those trying to remain connected to their land. The words, "I am sorry" are insufficient; they must be accompanied by appropriate action.

Reconciliation for Aborigines is tied closely to knowing the truth of their own story—including the truth of their ancestors’—and the story of their place in the land—their connection to *The Dreaming*. The resurgence of *Memelma* at Wadeye demonstrated the power of narrative to effect changes in the life of not just individuals, but an entire community.

They have a deep appreciation for the importance of other peoples’ stories. It was through listening to the experiences of other Aborigines that they began to understand more clearly what had happened outside of Wadeye. They were sorry for what had happened to other indigenous-Australians.

They were also able to easily discern the content of conflicting narratives. In the imagination exercise they were able to identify with and understand the actions of previous missionaries. This did not prevent them however, from seeing the need for missionaries to recognize the mistakes of the past and to change behavior patterns that resemble those of the past.

Their attitude to conflicting narratives, particularly to ones that are intentionally unsympathetic to indigenous-Australians, revealed their desire for “right relationship.” They refuse to allow narratives of the lie to derail the overwhelming goodwill felt in the reconciliation process. It is in this context, that these unsympathetic views causes Aborigines to think more deeply about their place in Australia, and what it means to be Australian. These unsympathetic narratives prompted them to work even harder for the truth to become known, all the time through the desire for right relationship.

*The Voices of Anglo-Australians, Including Missionaries*

Gerald Arbuckle, the well-known New Zealand Catholic priest and writer on cultural anthropology, said a few years ago in a workshop, “Culture is like the lens on a person’s spectacles. When the person is wearing the spectacles she or he cannot see the lens. Those watching the person see the lens clearly. So it is with culture.” It is with such caution noted that I present the findings on the role of narrative in reconciliation from interviews with Anglo-Australians.

*Personal Reconciliation*

Most Anglo-Australians have not been through the social, cultural, and historical trauma that indigenous-Australians have experienced over the great bulk of the past two centuries. It is not surprising therefore, that Anglo-Australians experience the process of personal reconciliation differently to Aborigines. While nearly all Aborigines had forgiven missionaries for past abuse without receiving an apology, Anglo-Australians tend to offer forgiveness only *after* an apology has been received. The Anglo-Australian understanding would be what Schreiter calls the “common-sense” one. Comparing the experiences of reconciliation in the lives of Anglo-Australians and Aborigines reveals telling cultural differences in the way each group experiences personal reconciliation.

*Avoidance as an Anglo-Australian response to conflict.* Whereas, a direct response to conflict describes the preferred mode of indigenous conflict resolution, avoidance seems to distinguish Anglo-Australians. Anglo-Australians stated that they normally avoid those with whom they

disagree. Many Anglo-Australians gave stories of backbiting that went on among the Whites. Aborigines have observed this behavior. When asked, “What do you see Whites do when they have a problem with someone?” Kunyep thought about it and answered, “Avoidance, eh? They avoid each other. If they have argument, they will walk on other side of the road, I’ve seen that, that’s true.” Sr. Ellen would agree with Kunyep. Even though her preferred way of handling conflict is “to face the person” she spoke at length about the ways “Whites avoid direct conflict.” She mentioned the conflict she had with Anglo-Australian parents about the education of their children in the school, and commented, “White people won’t talk to me about this problem but they’ll be backbiting all around the community about me.”

I was surprised to discover that Anglo-Australians respond to conflict through avoidance. I saw how our language reflects this. Phrases like, “that person is passive-aggressive,” “just get around the problem and go forward,” “ignore it, and keep going” all point to the way avoidance works as an Anglo-Australian cultural response to conflict or tension.

*Connection between avoidance, memory and time.* Is there any connection between the phenomenon of avoidance and the attitudes of Anglo-Australians who strongly reject the need for apology? The statements like, “forget the past, get on with the future,” “move on with the future,” “get on with it” suggest a linear sense of time operating. This sense of time is also present in some of the statements above on avoidance. Does this suggest a possible link between the way Anglo-Australians understand avoidance, time, and memory? Does the desire to “forget the past” and “get on with the future” reveal another aspect of a Western linear-time driven

worldview? Could this explain some of the difficulty that Anglo-Australians are experiencing with regards to social reconciliation? Many Anglo-Australians who saw no need for apology, felt that the “apology business” was “a waste of time.” They were prepared to reconsider the need for apology only when it was suggested that perhaps the refusal to give apology was the very thing that was stalling the reconciliation process.

*The desire for personal apology.* Anglo-Australians prefer to receive an apology from people who have hurt them. And even though they will accept gifts and other actions as an apology, they give special importance to hearing or reading the words, “I am sorry.” We recall the stories of Sr. Ellen and Maryanne from Chapter 4. They both admitted that an apology would have helped them in coming to terms with past hurts. For many, an apology helps “bring closure” to past painful experiences. The expression, “She lived her whole life waiting for an apology” reveals how much the need for a personal apology is part of Anglo-Australian culture.

Most Anglo-Australians who mentioned they had past hurtful experiences said they had not received an apology. Most had struggled to forgive the one or ones who had hurt them. All said they had tried to get on with their life. Unlike the Aborigines, most Anglo-Australians preferred not to talk about past hurts (avoidance?)—even with the opportunity to speak “off the record.” Storytelling seemed to come to an abrupt halt at these moments. It seems that Anglo-Australians find it difficult to talk about personal pain in their life. It may also reflect Anglo-Australians’ ability to live with incomplete reconciliation. The need to go to the heart of the conflict or tension often remains put on hold.



### *Local Reconciliation*

The Anglo-Australian interviews revealed the close connection of history and reconciliation. This showed itself in a number of ways. Anglo-Australians who advocated the need for an apology at the national level were not sure if this was required in Wadeye. The main reason given was “I don’t know enough of the story of what went on here.” Those who had only heard the old missionary accounts of the history of Wadeye felt there was no need for an apology. After learning other accounts they changed their position on this. Quite a few people changed their position during the interview after going through the imagination exercise. They were shocked by the Western cultural assumptions of superiority that operated in the mission, and the affect that had on Aborigines at Wadeye.

The interviews demonstrated the importance of hearing the stories of others. When Anglo-Australians heard the Aboriginal stories many connected with the suffering experienced by Aborigines. This showed itself through a changed position on the need for apology. The role of leadership cannot be over-emphasized here. Leaders must recognize that social reconciliation begins with apology, and that this is essential for shaping a new redeeming corporate narrative.

*The role of corporate memory.* The striking feature of the interview data from the missionaries was the division within the missionary ranks over the role of a local apology. Despite there being unanimous agreement on the need for a national apology, missionaries were almost evenly split on whether the mission should apologize at Wadeye. The division of opinion was almost along “party lines.” Those belonging to or close to the MSC and

OLSH orders that were living at Wadeye did not feel a need for a local apology. Those belonging to other orders felt there clearly was a need for an apology. If we accept that despite all the good will of the missionaries, the OLSH and MSC missionaries, together with their lay missionaries, perpetrated abuse against the people at Wadeye, why is it difficult for the missionaries of those orders living at Wadeye to feel the need to apologize? Perhaps it is closely tied to the role of corporate memory.

*The relationship between memory and vulnerability.* The more individuals feel a need to protect the memory of their predecessors, the more likely they are to struggle to connect with those whom their predecessors have hurt. Corporate memory is clearly a powerful factor at work in some of the MSC and OLSH narratives (read: bystander). Without a propensity for vulnerability, bystanders or perpetrators can easily disconnect from the survivor's story.<sup>4</sup> During an interview with an MSC brother at Wadeye who was struggling with the need for reconciliation at the local level, the following insight came, "When the vulnerability of a survivor meets the vulnerability of a bystander or a perpetrator then dialogue can occur. When the vulnerability of a survivor meets force or avoidance, tension occurs."

Anglo-Australians who did not support an apology at Wadeye revealed little personal vulnerability; on the rare occasions when it came to the surface they seemed guarded, changed the topic, or gave few details about the experience. In short, their narrative around vulnerability changed markedly. When bystanders or perpetrators struggle to accept their vulnerability they are less able to connect with survivors.

For Liam Clancy the interview was “a good experience,” as it helped him articulate his feelings about being connected to indigenous dispossession. As he said, “It’s hard to take responsibility, to get up and say, ‘my great, great-grandfather was involved.’ He was a nice bloke, like your great-uncle. That’s hard, but necessary.” It seems that the manner in which Anglo-Australians identify with their predecessors’ story significantly influences the way they respond to stories of Aborigines. The more Anglo-Australians protected the memory of their predecessors the less they listened to stories that challenge that memory. This significantly diminishes the potential for reconciling the different memories of both groups. This has implications for reconciliation at local and national levels.

### *National Reconciliation*

Almost every Anglo-Australians interviewed indicated that they had undergone significant change in thinking about Australian reconciliation through listening to or reading the narratives of others. Anglo-Australians connected more deeply with indigenous-Australians after learning about their experiences. It is out of this context that the great majority of Anglo-Australians interviewed felt a national apology could assist the process of reconciliation in the nation.

*The role of leaders in social reconciliation.* The issue of national leadership was raised often. Jude Lane remembered his experience at the National Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in May 1997. He recollected,

Pat Dodson was a true statesman.<sup>5</sup> He put the White politicians to shame. I was really embarrassed as a White person. John Howard

was supposed to be the leader of our country, and Kennett [the premier of Victoria], I think it was, sitting beside him, while Pat Dodson was talking to all the people. These other two [Howard and Kennett] were sitting in a row of seats behind him. They were chatting to each other and having a laugh, *they weren't even listening*. This was just such a sign that these two individuals were so representative. The disrespect on that occasion in the way Pat Dodson was trying to get the people to give respect to John Howard [after Howard had just refused to give a national apology]. Dodson was amazing the way he did, the way he tried to quell the anger of the people in that Convention, to give respect to John Howard. But John Howard did little to warrant it. He didn't give much respect back through actions like having a joke with Jeff Kennett while Dodson was talking. Little things say so much. I was just blown away by someone like Pat Dodson; he cut the same statesman-like figure that Nelson Mandela does. I was just blown away. Other indigenous people there struck me the same way. I was pleased with Cheryl Kernot—the other White politicians left me cold.<sup>6</sup> It was embarrassing being a Whitefella at the Convention, putting our leaders up against the indigenous leaders, they were found wanting, left in the shade.

David Glover is an accountant from Melbourne. He is forty-years old, about to be married, and has been working in Aboriginal communities for over a decade. His background is representative of middle-class, educated Australians. While he does not see a need to offer an apology or sign a “Sorry Book,” he does not “have a problem with someone who feels they need to make an apology.”<sup>7</sup> He would not have a problem if the Prime Minister, on behalf of the nation gave an apology. As he put it,

An apology from the Prime Minister doesn't upset me or bother me in any way. I think Paul Keating said something like that. I must have agreed with Keating because I can remember his statement. I feel like what he said was appropriate, and the [indigenous] people at the time seemed to warm to it. They got something out of it, so that's fine.”<sup>8</sup>

David and Jude's interviews in different ways point to the important role that leaders have in promoting reconciliation in Australia. David's reference to Paul Keating's Redfern speech in 1992 is worth highlighting for a number of reasons. The very fact that David, who is not a partisan political person, can recall a speech from six years ago by an Australian politician is remarkable in itself! It also demonstrates the way that political leaders can capture the imagination of people, and cause people to reconsider earlier positions. Keating's speech focused on the need for Australians to acknowledge the history of suffering of indigenous-Australians. Keating made particular mention of the Mabo decision, describing Mabo as an "historic turning point" for the nation. People like David Glover listened to their leader in 1992. Jude Lane was also listening to his leader at Melbourne in 1997. They both demonstrate the significant role of leadership in reconciling communities and nations.

*Understanding reconciliation as a freely received gift.* Barbara Lawler, the twenty-year old university student from Brisbane signed the Sorry Book. The action of signing the book was her way of "saying sorry for the past," of "showing support." Barbara mentioned a time at university when an indigenous guest speaker was brought in to present the *Bringing Them Home* video. She recalls, "It was very sad, seeing the video. Everyone was quiet afterwards. There was a hush in the lecture room."

Jude Lane recalled his experience of apologizing to an Aboriginal woman at the Reconciliation Convention,

We were given an opportunity for non-indigenous Australians to get up and say sorry to an indigenous-Australian. At that point in time I still felt very uncomfortable about apologizing, nervous about it. I

turned to an old woman there, and said something to the effect that “I’m sorry for what my peoples have done to your peoples.” It was a very simple thing. It took me less than ten seconds. But just the emotion in her face. And I found I got caught up in the emotion of it too. I just felt that I had done something that was small, it was a bit hard to do, but it was a powerful thing. Just to see the joy in this old woman’s eyes. The tears were coming down her face and she was saying, “thank you, thank you.” She gave me a big hug.

