

Book Reviews

RENE POWELL AND BERNADETTE KENNEDY,
Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P.
North Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2005.
ISBN 1920731997. Pp. 221. Rrp. \$24.95.

This is courageous writing. The story takes the reader on a journey that is as shocking as it is enlightening. Co-authors and friends, Rene Powell and Bernadette Kennedy, show remarkable skill in presenting their material in a way that is both convincing and disturbing. In the book's back cover comments, historian Henry Reynolds says: "Like no other book it brings together a compelling personal story with sharp objective analysis."

As a member of the Stolen Generation, Powell states in the preface: "I just want the truth to be told." Later, in reflecting on her frustrating, humiliating and farcical experience at the National Senate Inquiry in the year 2000, she concedes wearily that "an apology would mean nothing to me now", stating again: "I just want the truth to be told" (p. 84).

Powell presents an overview of the book's five chapters, which cover her own personal story and Kennedy's early archival research (Chapters 1 & 2), tracking of the public media debate concerning the Stolen Generation (Chapter 3), issues for co-writing (Chapter 4) and concluding reflections (Chapter 5).

The soul destroying "unwanted at birth" line was fed to Powell all through her young life. As an adult, along with Kennedy in *her* search for truth, comes the awful realisation of the racism and fear behind the lie. A tragic, even deeper sadness, as Powell recounts, is in the loss of her Ngaanyatjarra language. In 1966, as a twenty-one year old, she returns to her family and experiences the heart-breaking reality of being unable to communicate with her mother. "I had lost my language", she says repeatedly. "I couldn't talk to my mother about what had happened to me or why I had been taken... we couldn't speak as a mother and daughter would speak to each other..." (pp. 74-75).

In the section dealing with "The Questionable Mechanisms of Removal", Kennedy argues cogently that Powell's forcible removal from

her people and from her Milyirritjara country, clearly amounts to a policy based on race, where the rights of indigenous children and their parents were knowingly infringed. Referring to documentation from the Native Affairs/Welfare files, Kennedy provides evidence of unlawful behaviour by the Western Australian Government, showing that politicians and officials of the time were quite aware of the illegalities and were in fact devious and determined in their efforts to maintain the wrong. "The push to remove children through the children's courts was motivated as much by the fear of litigation as by any desire for justice" (p. 95). The writ of *habeas corpus*, for example, as Kennedy's painstaking research reveals, was feared and carefully avoided by Government officials in the late forties (pp. 94-100).

Kennedy has brought important new material to light and is in fact able to conclude convincingly that "the removal of Rene Baker on 3 July 1952 flouted child welfare policy advice given to the Western Australian Parliament in the Commissioner's Annual Report of June that year" (p. 99). Her analysis presents an important shift in the Stolen Generation discourse. Through her extensive and rigorous investigation and analysis, she has exposed the dangerous, stark truth of a Government both uncaring and destructive. What is more, Kennedy makes absolutely clear that it is no longer accurate to claim, as the former Senator John Herron, recent Minister for Aboriginal Affairs does, that Government Stolen Generation policies and practices were "sanctioned by law" (p. 90).

The sobering conclusion, reached by both Powell and Kennedy, is of a nation still with its head in sand, still in denial, still unmoved by the rights and just claims of hundreds of indigenous Australians. Morag Fraser (*Eureka Street* April 2005, p. 30) reminds us that "systematic lying corrupts the body politic". Unfortunately, along with this, notes Fraser, "it also taints ordinary people". So Australians generally, are a diminished people as long as the "deniers" continue to hold sway.

Well respected social commentators on Australian indigenous issues such as Mick Dodson, Frank Brennan, Marcia Langton (and the Mary Bennetts of earlier years), address critical matters of truth and justice needing to be addressed by the Australian Government and the Australian people. It is important that Stolen Generation stories, in print, as well as in film, national television and radio continue to challenge and inform. The invaluable contribution of *Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P* lies perhaps, in its unique and successful blending of the two perspectives: the autobiographical and the analytic. Both reflections are deadly serious; both are hard-hitting, challenging and passionate. More writing in this genre and of this quality would bring much enrichment to the necessary on-going discourse and debate.

