

whole Church and it has to be critical and honest. Such a theology must also be ecumenical and patristic, both of which indicate a theology speaking to the cultures of their times. And finally, such a theology must be liturgical in its rootedness in the worshipping community.

As a note of interest, the full versions of all the papers will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*.

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Topic: Theological Anthropology at the Christian/Aboriginal Interface in Australia

Moderator: Phillip J. Linden, Xavier University, New Orleans

Presenter: Gideon Goosen, Australian Catholic University, Sydney

Respondent: Robert Gascoigne, Australian Catholic University, Sydney

Gideon Goosen presented a study of the interface between Aboriginal religion and Christian theology. His point of departure was the archeological and cultural context of Australia from its earliest period. Of immediate concern was the contrast between eighteenth-century British and Aborigine cultures. The British were Christian, urban, industrial, and technologically advanced while the Aborigines were seminomadic and unsophisticated. Thus, the interface between Christian theology and Aboriginal religion (*spirituality*) has and continues to present serious problems. But the anthropology/theology exchange has provided the basis for ending antipathy and suspicion that existed in that interface.

Anthropology in its relationship to theology has been able to demonstrate how culturally conditioned reflections are. The challenge is to think multiculturally. Anthropology offers the theologians the possibilities for a more concrete way of grounding what they are doing and saying among indigenous peoples. Theologians can go beyond or "behind" anthropological methodologies to create indigenous theologies.

After outlining the anthropological models used in the history of the theology/Aboriginal spirituality interface, Goosen identified the positive outcomes that have resulted from the anthropology/theology exchange for both Aborigines and other Australians. The exchange provided an opportunity and a challenge for Aboriginal theologians to express their theology in their own culture while engaging in global theology. The challenge is to forge theology and liturgy that flow from the culture of the people while being faithful to the tradition.

Likewise, the theology/anthropology exchange has allowed for a discovery by theologians of Aboriginal values. Anthropologists encouraged Westerners to

enrich their culture by adopting the Aborigine values of tolerance and cooperation, the harmonized way of relating to the universe, and the spirituality of the Aborigine culture. The significance of including the anthropological dimension into the theological reflection led the Catholic Church in Australia to a more positive attitude towards other religions in several of its official statements. (See the 1978 statement of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace entitled *Aborigines: A Statement of Concern*.)

According to Goosen, the anthropology/theology exchange reveals the impact of the Aboriginal mythopoetic worldview on Westerners/colonialists. Aborigines have an aesthetic, metaphorical frame of mind. They use mythic stories which overarch all institutions of their society. Humans are seen as participants in cosmic drama. These mythic stories are lived out in storytelling, rituals, songs, art, and celebrations. This mythopoetic approach to society differs from the Westerner/colonialist structure of meaning.

The Aborigines also express their religious experience of cosmic manifestations in the life forms of animals, reptiles, birds, insects, as well as in places. The land which preexists humans is transformed into life by the spirit of those who have traversed it. From the Aboriginal perspective, there is no serious tension between culture and religion. Central to the spiritual experience of the Aborigines is what is called "dreaming." Dreaming is an expression of the Aboriginal creation myth and originating story from Eternity. It is how they explain the cosmos and their sacred story. Aboriginal dreaming expresses the present, past, and future. In fact, through dreaming, Aborigines can even alter the present.

Goosen then presented some of the theological issues involved in the Christian/Aboriginal interface. He noted the continuity that exists between Aboriginal values and Gospel values. In fact, Aboriginal values challenge the Western Christian church about what it promotes as Christian values, and renders a critical appraisal of how its lifestyle matches with the New Testament Christ.

Unlike the Western hierarchical worldview, a High God normally is not a part of the Aborigine family-model worldview. The Aborigines are egalitarian with no hierarchical structure. Their spirituality is "a reflection of the social organization of the Aboriginal tribe." The European culture, language, science, experiences and, especially, religion, are all seen from a hierarchical viewpoint. This interface raises a question concerning the Western Christian concept of God.

The sense of time in Aboriginal spirituality presents another possibility of theological concern that has potential for the Western Christian worldview. There is no linear or absolute understanding of time in Aborigine spirituality. Time is tied to space. There is no past or future. There is only an ever-expanding present. The past can be influenced by story, retrospectively. There is what might be called "time reversal." The challenge for the Westerner in the interface is whether my view of time is the only way to understand it. The dimension of future is of less interest in Aboriginal spirituality. They believe that "life after death" means that the spirits will take them to be with the ancestors. With this

understanding of time there is the possibility of a greater openness to allowing eternity to penetrate time-space, which fits in well with a reclaiming of our mystical tradition in the West.

For Aborigines, sacramentality is common ground in which time is interpenetrated by Eternity, while for Catholics it is seen mainly in terms of grace and signs of grace. In the former sense, sacrament become a platform of commonality. The sacramental dimension of Aboriginal spirituality is the site where the personal story is linked to those creatures with whom they have a personal spiritual connection. This site can be read like the Bible. Thus the sacraments become the ground for mediation, healing, and the liberating presence of the Spirit. The Aboriginal concept of spirituality might liberate Westerners from our narrow, legalistic understanding of sacraments, placing us in touch with the culture of those who celebrate them.

Celebrations and liturgy reflect inculturation of the Aboriginal culture into Christian worship. The outdoors and the campfire, which symbolize unity and warmth, kinship and love become the sacred place that best expresses the meaning of the Eucharist.

In his response, Robert Gascoigne confirmed and supported the benefits of the anthropology/theology exchange as presented by Goosen. He stated that within this interface theology eases the intensity of the relationship between European and Aboriginal Australians. Divisions and debates about land culminate in a quest for Australian identity. Gascoigne contends that the exchange between the Christian theological and the Aboriginal spiritual landscapes contributes to the narrowing of the divisions and takes on a definitive role in the "search for new and open forms of Christian identity."

In conclusion, Gascoigne pointed to how the anthropology/theology interface is applied. He pointed out how it has invited European Australians into a dialogue on questions beyond the religious issues about time and sacramentality. It has prompted European Australians to learn from Aboriginal understandings of land in order to grapple with the serious ecological crises facing Australia. From a Christological view, the dialogue ultimately will involve working together to allow "the vision of Christ to broaden and deepen in the light of their experience of the Spirit."

The presentation raised many challenging questions. One of the concerns of those gathered was the Aboriginal concept of time. Discussion also focused on eschatology, the fusion of time, and the economic future of Aboriginals in the face of the globalization of culture.

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