The “hush in the lecture room” that Barbara and her colleagues felt, and the “emotion” that Jude shared in, occurs when people experience breakthroughs in relationships and understanding. This indicates the spiritual qualities of reconciliation and serves to highlight the subtle movement of the Spirit present in human vulnerability. The Spirit is present when people listen freely to stories that challenge the dominant narrative. Jude and Barbara both indicated that the experience significantly affected the way they understood their relationship with indigenous-Australians. This in turn gave them the desire to support the process of reconciliation in Australia. Notice that reconciliation is experienced as a surprising gift—it is not something that people manufacture and distribute (see Chapter 2). It is something freely given; people need to be vulnerable enough to accept and respond to it. This is what having a spirituality of reconciliation means.

Jude and Barbara’s story provides us a glimpse into the trinitarian underpinning of reconciliation (Chapter 2). God, through the Holy Spirit, calls us to cooperate with God, and be active subjects of God’s grace. Reconciliation involves both spirituality and strategies. The spirituality present in Jude and Barbara’s stories is indicated in their openness to responding to others pain and suffering. The strategies are evident in the

ways people came together to listen to the stories of others. Listening cannot be forced or manufactured, it must be invitational. Strategies for reconciliation emerge out of a spirituality of reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> Spirituality and strategies harmonize in the ministry of reconciliation.

*Understanding reconciliation as a rare commodity.* Many Anglo-Australians at Wadeye saw no need to apologize to indigenous-Australians. Lisa Smith mentioned the time when she went into Darwin as part of Aboriginal Reconciliation Week. She recalled “A few of the teachers [at Wadeye] exclaimed loudly, *‘I’m not going to apologize, I’m not going to apologize for the Stolen Generation and the things that have happened.’*” Brian and Maryanne Esmonde reflected those teachers’ attitudes in their interview.

Maryanne said,

I don’t think an apology is necessary. If you did what you thought was right at the time, you shouldn’t be sorry, none of us should be sorry, otherwise we are going to go through life apologizing for everything that has gone on in our past that we are now finding needing to be corrected.

Her husband, Brian, gave a similar response.

Life has been so bloody cruel to so many people. Let’s go on forward and treat people as equals. I find it *such a waste of energy*. I just *can’t believe* this is going on. What happened at the time was right for that time. It was *not meant to hurt anyone*. And that’s why I’m not sorry. It’s nonsense.

When I said, “My fear is that we are stuck as a nation because we haven’t apologized” Maryanne commented, “Now that we have come so far, that may well be. The issue is not going to go away.” Brian indicated no

change. He remained convinced that the apology agenda is “dividing the nation. It’s not bringing us all together.”

After telling Maryanne and Brian a Stolen Generation story that a priest had told me, I asked, “After listening to that story how do you feel about the role of apology?” Maryanne responded,

No. No. We do know that it is a basic need for a human being to know those stories of your beginning. But there are many young people in the world who don’t know where they began. Look at John Nylon, he doesn’t even know his mother’s name.<sup>10</sup> He’s our age. He’s not expecting anybody to apologize to him. It’s just a fact. I don’t deny that that story pulls your heart-strings, but there are so many stories, it doesn’t change the way I feel about the Stolen Generations.

Maryanne and Brian talk about apology differently to the way Jude and Barbara spoke about it.<sup>11</sup> Brian and Maryanne talk about apology as if it were a rare commodity with limited distribution.

Maryanne and Brian were unable to connect with the story of the survivor. They compared different survivor’s pain and in so doing became disconnected. This is the opposite of Jude and Barbara’s experiences. They deeply connected to the story of the survivor. Barbara experienced this as a member of a group listening to and watching the images and the words of survivors on video and a particular survivor in person, Jude through being brought face-to-face with a survivor offering forgiveness. They did not compare one survivor’s experience with another. They were fully present to the other before them. This contrasts markedly with those driven by a future-oriented worldview. They do not respond to the immediate truth of the other’s story. They become deaf to history and shut themselves off from



the possibility of being in communion with the other. As such, a divided memory continues (cf. Cone 1975, see Chapter 3).

*Acknowledging shared history.* All Anglo-Australians interviewed felt there was a need for the Government to acknowledge the truth of the past. A few mentioned they did not want to “dwell on the past for too long.” Even those who preferred to move on recognized the need for our history to be openly acknowledged. Below are the views of three Anglo-Australians: David Glover, Sr. Mary, and Fr. John Leary. They each gave important reasons for the need to acknowledge what happened to indigenous-Australians. Their interviews reveal the way a person’s life-experience influences their understanding of history and reconciliation.

David Glover believes the Government needs to acknowledge and assist Australia’s indigenous people who have suffered dispossession and family disruption. As David put it,

You try and put yourself in that situation. I believe it is extremely wrong to remove people, it is basic human rights—possibly even more so when the culture of the people is so attached to the land they are from. With us, we tend to be more mobile. I’m from Melbourne, but I don’t feel a need to be there. Whereas a Wadeye person, he’ll always be here—this is where he *belongs*. He might go away for a little while, but he’ll always come back. Where in my culture, that’s not so much an issue. To remove someone from their place is probably not as hard in my culture as it would be for Aborigines.

I raised with David an often-heard statement “The Aborigines were removed only for their own benefit.” He replied, “I think that argument’s a bit like saying that we’ll take the White people away to live with Aborigines, so the they’ll have good hand-to-eye coordination and be able to fend for themselves in the bush!” He continued,

I just assume that people who say those sorts of things don't really understand. They're still locked in or have blinkers on to a culture that they are used to which says, "education is what you need and you've got to speak good English to do this or do that." In their eyes, that's what their culture's taught them, so they just assume that applies to everyone else as well—but it doesn't.

Sr. Mary first gained an insight into what had happened to indigenous-Australians when she did the CSJ course in Brisbane in 1995, and a Kimberley retreat experience in which she was given information on the massacres that occurred in that region. She commented, "When I was growing up free and easy in the '60s, Aborigines in Cherbourg were having to ask permission to go out of the gate.<sup>12</sup> They were oppressed." After talking more on the history of what happened she commented: "These experiences happened to their grandfathers, it didn't happen to them either. We are connected through shared history."

By understanding they have a shared history with indigenous-Australians, Anglo-Australians make deeper connections with indigenous-Australians (see Chapter 3). There was no indication of any guilt in those who spoke about history in terms of being shared. Those who failed to see their connection to the past history of Aborigines struggled to connect with Aborigines in the contemporary situation.

Fr. Leary has over fifty years experience working with Aborigines in the Northern Territory. I asked him, "What do you say to Australians with all your experiences, what do you say the nation needs?" He replied,

Just to say "to be reconciled" is not saying enough. You've got to remind people that Aboriginal people have been through all the trauma, the *whole* history of this land. They have suffered a lot of injustice; the deprivation of land rights in the beginning, the settlers

going out. Even up here in more recent years Aborigines were being shot because they were accused of interfering with their cattle. Whites got away with, literally with murder. So as a race, unless you read history the right way, you'll never come to a spirit of understanding about what makes the people the way they are today.

Earlier, Fr. Leary mentioned Pauline Hanson. He commented,

Mrs. Hanson, she points to something that's real, but it's not a deep look at the whole problem. It's condemning people without seeing why the people are this way. And just by *condemning* them, you are going to make the situation worse. Reconciliation then becomes more difficult.

Fr. Leary then spoke about the notion of "moving on into the future."

From his viewpoint he believes

you cannot move on with the future when you leave behind a whole lot of dispossessed people. These problems that exist, people have to realize there's a *cultural conflict* with people who were here long before we ever stepped on to the shore. In that sense we are responsible for a lot of their problems. You can't rush right over this history and say, "let's start again, forget about all that." It's a matter of justice to these people.

In one of his reflections Fr. Leary paused and emphasized, "*These Aborigines have got something deep to offer us.*" So at the end of a long interview I asked, "Are you confident that the Australian people have the confidence to receive what the Aborigines have to offer us?" He commented,

I think there's a lot of "Mrs. Hanson Australians" who do not understand what the Aboriginal people have been through. Unless that understanding occurs you won't have reconciliation. But I think, and I think among new Australians too, like the Vietnamese, this understanding is developing, perhaps more than the "hard-bitten Aussies." A lot of the "bitten Aussies" are people who are on the

defensive because Aboriginal people did belong on the places where they now have got their farms. That's what I think.

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The interviews with Anglo-Australians shed light on the influence of narrative on people's understanding of reconciliation. First, it was very evident that narrative is not a neutral phenomenon. That is, narrative can be a powerful tool either to increase connection with others or confirm prejudice and disconnection.

Second, narrative has a vital role in educating people on the historical facts of the past. When bystanders became familiar with historically accurate information through the mechanism of narrative, they understood more the need for reconciliation. The converse also applied: bystanders who knew little about the history and stories of indigenous-Australians were more likely to feel ambivalent or resistant towards Aboriginal reconciliation.

Third, corporate memory can become either a vehicle for increased connection with others, or an obstacle to hearing the truth of the other's story. For some bystanders, being connected to the shame of the past through the actions of predecessors or ancestors became a catalyst for making increased connection with indigenous-Australians in the present. For others, corporate memory served to dilute the impact of the truth of indigenous-Australians. A defensive outlook limits vulnerability and lessens openness to the truth of the other—thereby preventing the power of the Spirit to minister reconciliation between peoples.

Fourth, the interviews exposed the crucial role that leaders have in bringing about a sense of shared history. In this sense, leaders have the task

of dismantling the defensiveness that may exist in the corporate memory of individuals and communities. Without intentional efforts to do this a significant percentage of the population will be unable to make sense of the conflicting narratives that are before them. Many bystanders changed their attitudes after they had heard and learnt about the history of indigenous-Australians. Leaders have a powerful role; they can either effect changes in people's understanding, or confirm old prejudices and misinformation. Leadership is not a neutral phenomenon in the ministry of reconciliation.

Fifth, the language of a future-driven worldview often masks defensiveness within Anglo-Australians. The phrases, "forget the past," "let's get on with the future," serve to avoid facing the truth of the past and prevent people to arrive at any sense of shared history. This has implications for our national journey towards reconciliation. People such as Prime Minister Howard have suggested that those giving energy to help the nation remember the past accurately are engaged in some sort of "guilt industry."<sup>13</sup> By this, Prime Minister Howard suggests there is a correlation between guilt and remembering the wrongs of the past. The data of the interviews seems to suggest the reverse applies. The more people know the historical facts of the past, and recognize their connection to it, the more they develop a sense of shared history, have a deeper sense of connection to the land and lives of indigenous-Australians, and become more able to integrate the past. The data of the interviews suggests the Government needs to reconsider seriously its present approach to national reconciliation, as it seems to be creating the very thing it says it is attacking—namely a sense of guilt in the community.

### *Summary*

This chapter explored the impact narrative has on people's understanding of reconciliation. We recall the comments from Reynolds (1999:171), "Without some reconciliation of stories, some convergence of histories, it is hard to see how the broader agenda of reconciliation can be advanced." We are now well-positioned to respond to his question: "Is reconciliation possible between two peoples who fundamentally disagree about their shared past, who differ widely in their explanation of the reason why things are as they are now?"

The data of the fieldwork suggests that narrative is a powerful tool and capable of bringing about changes in the way people think about one another. We saw that the more Anglo-Australians learned what happened to indigenous-Australians, either through accurate historical information or having had opportunities to meet indigenous-Australians, the more they recognized their connectedness to the indigenous story. Some Anglo-Australians were shocked and surprised that the history of their family and community was so closely interlocked with the Aborigines. The remembering was painful for many. Nevertheless, the great bulk of Anglo-Australians indicated a significant capacity to integrate the emerging historical facts on Aboriginal dispossession and family trauma. In listening to the truth, all were gaining memory. This creation of common memory achieves a unity that respects differences; it enables people to experience closer relationship with each other (see Chapter 3). This is reconciliation.

Rather than experiencing guilt from such knowledge of history, it served to increase Anglo-Australians sense of connection to the struggle of

indigenous-Australians. With the knowledge of the history, often given through narrative form, they were better able to understand why so many indigenous-Australians continue to experience disadvantage. The more they learn about indigenous-Australians the more they sense that indigenous-Australians have something to offer.