In the preface, Powell reflects on the image of the rock-hole in speaking about the search for truth:

A real story tells the truth. In harsh places you can't go telling lies about things and you can't send a group of people over there to a rockhole where there's no water. You've got to tell them where the rockholes are. You want them to survive. People have to survive. A story must tell the truth.

Powell's personal reflections and Kennedy's dangerous truths take us into a dry, desolate place, but in the end, if we can truly hear and respond to the story, there is the promise of the rockhole's pure water. In Kennedy's understanding, this coming together with mutual respect and acknowledging the past can in fact, be "a sign of a nation's maturing" (p. 22).

Comprehensive chapter notes, photographs and an excellent bibliography add to the general high quality of the book. *Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P* is a Stolen Generation story, a story of Australia's history and people, that deserves and demands serious and urgent response.

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MARGARET ZUCKER,

From Patrons to Partners, and the Separated Children of the Kimberley:

A History of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley, W.A.

2nd Edition. Fremantle, W.A: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

ISBN 095799883X. Pp. x + 253. Rrp. \$29.95.

Some thirty years ago Peter Willis, formerly Catholic parish priest of Kununurra in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia, authored a study with the title, *Patrons and Riders*. It was an account of two failed projects which he had undertaken with local Indigenous traditional owners, the Miriwoong people.

While, on reflection, Willis judged his role to have been that of patron, he explained that the role of the Miriwoong people proved to be that of riders. In the Kununurra study "riding" had the meaning of selective participation in the two projects. Rather than embracing the partnership towards independence which Willis, the patron, had hoped for, the Miriwoong response to his patronal offerings was limited to their sense of a "filial satisfaction and the acknowledgement of belonging" which was in keeping with their reciprocal kinship idiom. The projects did not produce the partnership desired.

The book under review here, the second edition of *From Patrons to Partners*, is profitably read with this background in mind. The clear implication of the title is that previous church patronage has yielded to a contemporary partnership with Indigenous Catholics.

From Patrons to Partners was initially an account of one hundred years of Catholic missionary presence in the Kimberley, 1884-1984. It was commissioned by Emeritus Bishop John Jobst. This second edition stems from the concern of the present bishop of Broome Diocese, Christopher Saunders, that events surrounding the *Stolen Generations* should be included in recorded church history. Author Margaret Zucker does this in an added chapter; her preferred expression for those young people caught up in this sad fact of Australian history is *Separated Children*.

The new chapter 23, "The Separated Children", follows the lead of the official *Bringing Them Home* document in recording the church's desire for an on-going environment of reconciliation. Stolen generation people might then have the option of an appropriate experience of shared "filial satisfaction and an acknowledgement of belonging" within the church, to nuance the earlier words of Peter Willis' study.

Like the official *Bringing Them Home* document, *From Patrons to Partners* has poignant excerpts from now familiar stories told by individuals who suffered under the regimes of assimilation. There is telling testimony from church personnel who maintain deep mutual affection with not a few of those they served within institutions. And there are official, eloquent expressions of sorrow and regret from church leaders.

The second newly added chapter is an informal reflection on evangelisation and ministry among Indigenous people by the incumbent bishop of Broome, Christopher Saunders. As such it would have been better placed with the appendices provided, one of which is an account by the renowned Daisy Bates of her trip to Broome as guest of Perth's Bishop Gibney.

In their own way the two new chapters of the second edition of *From Patrons to Partners* confirm that till now local church history has been presented predominantly in the narrative genre. A critical and thorough assessment of the church's cross-cultural evangelising among Indigenous people of the Kimberley is yet to be seriously undertaken; the tools of anthropology and sociology, and then theology, as these might be subsumed in missiology, are not yet turned to steady professional use.