Narrative is slowly but surely turning back Australia's "Great Silence" of the twentieth century, and it is also turning back the forces which seek to keep Anglo and indigenous-Australians divided, locked into their own separate histories. The High Court decisions of *Mabo* (1992) and *Wik* (1996) challenged and overturned the narrative of the lie of Australia's founding history: that Australia did not legally belong to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (Commonwealth of Australia 1997) *Bringing Them Home Report* brought out into the public arena stories of the century long assaults on Australian-indigenous families. People are listening to these emerging narratives.

While these indigenous-Australian stories are often very old, many Anglo-Australians are hearing these for the first time. By the reaction of people like Pauline Hanson and even our own Prime Minister, indigenous-Australian stories are seen as a threat to the narrative of the lie that had been passed down. The story of indigenous-Australians struggle to survive and desire for reconciliation is being recorded. Their stories are rewriting Australia's history, and in so doing, revealing the power of narrative to promote reconciliation in the lives of individuals, communities, the entire nation (cf. Reynolds 1999:243ff).

We are now ready to turn to the third and final part of the dissertation. Chapter 7 walks us through what happened, highlighting particular findings and surprises. Chapter 8 reflects on the missiological implications of the research. This will be grounded in concrete suggestions for the community of Wadeye, and point to what this may mean for other communities, Australia, and other nations journeying towards reconciliation.



## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This means told to pack and placed on the next available flight out of Wadeye.

<sup>2</sup> For an understanding of oral cultures see J. Goody (1987), S. Harris (1984, 1990), Kim and Berry (1993), M. Bains (1992).

<sup>3</sup> Jabiluka is a uranium mine in the heart of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, about 350 miles from Wadeye. The Aboriginal custodians of Jabiluka have protested on the mining for uranium on their tribal land. The present Federal Government policy has been to allow mining on the site. The number of Aborigines who spoke with disgust about the government's decision and actions surprised me. My surprise was not with the disgust at the government, but their obvious close attention to what has been happening there.

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Peter, the visiting MSC priest to Wadeye, as well as Sr. Mary, the other religious sister who was living with the OLSH sisters, both felt a need for a local apology. They both revealed a considerable degree of vulnerability in their interviews.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Pat Dodson is one of Australia's important indigenous leaders. He was the founding chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. He is the older brother of Mr. Mick Dodson whom I mentioned in my *Moola Bulla* story in Chapter 3. Mr. Pat Dodson used to be an MSC priest, and was stationed at Wadeye during the late 1970s. Disagreements with the then Bishop of Darwin led to him leaving the priesthood.

<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Kernott is an Anglo-Australian politician. She is a member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the same party as former Prime-Minister Paul Keating.

<sup>7</sup> The "Sorry Books" campaign was a grassroots initiative that developed as a response to the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's *Bringing Them Home* report. People were invited to sign their name to a statement of apology for what happened and express their desire that such a policy never be repeated again. It received a large amount of publicity throughout the nation. Many people were not sure what was exactly entailed. Many people felt that it was part of indigenous people and

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their supporters wanting Australians to feel guilty for the past. As such, it was referred to in some sections of the community as part of the “guilt industry.”

<sup>8</sup> David is referring to the previous Prime Minister, Paul Keating and his Redfern Speech in 1992.

<sup>9</sup> As stated in Chapter 2, Schreier (1998) gives over three-quarters of his book, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, to the spirituality of reconciliation. Strategies for reconciliation emerge out of deep attending to a spirituality of reconciliation.

<sup>10</sup> I’m not sure who John Nylon is. I suspect he is an Anglo-Australian they have heard of or know personally who has come from difficult circumstances to do well in life.

<sup>11</sup> Brian and Maryanne were the only persons interviewed who felt a national apology was unnecessary.

<sup>12</sup> Cherbourg lies less than two hours west of Brisbane. It functioned as an Aboriginal reserve in much the same way as *Moola Bulla* did in the Kimberley. Indigenous-Australians from all over Queensland were taken there. Sr. Mary is referring to the permission cards that indigenous people there had to have on them to prove they were able to leave and come back to the reserve. This system operated in some parts of Queensland right into the 1980s.

<sup>13</sup> For example, there is plenty of historical evidence that indicates that from very early on indigenous-Australians defended their tribal boundaries from pastoral and government incursions. The literature of the time refers to these as local wars. Thousands of deaths were recorded on both sides. The present Government does not wish to name these events as “warfare.” Those who say that it was warfare are condemned as part of the “guilt industry.”

**PART III:**

**SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS,  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## CHAPTER 7

### Looking at How We Stand on the Land

This dissertation began when my memory of Ian resurfaced. I could not understand why something that happened twelve years ago, and had appeared to be reconciled some years later, came back to the forefront of my mind. I began to realize that the memory required further attention; I needed to fully receive the forgiveness that Ian offered me. I have been taken down roads that I never knew existed. Many of these roads were memories long buried or discarded. The memory of Alan Goldman resurfaced like a family ghost, this memory became an emblem of the secrets and the scars of our nation's relationship—or lack thereof—with indigenous-Australians. The fact that we are able to remember signals their importance. Memories contain the truth. Despite the pain of embracing the truth, such an embrace enables us to stand on the land with more integrity.

The stories gathered from the fieldwork suggest that my story may be analogous to the journey of reconciliation that communities like Wadeye and nations like Australia are undergoing. Australia is being challenged to come to terms with its past memories. Australians are being challenged to remember the past treatment of indigenous-Australians, to integrate these memories into its national identity, so as to respond more compassionately and collaboratively in the present.

The story of indigenous-Australians' fight for survival over much of the last two hundred years has been a bloody and traumatic one, but it is a

story that needs to be told. In gathering these stories, and telling these stories, Australia will be positioned to change its historical relationship towards its indigenous people. The narrative of the lie has been exposed by the High Court judgements, first on Mabo (1992), then on Wik (1996). The Commonwealth Government's Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's (1997) *Bringing Them Home* report exposed an almost century long government and church assisted process of systematic attack on indigenous-Australian families.

Truthful storytelling has the power to overcome narratives of the lie. Stories shared between people become stronger than the lie. Stories can create changed perception in the lives of individuals, communities, and nations.

We explored whether narrative has a role in bringing about reconciliation in divided communities and nations. While the specific focus was Australia, the implications are broader. We began by exploring the content of Australian history. Australia was settled on the outlandish narrative of the lie, *terra nullius*, that is, before the British arrived Australia belonged to no one, and indigenous-Australians had no sense or right of ownership of the land. Over time, Anglo-Australians developed an historical tendency to forget or bury the lie on which it was founded. Historians began to quietly ignore the resistance of indigenous-Australians to invasion and the alarming pattern of abuses and massacres that occurred. Commentators like W. E. H. Stanner called this twentieth-century development a national "cult of forgetfulness." Whatever way we describe it, a kind of historical amnesia occurred that attempted to soothe the memory

and conscience of Anglo-Australians. The work of historians like Henry Reynolds became the catalyst for a significant rethinking on Australia's history. The highest legal court in the land followed suit with the two vital judgments of Mabo and Wik. These once and for all exposed Australia's founding narrative of the lie.

Chapter 1 also examined in considerable detail the cultural nature of the clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. A number of commentators noted that the clash between indigenous and Anglo-Australians was arguably the most severe culture clash in history. An anthropological analysis revealed fundamental worldview differences between the two groups. Indigenous-Australians are primarily concerned with place, their place in the land. Anglo-Australians, like other industrialized people are fundamentally driven through their understanding of time. This culture-clash is most vividly played out in the way each group views the land and sea. Anglo-Australians tend to view these as resources to be used and exploited. Indigenous-Australians view the land and sea as integral to their identity, they speak of them in terms of relationship rather than as a commodity or resource. The need to bring the two worldviews into a closer and respectful conversation has been and still is an urgent one. Until this occurs these fundamental worldview differences will continue to prevent each from understanding the other.

With the historical and cultural nature of the clash addressed we explored the literature on reconciliation (Chapter 2). The great bulk of the literature had only been written during the past decade, and considerable disagreement existed among the different theorists. Polarities centered on

those who see reconciliation as a gift from God (vertical), and those who prefer to emphasize the human action of forgiving (horizontal) as the main priority. Some emphasized reconciliation as a type of spirituality, others spoke of it as a strategy for dealing with tension and conflict. Given that most of the discussion on reconciliation has been comparatively recent, we should not be overly surprised that some divisions or polarities exist.

The writing to date on reconciliation has failed to recognize the trinitarian dimension of reconciliation. Some have claimed that the trinitarian model for mission is too deductive for our times. They fail to see that the social Trinity can be the cornerstone for a dialogical model of mission. In particular there has been a lack of attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about perfect *koinōnia*, communion. *Koinōnia* is the goal of the ministry of reconciliation. The triune God displays radical vulnerability, shown through the suffering of God on the cross. The Holy Spirit calls us to become radically vulnerable and invites us into the divine *koinōnia*, including participating with God in the worst of human experience. The Spirit reminds us of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ and links us to the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this way communities of the past are linked with communities in the present.

A significant breakthrough in understanding reconciliation occurred when Robert Schreiter made the seemingly simple observation in 1998 that the processes of reconciliation for individuals and communities are quite different. This observation has telling implications for nations like Australia. Unlike personal reconciliation, social reconciliation begins with

an apology from bystanders and perpetrators for past abuses. The importance of accurately remembering history is obvious. Apology and remembering the past accurately are siblings in the journey of social reconciliation. Remembering the past is a direct challenge to the culture of forgetfulness.

The final part of my theoretical framework examined the literature on narrative. Chapter 3 began by talking about the way the memory of my great-uncle surfaced. This focused attention on the vital role that memory has in narrative. The second half of the chapter moved back to the research and writing done on narrative drawing particularly from the work of S. Crites and H. Richard Niebuhr, as well as from a number of South Africans who were writing out of that country's journey towards reconciliation. These writers highlighted the important way memory gives coherence to peoples' lives. Memory and identity are clearly linked. Accurately remembering the past is connected deeply to developing an identity.

Another important aspect of narrative is its role in working to achieve a shared memory between survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders. When people develop shared memory a sense of community is established. All members of the community grow in self-knowledge as they acknowledge the truth of each other's story. When that occurs, perpetrators, bystanders, and survivors recognize that their life story is integrally connected. People see each other and their ancestors as contemporaries; a sense of "shared history" emerges. This is conversion.

This brought us to the end of Part I. The theoretical foundation had been laid. With that in place we were ready to go into the field to see how



reconciliation was being understood in the Australian community at both the personal and social levels and to test whether narrative actually does have a role in the ministry of reconciliation. The results of the fieldwork make up the heart of Part II.

I saw Aborigines looking forward to reconciliation with the Anglo-Australian community. Nearly all Aborigines interviewed, indicated they had already forgiven missionaries and others for past mistreatment and abuses. If Tavuchis (1991) is correct in saying that for social reconciliation to occur survivors of abuse first need to be willing to forgive, then Australia is in a fortunate position. At times I was taken aback by the degree of forgiveness offered.<sup>1</sup> While offering personal forgiveness, many expressed the need for apology for the pain they and their forebears experienced. They understood the differences between reconciliation at the personal, community, and national levels.

During the fieldwork I saw many Anglo-Australians making significant connection between their story and the lives of indigenous-Australians. Young Anglo-Australians like Liam Clancy are painfully and painstakingly embracing their family history and coming to deep levels of connection with indigenous-Australians. It was Liam Clancy, who told me, that learning about his family history affects the way he “stands on the land.” Long-term missionaries like Br. Vince Roche cfc told me he was gaining more understanding through hearing the stories of indigenous people. It was only in recent years, Br. Vince said, that he had begun to actually hear the stories of the local Aborigines at Wadeye. These stories

were helping him understand the struggle of indigenous-Australians throughout Australia.

The fieldwork also raised the voices of Anglo-Australians like Maryanne and Brian Esmonde who struggled to see any need for apology. I saw the way corporate narrative works to prevent people hearing the other's story. Anglo-Australians whose corporate identity suffers through hearing past abuses were the most resistant to looking back, addressing the past, and offering apology. The need for persons to hear an accurate account of past history became very evident as most claimed they were not aware of this history.

Placing the insights gained through the fieldwork in Part II in the light of the content of Part I reveals a number of implications for those working for reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians. To this we now turn.

### *The Importance of Remembering*

Both personal and social reconciliation depends on reconciling memories. In personal reconciliation the more individuals are able to talk about their memories of past hurts, the more they are able to integrate these into their life. Through remembering and retelling the person is able to come to terms with and even experience a new sense of meaning in life. A redeeming narrative emerges.

In social reconciliation the importance of remembering the past accurately is highlighted. Social reconciliation is vitally concerned with accurately telling history. Social reconciliation falls apart when historical

accuracy becomes blurred or deliberately forgotten. It cannot occur unless the facts of the past are discovered, admitted, and talked about openly.

Remembering history accurately does not cause guilt in people. Burying the facts of history is far more likely to bring about guilt. Acknowledging the facts of history enables the emerging story to be based on the firm foundation of truth. There is not possible when historical facts are ignored or denied. Local communities and nations need to have an accurate living memory of the past. Anything that promotes this should be encouraged.

The fieldwork revealed the importance of sensitivity to people's lives. The past contains memories of complicated relationships where some Anglo-Australians tried to do good, yet caused considerable pain and destruction in the process. All the facts of the past need to be brought into the historical retelling and rewriting.

### *The Power of Apology, Facing the Past, Present, and Future*

Individuals often experience apology as a helpful aid in working through and bringing "closure" to the past. In a radically different way this dynamic occurs within communities. Apology serves not to bring about "closure," but to take the reconciliation process forward. It brings closure to the narrative of the lie, while simultaneously opening up a new redeeming narrative where all the historical facts emerge.

Social apology goes towards healing the corporate wounds of the past, including the memories of ancestors. While many indigenous-Australian survivors have already been able to forgive those who hurt them, they

express a desire for apology to be made to the whole group. This reminds us that while people are individuals, they belong also to cultural, ethnic, or larger groups. This is why individuals develop corporate memory and explains why apology is necessary *both* for individuals and groups. Church and community leaders must recognize this.

Many Anglo-Australians feel defensive about a national apology to indigenous-Australians. They feel apology is an obsession with the past, a refusal to come to terms with what has happened and an inability to move forward. People who hold this view often suggest that those who call on others to remember the past are part of a “guilt industry.” The results of this study suggest the opposite to be the case. Those who were intentionally remembering the past, and coming to discover more about their family history and their connection to indigenous-Australians were much less likely to be defensive about the past. Defensiveness was only found in those wanting to forget. Those who urged the past to be forgotten had the most difficulty in listening to and connecting with indigenous-Australians in the present. The obsession to forget may be a more accurate name for the “guilt industry.”

### *Forgetting and Avoidance*

The fieldwork suggested there might be a connection between wanting to forget the past and a tendency to avoid resolving conflict. Anglo-Australians, like some other cultures, tend to avoid those they are in conflict. This can go on over a whole lifetime; it can even be passed onto the next generation. Avoidance is apparent in Anglo-Australians who say Australia

needs to forget the past and get on with the future. By forgetting the past these Australians want to ignore Australia's history of violent conflict. Unlike personal reconciliation where Anglo-Australians seem more able to live with incomplete reconciliation in their life, social reconciliation requires the past to be publicly acknowledged, and proper apology and reparation made. This assists communities to deal effectively with its shared past. Many indigenous-Australian survivors are naming and working through the trauma that they have experienced directly or indirectly through their parents and grandparents. Many Anglo-Australian bystanders are experiencing a need for Australia's history to be told truthfully so as to be able to connect more deeply with indigenous-Australians and the land of Australia.

### *Apology and Reparation*

Community and national leaders need to see the importance of facing the past directly. Apology is about recognizing the truth of the past. It is about recognizing shared history: that people are where they are due to the past actions of their ancestors. Leaders need to see the symbolic and practical power of being able to bring together both sets of stories so as to create a shared narrative. The stories of both indigenous- and other Australians must be represented. Leaders need to explain how the actions of history connect us in the present. This is done without guilt, but with a spirit of empathy and connectedness. A failure to do so festers the wound that exists in the nation's psyche. The wound awaits treatment.

Reconciliation is not cheap and easy. The process of reconstructing the personal and social narratives of Australians and Australia must occur

within the broader framework of comprehensive socioeconomic and political empowerment of indigenous-Australians. While not commenting on the need for all this, I would like to refer to one aspect of narrative work that points to a particular need for reparation and compensation.

People and communities that have experienced trauma need opportunities to tell their story and have their history recorded accurately. A number of indigenous-Australians made a connection between their past trauma and their present social difficulties, particularly around the area of substance abuse. Local community processes need to enable people to tell their story, hear others' stories, and work through the communities' need for reconciliation. This needs to be replicated at national and state levels of governments and churches and other agencies. It would assist thousands of individuals and scores of communities who are carrying the trauma experienced over the years. This could be a cathartic affect on many individuals and communities, indeed the entire nation.

### *Developing Structures for Remembering*

Practically now, what structures do we need to develop for this to be incarnated at the societal level? Processes like "sharing circles" need to be replicated in some fashion in churches and communities. One such indigenous development at Wadeye is the *Memelma* Council of Elders. *Memelma* is demonstrating the power of storytelling to reinvigorate an entire community. The process of coming together and recalling memories and telling stories has enabled the Aboriginal community at Wadeye to begin the project of reclaiming their past; they are recognizing themselves as active

historical subjects. This is challenging the Anglo-missionary version of local history in which the Aborigines were mostly viewed as passive victims of social change. As we saw in Chapter 5, the *Memelma* process of recalling memories and storytelling is enabling knowledge to be passed down to the middle-generation, which could have been labeled “the lost generation.” Through the elders’ reclaiming their authority, a sense of security for the younger generations has emerged from which they can build on and better negotiate the present and the future. *Memelma* is still in its early days of regrouping. As Xavier Desmarchelier put it, “It is a little rusty for it has been ‘out to lunch’ for the past fifty odd years.” I hope that once *Memelma* becomes stronger it will invite Anglo-Australians throughout Wadeye—especially the missionaries—to participate in a “sharing circle.” This would help facilitate the process of reconciliation at Wadeye.

Bringing indigenous and other Australians together to tell their story as well as listen to each other’s story enables a sense of shared history to emerge. Stereotypes are broken down as people experience each other as contemporaries rather than as people belonging to different eras. That is, they gain a sense of connectedness with each other. One of the key findings in the fieldwork was that the power of narrative was maximized through being in relationship with the other.

The fieldwork interviews also highlighted the value and importance of imagination as a tool to facilitate the breaking down of barriers between indigenous and Anglo-Australians. In this light, we need to create racial-free and borderless spaces where people can meet as true selves to begin the process of individual reconciliation of memory. Theologically this is the

ground where God's reconciling Spirit is most powerfully at work. Through calling people to imagine what life is like for the other, we are directly challenging each person to experience deeper connection with the other. This is the work of the Spirit in bringing about perfect communion, *koinōnia*. This requires vulnerability. When people allow themselves to experience vulnerability they begin to see the other in a new light and realize their connection with the other. With increased connection walls and barriers begin to break down; a one-sided history and story begins to crumble as a shared history emerges from the sacredness of storytelling and storylistening.

Our next and final chapter explores the missiological significance of the study. After drawing together the historical, anthropological, theological, and biblical dimensions of the study and how these point towards the further development of the model of mission as reconciliation we venture forward to provide concrete recommendations to assist firstly, the Wadeye community, and secondly, the Australian nation in the journey to reconciliation. The implications of this for the ministry of reconciliation in other contexts will be highlighted.



## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> It needs to be remembered that the indigenous people of Wadeye are all baptized Christians. The vertical dimension of their relationship with God was already in place. They had not come to this position of healing only through psychological and narrative processes. We recall that the model of mission as reconciliation includes the Great Commission of which baptism plays a vital part.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Moving on through Remembering: Missiological Implications and Recommendations**

The previous chapter summarized the findings of the dissertation. This concluding chapter places these findings and reflections within a missiological framework. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part places the emerging model of mission as reconciliation in context. It is in understanding the context of mission that we can better identify the spirituality of a ministry of reconciliation, and the leadership qualities required for this work. We recall that one of our missiological assumptions is that mission as reconciliation incorporates the earlier expansion (Great Commission) and solidarity (Great Commandment) models of mission. It does not do away with the Great Commission or the Great Commandment; rather it places these in the context that at the heart of the gospel is reconciliation. As such, we are called to reconciliation with God in our individual life (vertical) and with cooperating with God in bringing about reconciliation between peoples (social reconciliation) and indeed between people and all of creation (horizontal). The second half of the chapter identifies strategies that can promote the ministry of reconciliation in the Wadeye community, and the Australian nation. We recall that pastoral action always precedes theological reflection.<sup>1</sup> As such, this is a preliminary investigation into identifying a model of reconciliation that is already being lived out.

*The Context for Reconciliation as the Model of Mission*

Robert Schreiter's (1992a, 1998) concern for reconciliation arose out of his interest in the phenomenon of violence. With the collapse of the bipolar world in 1989 the context changed from one of international wars to one of local wars. In such scenarios it is inevitable that people would have a problem with personal identity. Many people learnt to identify themselves in terms of being in opposition to another group. Now the "enemy" is close by; the enemy could even be one's neighbor (cf. Rwanda, Bouganville, Solomon Islands, Fiji, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

Missionaries since World War II have constantly found themselves in environments where there are resistance movements. The enthusiasm for independence has given way to violence. Africa and Latin America are classic examples of this. With the collapse of the bipolar world all sorts of internal conflicts and animosities that had been previously ignored or exploited by the Cold War super-powers of the Soviet Union and the United States now erupted.<sup>3</sup> Consider Indonesia, the former Yugoslavia and USSR, Fiji, Bouganville, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, all over Africa and South America. Even in Europe, which gives the impression it is de-Christianized, religious memories are not dead. Consider former Yugoslavia. There is an absolute necessity for incorporating into mission this context of overcoming violence.

The globalization process has reached the stage where there is fantastic connectivity (cf. Tomlinson 1999:1ff). While the dynamism is mostly coming from economics and neo-liberalism, it is also being facilitated by the electronic communication revolution. People are now

resisting negative local effects of globalization (cf. Gorastiaga 1996:88; Tomlinson 1999:181-207). The new means of communication allow people to better support each other. Missionaries as agents of change have an important role in helping facilitate this.

This modern mission era has coincided with the rise of a number of movements. These include modern feminism (for example, the priesthood of women in the Roman Catholic Church was previously not on an agenda); the developing awareness of “right brain” thinking (theology had become very rationalistic due to the influence of the Enlightenment); and, the interest in ecology (or in other words reconciliation with nature). These movements are wider than Christianity; they are part of the globalization process. We recall that with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, ecology has now been put on the agenda of governments and organizations in every part of the world. This is unprecedented in human history.

The destruction of the earth is bringing about a new radical poverty. Previously humans always at least had the land, now this is even gone or ruined.<sup>4</sup> The peace movement reminds us that the nuclear, chemical, and biological weaponry that has developed has no respect of boundaries or cultures. While these weapons were made for deterrence we now know how to make them and as such now have the potential to destroy the environment and ourselves.

In the Vietnam War the media exposed what happened. In the Gulf War the media was controlled. This creates dangerous civil and religious strife. Stories become suppressed. If these stories became known it could

turn people against warfare—this is one of the positive effects of the power of globalization.

A great deal of theological and pastoral innovation has arisen in the Third World. It is the powerless that in fact are giving rise to creative responses to the violence, such as Basic Christian Communities, theology of liberation, etc. In Australia it is not surprising therefore that the call to reconciliation has come from and been led by indigenous-Australians. (It is worth remembering that in the 1938 sesquicentenary a group of Aborigines in Sydney declared January 26 (Australia Day) “A Day of Mourning.” The hall in which they met is now recognized by the Heritage Trust.)<sup>5</sup>

The Spirit works with and through human vulnerability. There are none more vulnerable than those confronting death-dealing forces in society. All these factors combined are leading to the emergence of peacemaking exemplified through the United Nations declaring the year 2000 an “International Year for the Culture of Peace.” We are not peacekeeping, we are peacemaking. Peace is a process, not a state to be aimed at. Peace is essentially about relationships and as such is necessarily dynamic and fluid.

In contexts like the one described above there is an urgent need to find non-violent means for handling inevitable human conflicts. It is in this context that reconciliation becomes a much-needed background to any pastoral and missionary activity. It is both global and local, sometimes referred to as “glocalization,” and so is just as relevant in the First World as it is in the Third World (cf. Robertson 1995, Schreiter 1997c: 11, 69, Tomlinson 1999:195-196). It needs to become the driving factor in any model of mission.

Anthropology has highlighted how people cannot live without myths. Myths are foundational to our identity (cf. Geertz 1973:82). They make life meaningful. This is why narrative becomes extremely important. In Australia there are two stories since 1788, the indigenous-Australian story and the (mostly) Anglo-Australian story. The problem of reconciliation is how do these two stories become one so that a common or shared story emerges that contains both.<sup>6</sup> The truth and shadow of both stories need to emerge. We need a narrative that acknowledges human difference, yet recognizes the interconnectedness of our shared history.