There may be, however, tucked away in *From Patrons to Partners'* new chapter on the separated children, something like the promise carried by the biblical cloud as small as a hand. An ethnocentric model of mission is introduced and acceptably identified as a deficient early approach to evangelisation in the Kimberley. A ready inference is that developments,

at least in the East Kimberley during the late 1970s and beyond, have represented a better post stolen generations model of mission. Ritual dance and song together with art are said to have been inculturated (correcting the mistaken use of the word "enculturation" in the first edition) by Indigenous people, especially Gija and Jaru groups in partnership with religious sisters and pastors.

But such partnership, and indeed the inculturation itself, await critical anthropological and theological assessment, the more so to ensure that continuing instruments of evangelisation like the huge investment in education by Broome Diocese are not dominated by ethnocentric patronage. "[F]ilial satisfaction and acknowledgement of belonging" have a continuing relevance for Indigenous Catholics within Broome Diocese's far-flung network of schools. For its part, a church intent on evangelising through education needs to be aware that true partnership in faith requires unqualified Indigenous satisfaction with, and participation in, the church's evangelising purpose which itself has to be exclusive of patronage.

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DOMINIC O'SULLIVAN,

Faith, Politics and Reconciliation. Catholicism and the Politics of Indigeneity.

Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005.

ISBN 192069143X. Pp. 296 + xxiv. Rrp. \$39.95.

Dominic O'Sullivan is of Maori and Irish descent, a New Zealander who has followed closely the developments in Aboriginal law and policy in Australia. He is a Catholic with a long time commitment to church social justice work in New Zealand. This book is a reworking of his doctoral thesis – his first book, dedicated to his first born Lucy who arrived at the same time as the book. O'Sullivan provides a clear statement of his purpose:

The story of the Roman Catholic Church's involvement in current and historical indigenous policy debate in Australia and New Zealand is the story of inconsistent and often confused application of a perceived "constant" religious truth to complex and controversial questions of public policy. The following account is an attempt to make that story clear where at times it has been obscure, even to the Church itself; and to assess the circumstances of failure, as much as to define occasions of success. (p. xiii)

He assesses church statements and actions before and after the Second Vatican Council. In Australia, the theological changes came at much the same time as the 1967 referendum which increased the public's awareness of the rights of indigenous Australians. Post Vatican II, O'Sullivan focuses on reconciliation and land rights in Australia and on reconciliation, biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand.

O'Sullivan traces the gains and losses made by the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand. Maori claims accelerated in 1985 once the New Zealand Parliament legislated to ensure that the principles of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi were reflected in future dealings between government and Maori. This legislative change had real teeth once New Zealand went down the path of privatisation because any public assets (including railways and fisheries) which were privatised had to honour the principle that Maori get their fair share.

In Australia, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders never enjoyed the benefit of a treaty. The High Court's native title decisions have provided the legal and political lever for the indigenous people to have a place at the table of negotiation. In 1988, the bicentenary of British settlement in the east of Australia, Prime Minister Bob Hawke committed his government "to work for a negotiated treaty with Aboriginal people". The then leader of the Opposition John Howard issued an immediate press release:

The notion is utterly repugnant to the ideal of one Australia. It is an absurd proposition for a nation to make a treaty with some of its citizens. Such a treaty is a leap in the Constitutional unknown. It will become a Constitutional nightmare.

The Australian church leaders marked the 1988 bicentenary with a call for reconciliation and "a formal acknowledgement of the nation's Aboriginal pre-history and the enduring place of our Aboriginal heritage". By 1991, there was agreement on both sides of Australian politics about the need for reconciliation. A Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established with a ten-year mandate to assist the process of national reconciliation.

O'Sullivan provides detailed accounts of the statements and actions of Catholic Church leaders who assisted these initiatives for reconciliation. He has three central theses. First, he sees the legal requirement of co-existence of native title on pastoral leases in the wake of the High Court's *Wik* decision as the equivalent of biculturalism which has been "the prevalent political philosophy in New Zealand since the 1980s" (p. 103). Co-existence and biculturalism each require a sharing of resources and co-operation in political and economic arrangements. Second, he detects in Australia "a comprehensive body of informed Catholic

scholarship, which provided a strong theoretical context in which to consider the application of the magisterium to concrete political questions" (p. 258). In New Zealand he witnessed a "religious vacuum being filled by political activists" (p. 259). Third, he thinks the Vatican has long provided a coherent teaching on indigenous rights that has been neglected or fudged by local hierarchies too absorbed with the concerns of the non-indigenous populations.

O'Sullivan has unearthed some wonderful quotes from religious leaders including the memorable 1892 letter of Donald MacKillop to the *Sydney Morning Herald* lamenting, "Little Tasmania is our model; and I fear, will be, until the great papers of Australia will chronicle, with regret, the death of the last blackfellow" (p. 25). A century later, the late Justice Temm in New Zealand argued that limiting the legal significance of the Treaty of Waitangi was "just another cloak for racism because the purpose of the argument is to deny that the Maori New Zealanders have any special rights under the Treaty" (p. 247).

I was disappointed that the book by focussing so closely on church leaders paid little attention to the developments and problems in providing a coherent united church voice on indigenous issues when indigenous laity rather than non-indigenous clergy are entrusted with the task of speaking with a Catholic voice. The political landscape is now more difficult to navigate as there are many indigenous voices in the market place and they are not all singing from the same sheet. In Australia, there are now public disagreements between indigenous leaders about the inalienability and commercial utility of Aboriginal lands. Amidst such controversy, church leaders have less to say and less to contribute. Inspired by many of the New Zealand church leaders' espousal of treaty proposals, I was struck by how radical such proposals would be coming from Australian church leaders. Despite our claims to acute theological discernment, perhaps our church statements follow fairly slavishly the major political contours of our own countries, and just a little ahead of the public sentiment, regardless of the universal principles espoused in Vatican documents. This book provides a treasure trove for readers on both sides of the Tasman wanting to reflect on indigenous rights outside the square and true to the church tradition. O'Sullivan is right to point out the Australian church's failure to maintain "into the twenty first century the momentum of its advocacy of reconciliation during the 1990s" (p. 259). This book is a fine primer for those wanting to put right this failure.

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SEAN BRENNAN, LARISSA BEHRENDT, LISA STRELEIN, GEORGE WILLIAMS,
Treaty.

Sydney: The Federation Press, 2005.
 ISBN 1862875596. Pp. 192. Rrp. \$29.95.

A nation “does not make a treaty with itself”, Prime Minister John Howard once commented, with all the confidence of common sense. In his Foreword to this new book, Malcolm Fraser represents more reliable intelligence when he points out that New Zealand, Canada and the USA all have treaties with their Indigenous minorities. Among these former colonies of Great Britain, Australia stands in the uniquely invidious position of lacking a treaty with the traditional owners of its land base.

In 1831, for example, Chief Justice John Marshall of the United States Supreme Court determined that the Cherokee people formed a “domestically dependent nation” (p. 79), and legal judgments such as this contributed to the long tradition of treaty making in North America. There is an equally long tradition of reneging on treaty agreements, which demonstrates why it is important to consider the various ways in which any new treaties might be legally framed – whether as contracts, legislation, within constitutions or by reference to international law. Brennan, Behrendt, Strelein and Williams provide an accessible introduction to the strengths and weaknesses of each framework (pp. 134-40).

Whatever strategies may be adopted, they argue that a treaty process in Australia would make both symbolic and practical contributions to “a renewed society” within which both the past and the future can be addressed with more integrity (p. 155). They rightly insist that the Australian nation-state has in its origins an unresolved problem of legitimacy (p. 5).

Anticipating some recent debates amongst historians, the authors do suggest that *terra nullius* was more a background assumption than an official British policy (p. 103). In the early nineteenth century, for example, the Colonial Office in London required evidence that land was unoccupied and that no earlier forms of title existed. But the Antipodean colonists generally exercised their own wrong-footed common sense, inferring that since the land was not occupied in any “civilised” manner, then no relevant title could exist. The various agents of the Crown in the nineteenth century could engage in dispossession with their consciences deadened by a monological concept of sovereignty.