In the historical contexts of colonization and globalization the stories of the poor—like the stories of indigenous-Australians—were often ignored, denied or silenced. The stories of the victors or more powerful were negatively imposed on them (cf. Reynolds 1999). This resulted in many situations in collusion and a negative self-image. The model of solidarity emerged in the 1960s where it was seen that the gospel was preached to the poor (Luke 1:46-55). Up until World War II the solution was seen as charity. After World War II, through the social sciences there led to a change in consciousness. People who were engaged in “development” activity began to realize that the poor were not poor due to fate or bad luck, but more the victims of systemic injustice.<sup>7</sup> The obligation of charity changed to one of justice.

The Roman Catholic Church in its 1971 Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops noted that working for justice is a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel.<sup>8</sup> This divided churches, particularly missionary groups between those working for justice and those working for

charity. We could ask, Where is the need for justice? We look to the victims and survivors of injustice to answer this as they point to where the need for reconciliation is.<sup>9</sup>

Ecologists have demonstrated that connectivity is at the heart of the story of the universe: everything is related. They have noted that there is no development without tension. This also reflects the biblical worldview where tension is not seen as something to be avoided but rather as something to be faced (See Chapter 2). The question for us remains, How can we make tension be creative rather than destructive?

#### *Vulnerability: the Cornerstone of a Spirituality of Reconciliation*

A fundamental assumption is that we participate in the *missio Dei* (cf. Bosch 1991:389ff). The mission is God's, we are called to participate and respond to God's invitation into mission. In line with the recovery of the sense of *missio Dei* we also argued for the recovery of the trinitarian understanding of mission. From a theological point of view the Trinity is the ultimate foundation. You cannot go back any further; this is the supreme mystery that is revealed. In the Trinity you see the fullness of life which is intrinsically relational. We know that if persons do not have meaningful relationships they become truncated, they are not fully human. The coordinating and animating person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit calls us to participate in and with the triune God. We noted that the Holy Spirit sees life as fundamentally connected to the story of Jesus Christ. In that sense, the Spirit connects the present community with past communities.

The exploration of mission as *missio Dei* led us to recover the trinitarian foundations for mission. The Trinity serves to remind us that God invites us into relationship, as the triune God is intrinsically relational. The triune God is deeply connected to suffering and vulnerability. God's suffering on the cross is the symbol par excellence of this. The cross serves to demonstrate the power of vulnerability. The suffering of God points to a God of radical vulnerability who suffers with and through the pain of humankind. What seems to be complete foolishness and failure contains the mystery of God's resurrecting power.

We saw that the Holy Spirit connects the present community with the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit calls us into connectivity with other persons, with God, and with all of creation. It is through the Holy Spirit that we experience the fullness of God's reconciling love.

God's reconciling love does not remove the wounds of the past. Rather it works to transform the wounds and infuse them with new meaning and new redeeming power. We noted that in the resurrection stories the Christ came bearing his wounds. The wounds were sources of healing for others. This is the divine gift of vulnerability. In the divine context suffering is not meaningless.

What is the significance of the *koinōnia*, communion of the triune God for the human community? In particular, what is its significance for a human community searching for reconciliation with each other and with creation? It seems to suggest a number of things. First, the wounds that we inflict on each other cannot be ignored, or even repaired. Second, these



wounds must be remembered. Third, the resurrection reminds us that the wounds of the past can become sources of healing and hope for individuals and entire communities. Lastly, the community is called to come together and remember the past, thereby becoming a remembering community. As a remembering community, the community becomes more united and committed to its vision and hopes. It is from this foundation that it is better able to move forward into the future.

The interviews affirmed the power of vulnerability in the journey towards reconciliation. We noticed that Anglo bystanders who had come to a place of healing past memories were more open to reconciliation with indigenous-Australians. Those Anglo-Australian bystanders who had not been able to integrate past memories of hurt were correspondingly less able to make deeper connection with Aboriginal survivors. Personal fears and hurts therefore influence and sometimes directly shape the way people view others and social issues. Those involved in the ministry of reconciliation need to recognize and work through their need for healing in order to be able to facilitate the sharing of memories of survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators.

Leaders in the ministry of reconciliation need to have a spirituality of vulnerability. Reconciliation processes require openness to the truth. Leaders must nurture the hidden or silenced voices in the community to emerge and become part of the broader story. Nurturing listening and connectivity in the minds and hearts of bystanders to the lives and stories of survivors and perpetrators is a vital part of leadership. With connectedness and understanding the bystander will desire justice and liberation for

victims. This will provide the political mandate necessary for politicians and other leaders to provide meaningful reparation for survivors.

This missiological backdrop situated our context for mission. The discussion on the spirituality of reconciliation highlighted the gift of vulnerability in the ministry of reconciliation. We are now ready to suggest some practical strategies to assist in promoting the reconciliation process in firstly, the Wadeye community, and secondly, the Australian nation as a whole. We recall that strategies cannot force conversion. Conversion is the work of God.

### *Suggestions for Further Research*

Before moving to practical strategies it is timely to note some suggestions for further research. While there is increasing research in the area of survivors and perpetrators (cf. Enright and North 1998), the large majority of persons in most reconciliation contexts are bystanders, and these are still mostly ignored. There needs to be further research into bystanders as this group, being the largest group, has the most power in bringing about significant societal political and social change.

A further two areas for recommended research are very much interrelated. The first is the need to explore the relationship between how a person or cultural group handles conflict and the degree of empathy the person or cultural group has for others experiencing conflict. The second area is the need to explore the connection of the degree of personal integration of past hurt and the degree of empathy for those still experiencing hurt. While my research suggests there may be close levels of

connection in these two areas further research is needed. The results of this research would directly assist those involved in developing strategies to engage bystanders, so as to promote better processes or strategies of reconciliation in the community. To this we now turn.

### *Strategies for Promoting the Ministry of Reconciliation*

At the center of narrative work lies the need to heal painful memories. Stories are particularly powerful in reconciliation because they can serve to connect people with one another. The history of the Wadeye community suggests that the pains and hurts of the past have not been effectively treated. We saw that the majority of those from the religious orders that were the first to go to Wadeye felt there was a need to move on from the past. We noted that this cry is similar among many of Australia's politicians. While there is nothing wrong in "moving on," it is even desirable, we can only move on successfully when the past is honestly addressed. The stories of the forgotten or silenced ones must be heard and responded to. This reshapes previous understandings. Ignoring or forgetting the past is doomed to fail. The past must be remembered in order to facilitate the transition forward. The major block to reconciliation at both the personal and social levels is a failure to integrate the past into a new redeeming story of survival and resilience. It is impossible for a shared history to emerge when one side wants to avoid or forget the other's story.

Those who call on people to forget the past fail to recognize that the memories of the past have, as Metz (1972, 1980) put it so well, "future content." Metz argued that the memories of the victims and survivors of the

past are “dangerous” because they force us to take into account the stories of those still crying for justice. The cries of the poor become the *memoria passionis*; that is, they link us to the story of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection (cf. Metz 1972:16). If nations and communities are to be built on the firm foundations of truth and justice the “dangerous memories” of the silenced ones need to be integrated into the broader story. As such, a number of the suggestions for communities like Wadeye and nations like Australia are directed towards the need for institutions to preserve the memories of the past.

The following recommended strategies are only given as possible ideas for the Wadeye community to consider. (I understand the Wadeye community to be the Aborigines together with Church missionaries and other Australians.) It is better that these ideas are discussed in the community and out of the conversation action emerges.

*Twelve Strategies for the Ministry of Reconciliation for Wadeye*

1. Further develop the Wadeye Museum. Continue to promote both oral and written history and an Aboriginal interpretation of their history. Use video wherever culturally appropriate.
2. Write a history of the community from an Aboriginal perspective paying particular attention to the relationship of the people to the missionaries. The 1975 booklet by Br. John Pye has clearly passed its used by date as an accurate historical piece of writing.
3. Make a video of the “History of Wadeye.” The mission video, *They Walked in Darkness*, while having excellent footage reflects the

paternalistic and colonial preoccupations of the past. Perhaps make the content of the commentary more appropriate and re-dub it in the local indigenous languages.

4. Work towards having an annual day of “Healing the Memories of the Dormitories and the Mission.” These days could be given over to storytelling. I would encourage physically going to the places where the buildings were. Bring the men and women together separately for storytelling. Bring the elders and other generations together to share memories. The missionaries could at first be invited to participate through listening to the stories. We recall that many of the Aboriginal interviews revealed a genuine concern not to hurt the missionaries’ feelings. Listening in this context serves to empower people to reclaim their voices and develop a new redeeming narrative.
5. Culturally appropriate counseling support should be provided for those seeking further support. This could perhaps be a joint government and church sponsored action. While a certain amount of healing can occur through the sharing of stories some individuals may require specialized counseling.
6. The church supported family alcohol recovery programs recognize the trauma of the dormitories that many folk bring with them into treatment decades after the abuse (cf. Goldman 1994). The healing of memories be made a significant part of indigenous alcohol treatment centers.
7. Work towards a “Community Day of Apology and Forgiveness.” Apologies from the Bishop of Darwin, the Director of the Catholic Education Center, and heads of religious congregations, particularly from

the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, and Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Aboriginal leaders could respond by accepting the apologies and reminding the missionaries of their offer of forgiveness for the mistakes of the past. Perhaps a document that was drafted by leaders of both the White and Black communities could be signed as an expression of genuine commitment to avoiding the mistakes of the past and sincere desire to work and walk together into the future. The “Day of Apology and Forgiveness” should include culturally appropriate reconciliation rituals. This day could coincide with national days like the “National Sorry Day” or be part of the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Celebration (NAIDOC) week. Missionaries at Wadey have not utilized these national days.

8. Church support and recognition for the *Memelma Council of Elders*. Anglo-missionaries in the local church consult *Memelma*. This becomes a matter of normal protocol reflecting the missionaries’ status as guests of the community.
9. The Church run school and adult education services be vitally involved in the remembrance days in the community. The school to particularly consult *Memelma* on matters of cultural education and history.

These are suggestions for supporting the development of Aboriginal memory and history of the community. The activities can heal some of the pain that presently exists in those memories. Missionaries have a particular responsibility to allow the past memories of pain to be freely told. It is the duty of the missionary to respectfully listen and learn. Attentive and

respectful listening creates a safe environment. A safe environment is essential in the work of healing memories. It is only in safe environments that reconciliation between peoples can progress.

The above lists specific recommendations that could work to promote the process of reconciliation in Wadeye. There is also a need to make some further recommendations of a general nature that could perhaps better facilitate the emergence of an indigenous church at Wadeye. It is with that goal in mind that the following are recommended be discussed and negotiated in the church community:

10. Form a Wadeye Parish Pastoral Council body or equivalent that reflects the make-up of the community. Meetings to be conducted in Murrinhpatha or other appropriate Aboriginal languages in the community. Pastoral Council to be formed along the lines of the shared wisdom model of the *Memelma Council of Elders*.
11. The Diocese of Darwin establishes a Diocesan Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministry body or equivalent. This group is comprised of indigenous leaders from local church communities, the bishop, and the Vicar for the Aboriginal Apostolate. Meetings should be held periodically as the occasion presents itself. The goals being to promote the movement towards indigenous churches and reconciliation within the Diocese and broader community.
12. Missionaries and schoolteachers undergo substantial crosscultural ministry training in the first six months of placement. This training be

offered on an ongoing basis and would include the languages, cultures, and Aboriginal history of the peoples of Wadeye.

Each of these recommendations points to and acknowledges the inalienable sense of subjecthood that every person is entitled to have. Each of the three recommendations acknowledges the leading role that the Aborigines have in deciding their own destiny. The recommendations serve to reverse the earlier patterns of behavior that assumed the missionaries came with all the knowledge and had all power. The recommendations point to the missionaries as being primarily learners rather than teachers. This would demonstrate a practical commitment to changing structures and relationships that reflect power and control over indigenous-Australians to structures and relationships that reflect the same desire for equality that so many Aborigines named.

We have explored briefly some practical suggestions to promote the journey towards reconciliation in Wadeye. We have also noted that meaningful efforts towards reconciliation will by its very nature nurture the development of an indigenous church in the community. In a certain sense the experience of reconciliation serves as a cathartic release for desiring greater subjecthood and healing in the person. We recall that for many people recovering from abuse and trauma their ongoing healing and recovery is closely connected to their desire for political and social change. This is similar for entire communities. Survivors are aware of having survived. They see how structures held them back and how they have made



sense of the pain of the past. As a group, they can look forward with optimism and with a greater sense of their own subjecthood and power.

We are now ready to explore what the findings of the research can mean for the Australian nation, and indeed, for nations throughout the world.

### *Strategies for Reconciliation in Australia*

The story of the Wadeye community has been replicated throughout Australia. The dormitories in Wadeye reflect the systematic program of those times by governments and churches to assimilate Aborigines into mainstream Anglo-Australian culture. The words of Wurrngit are haunting. When reflecting on his experience and those of his generation in the dormitories from around age six onwards Wurrngit spoke out, *“There’s about two hundred of us walking around here. We have been through hell.”* Other interviews revealed similar memories. The words, “cruel,” “hidings,” “fenced in like refugees,” “separated from family,” “confused,” came up often. What was particularly surprising was the way the stories of the dormitories echoed the stories and emotions of the Stolen Generations. The Aborigines from Wadeye serve to remind us that being separated from family, culture, and language equates with being or feeling stolen.

The great majority of Aborigines living in Wadeye have not lost their land. This would place them in a minority of indigenous-Australians. The interviews highlighted the spiritual connection that indigenous-Australians have towards the land and sea. A considerable number of Anglo-Australians revealed that the Aboriginal sense of land was influencing the way they now

view the land. The Aborigines from Wadeye highlighted the spiritual understanding of land found throughout indigenous-Australia.

It is understandable that the two factors that have galvanized indigenous communities throughout Australia have been the cry for Land Rights (that began in the 1960s) and more recently the cry for an apology for the forced removal of children from their families. These are the two greatest wounds that indigenous-Australians now carry.

The High Court decisions of Mabo (1992) and Wik (1995) have worked to restore the memory of Aborigines as the original landowners of the country. As noted earlier, the Mabo and Wik decisions do not help the great majority of indigenous-Australians who are no longer able to prove an historical and cultural connection to the land of their ancestors. While the wounds of the past cannot be removed, the High Court decisions have been significant in enabling a more redeeming narrative of Aboriginal history to emerge. This is vital in recovering self-esteem, hope, and identities for many whose story had previously been silenced or even denied.

The Commonwealth Government's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's 1997 report, *Bringing Them Home*, has been a significant first step in acknowledging the memories of the century long assault on indigenous-Australian families. Many local and all state governments, many church groups and community organizations apologized on behalf of those who came before them for the mistakes of the past. One million Australians felt connected enough to the stories of indigenous-Australians to sign "Sorry Books" as a sign of their support and willingness not to repeat the mistakes of the past again. Late May and early June of

2000 saw an extraordinary outpouring of goodwill in the Australian community towards reconciliation. On May 28, over 250,000 people—the largest political gathering of people in Australia’s history—walked over Sydney Harbor Bridge as a sign of support for the process of reconciliation. This coincided or was followed up by “reconciliation walks” in smaller communities throughout the nation. In the first weekends of June, Brisbane and Adelaide staged walks for reconciliation that drew crowds of forty and sixty thousand respectively. It is becoming very evident that more Australians than ever are feeling increasingly connected to the struggle for reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians. My wife and I felt so strongly about the need to be part of the symbolic and historic reconciliation walk across the bridge that we flew down as a family from central Queensland to be part of the day. I was struck by the great variety of persons that came together. I smiled at the way the Holy Spirit is at work in coordinating and bringing together so many different peoples for the purpose of promoting reconciliation in our personal and social lives. It was impossible not to experience the joy and delight that was present in the gathering. For many that it was one of the highlights of their life, as it was of mine.

This delight overflowed into Australia’s celebration of the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics. The symbolism of Australia’s popular desire for reconciliation was highlighted when the Aboriginal athlete, Cathy Freeman, lit the Olympic cauldron. The closing ceremony highlighted many of Australia’s musicians making significant gestures towards reconciliation, most graphically captured by the band, “Midnight Oil,” having the word

“sorry” dramatically emblazoned on their clothing. Opinion polls have indicated increased support for reconciliation since the Olympics.<sup>10</sup>

Despite all the goodwill demonstrated by people and artists there is still a way to go at the national level of leadership in the country. Until our national leaders, particularly our Prime Minister, make the connection that their government is linked to past governments and that contemporary indigenous-Australians are connected to the past policies of governments an apology will neither be forthcoming, nor authentic if it comes reluctantly. Until the Commonwealth Government apologizes to indigenous-Australians for the past policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families’ reconciliation in Australia will remain stalled. Nevertheless, the grassroots support for reconciliation continues to burgeon, and it will be this movement that will influence the government to reconsider its present position.

Just as the Wadeye community needs to develop institutions that preserve the Aboriginal memories of the past so does Australia. The following recommendations are provided to promote the process of social reconciliation in Australia. We recall that reconciliation is not an alternative to social justice and liberation. It calls us to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and wherever possible make appropriate reparation and compensation as a sign of the community’s commitment not to repeat these mistakes. As such, a number of the following recommendations specifically target the need for appropriate compensation. We have argued that reconciliation goes beyond our normal understanding of justice. Nevertheless, reconciliation is

neither cheap nor easy. The costs of the compensation can serve to show how genuine the community's repentance and apology is.

In order to work towards healing the memories of the past and facilitating the journey of walking together into the future the following are recommend:

1. Work towards having an "Australian National Reconciliation Day" after the Commonwealth Government delivers a formal apology for its treatment of the Stolen Generations. This day could perhaps replace Australia Day that presently celebrates the landing of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove. Indigenous-Australians have long argued that Australia Day as it is presently celebrated is divisive. Anglo-Australians from other parts of Australia have also commented that it does not mean as much to them as those from the Eastern States. An Australian National Reconciliation Day should serve to bring all Australians together to honor the truth of the past, to acknowledge and celebrate cultural differences, so that we can better move forward together into the future. We remember not from a place of toxic guilt, but rather from a place of sorrow for the mistakes of the past and a commitment not to repeat these in the future.
2. Museums throughout the country acknowledge Aboriginal history. Aboriginal history is not revisionist or "black armband" history rather it should be seen as correcting a view of history that has created the "Great Australian Silence" towards indigenous-Australians.
3. Australia's National War Museum appropriately honors the wars that occurred in Australia as indigenous-Australians valiantly defended their

land from invading forces. There is a need to honor the memory of over 20,000 indigenous-Australians and 3,000 Anglo-Australians that died directly as a result of these conflicts.

4. Commemorate sites and dates of wars that have occurred on Australian soil. A considerable number of the wars with indigenous-Australians have been recorded. There are others that are still being passed down through the oral tradition. It is our duty to find ways to remember them as an important part of our Australian history. Some of these ways could include, Remembrance Days, erection of monuments on sites, songs or poetry.
5. Compensation and reparation for survivors of the Stolen Generations that works to heal the memories (culturally appropriate trauma counseling) and reconnect family members. Family and intergenerational counseling services will be required to assist in bringing families together as they work to recover from the shared trauma of the past. There is great merit in former Prime Minister, Sir Malcolm Fraser's recommendation of establishing a "healing fund" similar to Canada's \$350 million fund, to deal with compensation and so take the issue out of the courts.<sup>11</sup>
6. Ongoing compensation in the form of ongoing funding from Commonwealth Governments for an Indigenous Land Fund in which indigenous-Australians work towards buying back land that cannot be legally claimed through recourse to the Mabo and Wik decisions.<sup>12</sup> A certain percentage of the national budget should be established in legislation to ensure that this continues into the future.

7. Funding for community and schools to work on “shared-history” projects at the local community levels between indigenous and other Australians. An important part of these projects would be developing racial free and borderless places where safe storytelling and storylistening circles occur.
8. Funding for schools and community groups for relationship building exercises between indigenous and other Australians. We recall that the power of sharing stories is maximized through relationships.

### *Conclusion*

We have seen that the context for the emerging model of mission as reconciliation is the cry of peoples throughout the world, and indeed creation itself, for justice and liberation. We also saw the ways people desire reconciliation with self, others, and God, and how these personal dimensions (vertical) often affect the way people respond to the hurting and pains of others (horizontal). We saw the need for those involved in the ministry of reconciliation to have a spirituality that embraces their own vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of others. The heart of spirituality like the heart of our triune God is reflected in the call to be in right relationship with self, others, and God. The Trinity reminds us that difference is honored, not obliterated, and that the underlying challenge for us is to search for a unity (*koinōnia*) based on perfectly equal relationships. From this we stepped forward and named some strategies that may assist the process of reconciliation in the small community of Wadeye, and then ventured further to offer suggestions for the Australian nation.

We recognize the need to identify strategies as God calls us to actively participate and cooperate with God. We recall that it is the Spirit who calls us to work with God in bringing about reconciliation. We know that reconciliation is not only the task of God (vertical domain) or of people (horizontal domain). The Spirit as the animating and connecting person of the Trinity calls us to be in perfect *koinōnia*, communion with each other and with the triune God of mutual relations. We saw that the Spirit is vitally concerned with remembering the story of Jesus and desiring the story of Jesus Christ to be connected with the stories of communities down through the ages, and indeed right into the story of the community of the present moment.

My story with Ian continues. During my fieldwork at Wadeye I only saw Ian once, and that was quite briefly. He was looking forward to catching up with his brother who had just returned from being in jail in Darwin. During the fieldwork I never made or found the opportunity to tell Ian about the immense impact that his forgiveness has had on me. Ian almost certainly has no idea that his offer of forgiveness has brought about such a dramatic change in my life. In many ways then our stories still need to be brought together. I too have unfinished business to account for. But I know from the “deep insides” of myself, that I approach my future meeting with Ian and “Ians” everywhere, with a sense of wholeness and well-being that I did not have before. I am now able to stand on the land with an increased feeling of integrity. I believe this awaits each and every Australian who has the courage to look back and remember, so that they can



move on into the present and future and see things with new eyes and ears  
and with a changed heart.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vatican II document *Guadium et Spes* # 4, refers to this in the context of “reading the signs of the time” methodology. See Pope John XXIII (1961) in *Mater et Magistra* # 236. Pope Paul VI (1971) *Octogesima Adveniens* # 4 refers to the “see, judge, act” methodology.

<sup>2</sup> See Brian Starken, “Civil War and Conflicts. Mission as Reconciliation.” Public meeting, March 31 1999. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission, USG/UISG Rome.  
<http://www.sedos.org/english/conflict.html>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. The Report of the Commission on Global Governance (1995:12) *Our Global Neighbourhood*.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1988 Columban General Assembly, in their section “Solidarity with the Poor in Ecological Perspective” it was noted that the “poor are being made *radically* poor” as for the first time in human history, the earth, which is their source of livelihood is being destroyed. This is being done “without the possibility of a creative alternative” (No. 67).

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Australia Day is referred to by many indigenous-Australians as “Survival Day.” It has become a day of celebrating the survival of their culture.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Geoff Clarke, Chairperson of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, “A Long Journey into Daylight for all Australians,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 2000, p.17.  
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0005/08/text/features7.html>

<sup>7</sup> For example, in parts of Australia mandatory sentencing of juveniles may be legal but it still remains intrinsically evil.

<sup>8</sup> The full reference can be found in the introduction of the document *Justice in the World* presented to Pope Paul VI by the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 1971 (O’Brien and Shannon 1992:287-300).

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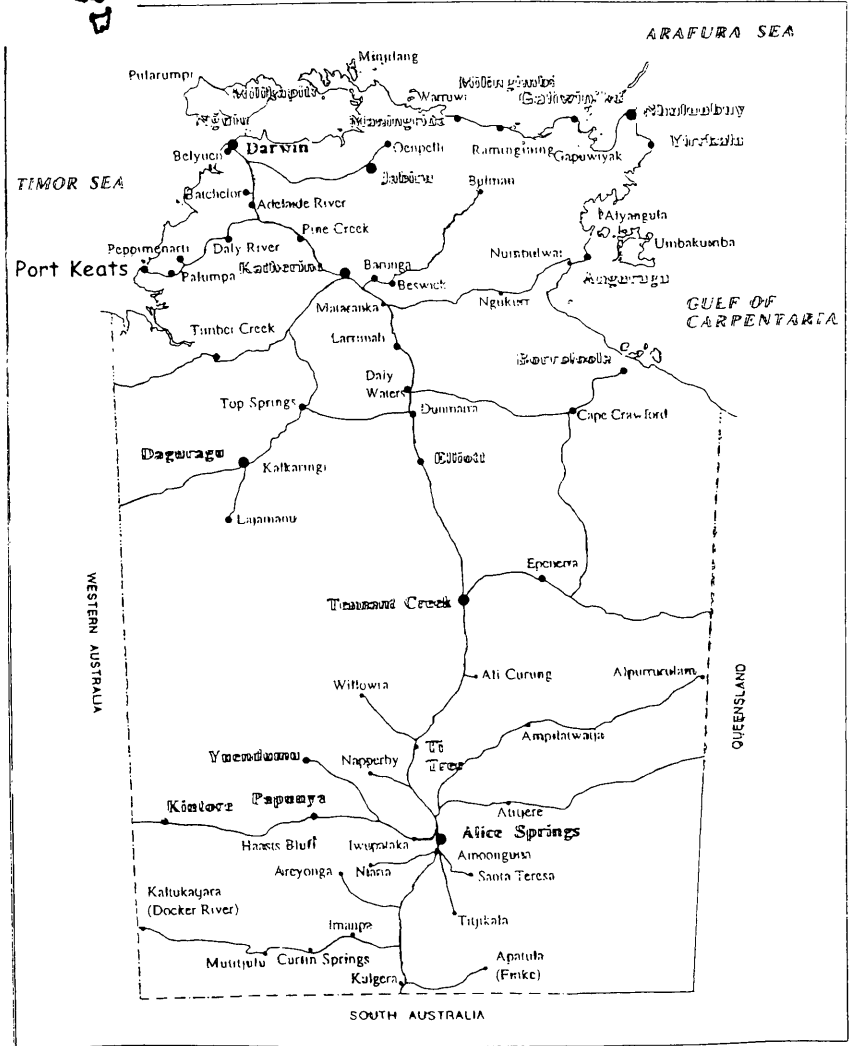
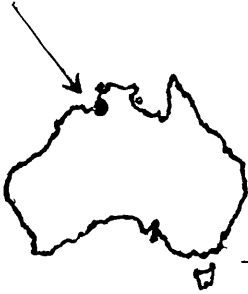
<sup>9</sup> Cf. Columban General Assembly, *Becoming More Missionary: Our Shared Experience*, Nos.71-72. As the Columbans put it in 1988, “Through His coming we see our destiny as tied to that of all other human beings. He taught us that it is the poor who are the most obvious victims and as such they signal the presence of dominative, exploitative and oppressive ways of life for everyone” (No. 72).

<sup>10</sup> The latest Herald-AC Nielsen poll showed support for reconciliation jumping from 74 percent to 78 percent. Opposition to a treaty dropped six percent to 34 percent. Opposition to an apology was still the majority dropping only one percent from 53 percent in May to 52 percent in November. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 November 200, p.1.

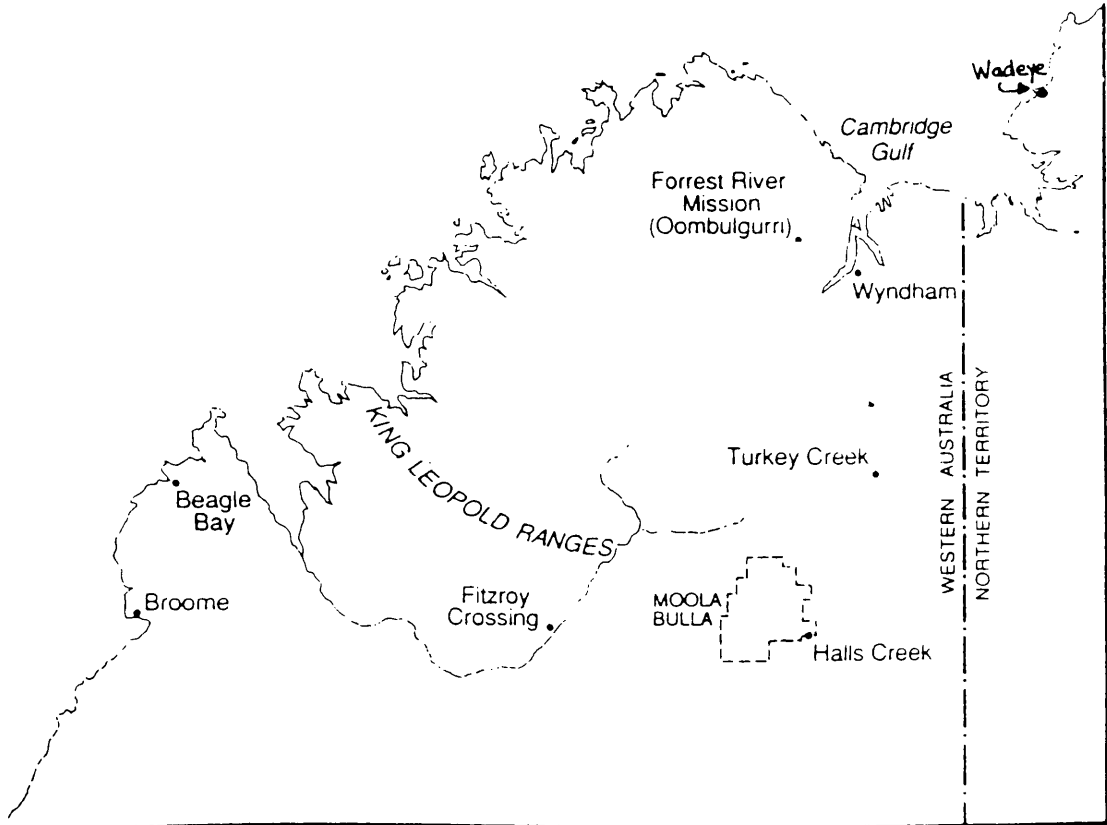
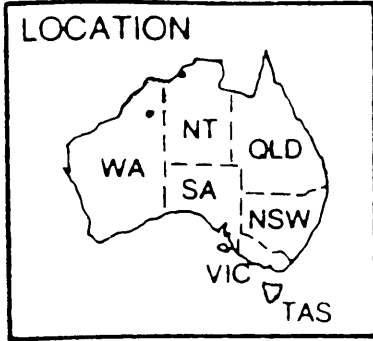
<sup>11</sup> Cf. *The Australian* newspaper, 5 May 2000, p.1. Current Prime Minister John Howard comes from the same political party as former Prime Minister Fraser. Howard was a senior minister for many years in Fraser’s Government from 1975 to 1983.

<sup>12</sup> The Keating Government legislated for such a fund in 1993. There has been an excellent response and usage of this fund. I am highlighting the need for this fund to continue far into the future.

# Appendix A: Maps of Focal Area of Study



## Appendix B: Maps of *Moola Bulla* and Kimberley



## Appendix C: Interview Schedule

### *Interview Schedule with Aborigines*

- 1.1. Can you talk about what would happen if someone did the wrong thing or broke the Law in your culture?
- 1.2. How would people act towards that person?
- 1.3. How would the family of that person act toward him/her?
- 1.4. Could the person ask for forgiveness for his/her wrongs? What would she/he have to do? How would she/he go about asking for forgiveness?
  
- 2.1. Can you tell me a time when you have been hurt by someone? What did you do when this happened? How do you feel about this now? What helped? What did not help you or made things worse?
- 2.2. What have been the worst ways you have hurt someone else? How do you feel about this now?
  
- 3.1. What is your earliest memory of a White person?
- 3.2. (If not mentioned above) What is your earliest memory of a church person?
  
- 4.1. When you think of “church” at Wadeye what comes into your mind?
- 4.2. What is your best memory of church?
- 4.3. What is your worst memory of church?
- 4.4. What has been your best experience in the church at Wadeye?
- 4.5. What has been your worst experience in the church at Wadeye? How did you feel at the time? How do you feel about this now? (If different) What has helped you feel better about this experience? Has anything made you feel worse about this experience?
  
- 5.1. What is your best experience of relationship with a White person or missionary at Wadeye?

- 5.2. What is your earliest experience of hurt feelings with missionaries or Whites?
- 5.3. What is your worst experience of hurt feelings with missionaries or Whites?
  
- 6.1. Has there been a missionary that you have been close to? What do you remember about this person?
- 6.2. Has there been a missionary that has hurt you? What do you remember about this person? How did you feel when this person hurt you? How do you feel now about this? (If changed) Why do you feel differently now?
- 6.3. Did the person who hurt you ever say sorry to you or ask for forgiveness from you? Is there anything you would like to see happen about this experience?
  
- 7.1. What do you do when you have “hurt feelings” toward another person? A missionary? A White person? (If different response) Why do you act differently with each?
- 7.2. What do your friends or family members do when they have been hurt by others? Missionaries? Whites?
  
- 8.1. What do you do when you disagree with someone in your culture?
- 8.2. What do you think of the ways Whites handle problems with other Whites? What do you think of the ways Whites handle problems with Aborigines? Is it very different from your way? How?
  
- 9.1. Who or what has influenced the way you handle disagreements or problems with people? With missionaries? With other Whites? Has your understanding changed over the years? How has it changed?
  
- 10.1. Do you have any favorite Bible stories about hurt feelings and disagreements? Can you talk about what these mean for you?

- 10.2. Do you have any favorite cultural stories about hurt feelings and disagreements? Can you talk about what these mean for you?
- 11.1. How do you feel about the missionaries at Wadeye? How do you feel about the Whites at Wadeye? Have your feelings towards missionaries and Whites at Wadeye changed over the years? If so, How have your feelings changed?
- 12.1. Is there anything you are particularly happy about that is going on in the church at Wadeye? Is there anything that you are not happy with that is going on at the moment?
- 12.2. What would you like to see happen in the church at Wadeye?
- 13.1. What are the best things that are happening in Wadeye at the moment? Why is this happening now?
- 13.2. What are the main problems in Wadeye at the moment? Why does Wadeye have these problems?
- 14.1. What are the main problems between Aborigines and Whites in Wadeye?
- 14.2. What are the main problems between Aborigines and missionaries at Wadeye?
- 14.3. Do these problems get resolved? Ignored? Explode? Why does this happen?
- 15.1. How are disagreements handled between Aborigines here?
- 15.2. How are disagreements handled between Aborigines and Whites here?
- 15.3. How are disagreements handled between Whites here?
- 15.4. How do you feel about the way disagreements are handled here? What would you like to see happen?
- 16.1. Can you remember when the church helped the community come together over disagreements?



- 16.2. Can you remember a time when you were disappointed that a church person did not bring people together after a disagreement?
- 17.1. Can you remember a time when you spoke to a White or missionary about something you were upset with them about? How did you go about this? What happened? How do you feel now about this? Would you do this again? Would you do it any differently now?
- 18.1. Does anything need to happen in this community for creating better relationships between Aborigines, missionaries and other Whites?
- 18.2. Have you tried to do anything to help this happen? What happened?
- 19.1. Who are the church leaders in Wadeye?
- 19.2. Do they have a role in helping the community come together and solve problems? How do you feel about their efforts to do this.
- 19.3. What would you like to see happen?
- 20.1. Have you ever been unexpectedly forgiven by someone? Why were you surprised?
- 20.2. Have you ever unexpectedly forgiven someone who hurt you or a loved one? What led you to forgiving that person?
- 20.3. Has there been someone that you have wanted to forgive but have been unable to? Why has this been difficult for you?
- 21.1. What has been the best experience of establishing peace in your life?
- 22.1. Imagination Exercise. I would like you to imagine being a White person, maybe a priest who worked in Wadeye. It is over 30 years ago. You are working in the dormitory or convent. You are worried that Aborigines are experiencing health problems as they move from the bush into the town. You believe they need to learn English so as to better handle the problems that the White person will bring them. You believe they deserve to learn about Jesus and his church. It is

hard working at Wadeye. You have left your family many thousands of miles away. Many of your friends and family think it is a waste of time working at Wadeye.

- 22.2. How do you feel being that missionary? How do you feel being that missionary as you look back on all your work, prayers, and efforts?
- 23.1. What do you think of the debate in Australia about reconciliation with the Aborigines? Do you care about this issue? Why? Why not?
- 23.2. Has your attitude to Whites changed over the years? How? What led you to change? Or, What reinforced your earlier ideas?
- 23.3. How do you feel towards other Australians in general? How has this come about?
- 23.4. What, if anything, do you think needs to happen in Australia in regards to reconciliation?
- 23.5. How much do you feel you should be involved in this?
- 23.6. How much are you prepared to be involved in this?
- 23.7. How would this look in places like Wadeye?
- 24.1. Do you have anything else you would like to say on the topic, or anything about the interview?

*Interview Schedule with Anglo-Australians Including Missionaries*

- 1.1. What led you to be involved in ministry/work out here?
- 1.2. How long have you been involved in ministry/work here?
- 1.3. How long do you feel you will stay here?
- 2.1. What is your earliest memory of an Aborigine?
- 2.2. What is your earliest experience of racial or cultural conflict with Aborigines?
- 2.3. What is your worst experience of racial conflict with Aborigines?
- 2.4. What is your best experience of harmonious relationships with Aborigines?

- 3.1. What is your best memory of church?
- 3.2. What is your worst memory of church?
  
- 4.1. When you think of “church” at Wadeye what come into your mind?
- 4.2. What is your earliest memory of a church person at Wadeye?
- 4.3. What has been your best experience in the church at Wadeye?
- 4.4. What has been your worst experience in the church at Wadeye? How did you feel at the time? How do you feel about this now? (If different) What has helped you feel better about that experience? Has anything made you feel worst?
  
- 5.1. What is your earliest experience of relationship with an Aborigine at Wadeye?
- 5.2. What is your worst experience of damaged relationship with Aborigines at Wadeye?
- 5.3. What is your earliest experience of damaged relationship with Aborigines at Wadeye?
- 5.4. How do you feel now about these experiences? Have you changed through these experiences? If so, in what ways? If not, Why not?
  
- 6.1. What do you do when you have a problem with an Aborigine at Wadeye? What happens?
  
- 7.1. Can you remember a time when you hurt an Aborigines at Wadeye? What happened? Did the problem get resolved peaceably? If so, how? If not, Why not?
- 7.2. Can you remember a time when an Aborigine hurt you? What happened? Did the problem get resolved peaceably? If so, how? If not, Why not?
  
- 8.1. Is there a missionary colleague that you admire? What are the qualities you most like about this person?

- 8.2. Has there been a church person that has hurt you? What do you remember about this person? How did you feel when this person hurt you? How do you feel now about this? (If changed). Why do you feel differently now?
- 8.3. Did the person who hurt you ever say sorry to you or ask for forgiveness from you? Is there anything you would like to see happen about this experience?
- 9.1. What do you do when you have conflict with another person? A fellow missionary? An Aborigine? (If different response) Why do you act differently with each?
- 9.2. What do your friends do when others have hurt them? Fellow missionaries? Aborigines?
- 10.1. What are the main problems between Aborigines and Whites in Wadeye?
- 10.2. What are the main problems between Aborigines and missionaries at Wadeye?
- 11.1. How are disagreements handled between Aborigines here?
- 11.2. How are disagreements handled between Aborigines and Whites here?
- 11.3. How are disagreements handled between Whites here?
- 11.4. How do you feel about this? What would you like to see happen? What are the best ways you deal with disagreement with Whites? Aborigines? Missionaries?
- 12.1. Has anyone or anything influenced the way you handle conflict or problems with people? With fellow missionaries/workers? With Aborigines? Can you talk about this? Has your understanding changed over the years? How has it changed?
- 13.1. Do you have any favorite Scripture stories about conflict and reconciliation? Can you talk about what this means for you?

- 13.2 Do you have any favorite stories about handling conflict? Can you talk about what these mean for you?
- 14.1. How do you feel about the church at Wadeye? Has your feelings for the church at Wadeye changed over the years? If so, How?
- 14.2. Is there anything you are particularly happy about that is going on in the church? Is there anything that you are not happy with that is going on at the moment?
- 14.3. What would you like to see happen in the church at Wadeye?
- 15.1. What are the best things that are happening in Wadeye at the moment? Why do you think this is happening now?
- 15.2. What are the main problems in Wadeye at the moment? Why do you think Wadeye is having these problems at this time?
- 16.1. Can you remember a time when the church helped the community come together over disagreements?
- 16.2. Can you remember a time when you were disappointed that a church person did not bring people together after a disagreement?
- 17.1. Can you remember a time when you spoke to an Aborigine or fellow missionary worker about something that you were upset with them about? How did you go about this? What happened?
- 17.2. How do you feel now about this? Would you do this again? Would you do it any differently now?
- 18.1. Does anything need to happen in the community for creating better relationships between Aborigines, missionaries/workers, and other Whites?
- 18.2. Have you or anyone tried to do anything to help this happen? What happened?

- 19.1. Who do you consider are the church leaders in Wadeye? How do you feel about their (or your) efforts to bring about increased harmony here?
  
- 20.1. What have been the best parts of the church's mission at Port Keats?
- 20.2. What have been the parts of the church's mission here that have most concerned you?
  
- 21.1. Do you feel missionaries or other Whites have anything to apologize to Aborigines for at Wadeye? If so, What?
- 21.2. If you think there should be an apology how should this be done? How would it look?
  
- 22.1. Do you feel the Aborigines need to apologize to missionaries and other Whites at Wadeye? Why? How would you like to see this done?
- 22.2. Is there something that you feel a need to apologize to Aborigines here or at any other place for? Have you been able to do this? (If yes) What helped you to be able to do this? If not, what would you need to help you do this?
- 22.3. Has an Aborigines ever apologized to you for a hurt that has been caused to you? How did you feel at the time of the hurt? At the time of the apology? How do you feel now about the apology? (If significant change). What has contributed to your change?
  
- 23.1. What experience or event comes to mind when you think of "reconciliation"?
- 23.2. What has been your greatest experience of reconciliation in your life? What happened?
- 23.3. What has been the most frustrating or painful experience of failed reconciliation in your life? Why did this fail?

- 24.1 In regards to Wadeye, what has been your best experience of reconciliation with Aborigines here? What has been your most frustrating or painful experience of failed reconciliation with Aborigines here?
- 25.1. Has your understanding of reconciliation changed over the years? If so, how has it changed?
- 26.1. Have you ever been unexpectedly forgiven by someone? Why were you surprised?
- 26.2. Have you ever unexpectedly forgiven someone who hurt you or a love one? What led you to forgiving that person?
- 26.3. Has there been someone that you wanted to forgive but have been unable to? Why has this been difficult for you?
- 27.1. Do you have a particular experience of reconciliation that best captures for you what reconciliation means in your life?
- 28.1. Imagination Exercise. Could you for a moment imagine being in 1960 when the church was operating the dormitories at Wadeye. You are a young Aborigine girl. You are six years old and you are now living in the convent which government policy strongly supports. The goal of the policy is to help Aborigines assimilate into the community. That is, too largely give up your cultural ways and become like Whites. It is still seven years before you are considered a citizen of Australia. Your people have no political power. Everything is controlled by Whites. You stay in the dormitory for ten years, up until the age you were about to marry. You were largely removed from your family and culture. The discipline in the convent was very different from what you had previously known. You were strongly encouraged to speak English. You had to learn new ways of praying, cleanliness, church duties, and domestic duties like sewing and western cooking. It felt quite strange. These new people and their

rules seemed very strange to you. You struggled to understand what was happening.

- 28.2. How do you feel you would have felt back then being that young Aborigine boy/girl? How do you think you would feel now over thirty years later?
- 29.1 What do you think about the debate in Australia about reconciliation with the Aborigines?
- 29.2 Do you personally care about this issue? Why? Why not?
- 29.3 Has your attitude to Aborigines changed over the years? How? What led you to change? Or, What reinforced your earlier ideas?
- 29.4 How do you feel towards Aborigines in general? Why do you feel this way?
- 29.5 What, if anything, do you think needs to happen in Australia in regards to reconciliation?
- 29.6 How much are you prepared to be involved in this?
- 30.1 Do you have anything else you would like to say on the topic, or anything about the interview?



## Appendix D: “The Story of Peter Brogan,” Told by Fr. John Leary msc

Peter was brought up at the Bungalow in Alice Springs. There were about six of them. And Paddy Malney was the lovely old priest down there. I think if anyone stuck his head out, he would baptize them. They were baptized and sent up to Garden Point.

Peter has eleven kids, twenty-seven grandchildren, couple of great grandchildren.

So, I was sort of preparing a little bit for his diaconate. Peter was married to Thecla, who died last year. As he was approaching diaconate I said, “Peter, where did you come from?” He said, “from around Alice Springs.” I knew that was where he was sent. I said, “How old were you when you went there?” He said, “Oh, about seven.” I said, “What language did you speak?” He said, “I had some Aboriginal language.” I said, “Can you remember any of it?” “Can’t remember a word—I know I didn’t speak English.” I said, “Did you have a name?” I was getting down to basics. “Yeah, but I don’t know whether I got it right.” I said, “Well just as you remember it”. He said, “name like Minchin.” I said, “Oh, they’re around *Palumpa* the Minchin’s.”<sup>1</sup>

So I went back to *Palumpa* and found that they knew Peter. His mother came from *Papa Ngala*. They knew his mother’s name and everything. So I went back over to Garden Point, granddad Peter and Thecla his wife, and brought them down to *Palumpa*.

And he met Frank and Paul Minchin, and Jock. I said, “Jock, what do you call Peter?” “I call him brother, same mother.” And they took him to *Papa Ngala*.

They parked the truck, and you walk up and go into the cave. And as we got near the cave, Jock started to call out to the spirits that Peter was coming back, and he mentioned the mother’s name and all—then we went up into the cave. And there’s perpendicular straight lines in it. One under the other. I always thought they were people they had bunged up.<sup>2</sup> I never

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<sup>1</sup> *Palumpa* lies about twelve miles to the east of Wadeye.

<sup>2</sup> “Bunged up” means killed.

knew what they meant. Anyway Jock took Peter and showed him where he fitted—it was a genealogy. And where Peter fitted in.

Anyway, after all this they all went back down slowly to the bottom of the hill. And we sat on the ledges—a beautiful view over the Moyle plains—on a clear day you can see the sea in the distance. And we sat there. I was prepared to sit as long as Peter needed. I thought about what Peter was going through, discovering who he was. Learning about his relations, uncles and aunties, brothers and sisters. I just sat down there. They started to call out from down below.

I looked across at Peter, the tears pouring down his cheeks. I said “How about it Pete, you ready?” He was very quiet till about half way down. He said, “You know, this is the most wonderful time of my life.” *Well, that’s where I felt sorry.* Up until then, we thought we’d done so much good, and we had done a lot of good for Peter. He was the manager of Garden Point—all that sort of thing. But the very important thing as to who he was, and his relations and everything else, I felt sorry and I felt proud of being somehow involved in helping Peter find out who he was.

I ’spose a lot of colored people since then who have gone back to find their mother, and find out where they came from, who the relations were. It’s a necessity for some of them, the Stolen Generation, by those people. And it has been one of the great privileges of my life to have Peter find himself.

It was funny at one stage, someone said “Take your shirt off Peter.” He took his shirt off, and there was quite a scar on his back. And they said, “Yeah, when he was a little fella he was fighting another Aboriginal kid and fell on a peg or sheet of iron and cut his back.” The scar was there.

## GLOSSARY

<i>aunties</i>	aunts
<i>blokes</i>	guys, men
<i>bottle shop</i>	liquor store
<i>bunged up</i>	murdered or killed
<i>bunkum</i>	bunk
<i>bush tucker</i>	foods found on the land, like berries or kangaroos.
<i>casket</i>	container for cheap wine sold in bottle shops.
<i>convent</i>	girls dormitory was referred to as the “convent”
<i>corroboree</i>	tribal Aboriginal dancing and music
<i>couldn't give a bugger</i>	could not care less
<i>damper</i>	bread made out of flour and water cooked under the coals of a campfire
<i>elder</i>	older respected person
<i>fair-go</i>	equal chance
<i>flaked out</i>	sprawled out, somewhat disheveled, lying down
<i>g'day</i>	common Australian greeting like “good day” or “hello”
<i>grog</i>	alcohol
<i>hiding</i>	whipping or belting
<i>homeland</i>	tribal land
<i>humpy</i>	poor accommodation, tin shed or branches put together make-shift
<i>lugger</i>	small ship
<i>Memelma</i>	Council of Elders in Wadeye
<i>memelma</i>	feeling of agreement and reconciliation that is experienced after conflict has been settled
<i>mob</i>	large group, can refer to people or animals
<i>old man</i>	affectionate term for elder, father, or father-in-law
<i>pastoralist</i>	rancher, cattle or sheep station owner
<i>petrol station</i>	gas station
<i>rubbish</i>	trash, garbage or stupid talk
<i>straight talk</i>	honest talk face-to-face with person, usually around area of conflict or disagreement
<i>stubby</i>	bottle of beer
<i>taking the bolt</i>	making a run for it, running away
<i>the pits</i>	not good, dreadful
<i>tucker</i>	food
<i>Whitefellas</i>	White people

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