Any presumption that Australia is undivided in its sovereignty – and therefore cannot make treaties with itself – would obscure the complex realities of our self-government. There are different kinds of “sovereignty”, not least because the authority of “the Crown” in

Australian history has shifted from a monarch to the will of the people (p. 76). Federation gave birth to multiple levels of Commonwealth and State government which collectively represent the Crown's mysterious genealogy. Apart from a federal Constitution which "shares sovereignty" between the Commonwealth and the States (p. 71), sovereignty is also divided between the parliament, the executive and the judiciary (p. 124). In short, our multiply layered self-government is formed by a system of agreements between separate jurisdictions. There is no reason in principle why Indigenous jurisdictions cannot be added to the federated mix.

In 1992, the *Mabo* judgement of the High Court belatedly recognised that traditional Indigenous groups exercise an internal jurisdiction in defining the laws that relate to their own members. In this landmark decision, native title rights and interests were importantly identified as "inherent" – they were recognised rather than "granted" by the Crown. But instead of seeing the inherent system of traditional rights as implying a sovereign system of law (as in North America), the *Native Title Act* 1993 raised a whole new set of questions about the ways in which Indigenous polities could be recognised in Australia.

To begin with, native title cannot exist on private land, or on Crown land that was once privately held. Moreover, the Courts will only recognise traditional rights which are (1) defined by pre-colonial law and custom, and (2) where that system of law and custom has actually been maintained by the traditional owners since the assertion of British sovereignty. The *Yorta Yorta* decision suggested that any innovations in Aboriginal law since that time are not relevant, since the Court recognised "no parallel law-making system" in territories over which the British Crown had asserted its sovereignty (p. 78). This means that *Yorta Yorta* traditional owners would only have been recognised as native title holders if they had continuously maintained their legal system from 1788. And in any case, their sovereignty was presumed to be extinguished.

Not surprisingly, Brennan, Behrendt, Strelein and Williams argue that aspirations for land and cultural justice are unlikely to be satisfied by such tortured legal logic. Nevertheless, they suggest that the *Native Title Act* (section 86F) allows governments to negotiate agreements beyond the narrow definitions of native title, and this provision would allow for "treaty-style" processes (p. 137).

At the very least, the *Native Title Act* has given traditional owners considerable powers to negotiate. As even pragmatists acknowledge, the alternative to negotiation would be decades of litigation, demanding grotesque costs in both financial and social terms. In the case of the *Wimmera* judgement, in December 2005, a positive outcome was established by consent of all the parties and not by litigation. Justice

Merkel determined that the “tide of history” had not washed away the laws and customs of the Wotjobaluk and Wergaia peoples in Western Victoria.

Many of *Pacifica's* readers will be concerned about the issues presented in this book not just as citizens of Australia but as members of churches and synagogues. We stand in traditions for whom the concept of sovereignty can never be reduced to mere monarchs or popular plebiscites. The Hebrew Bible, for example, suggests that faith communities should be suspicious of both human kings and democratic majorities. The prophets and law-makers of Israel established a litmus test of authentic faith in enquiring how we treat fragile minorities – the “widows, orphans and aliens” – which might include in our context the stolen generations and those dispossessed from their traditional country.

If recent scholarship on Deuteronomy is to be taken seriously, then the covenant traditions of the seventh century BCE were contesting the version of sovereignty expressed in Assyrian treaties (*berit*, it is worth noting, means both “covenant” and “treaty” in Hebrew). Jerusalem’s theologians mimicked the empire’s treaty genre in order to assert Israel’s inherent rights and responsibilities under their divine sovereign. This theological twist effectively interpreted the Assyrian empire, against its self-perception, as a “domestically dependent nation” under the reign of God. Deuteronomy claimed a divine perspective which relativised the dreadful inequalities of military and economic power.

Public theology is a tricky business in multicultural societies, but that does not mean we all need to be reduced to blandly generic citizens. That approach would entail an assimilationist logic incompatible with Indigenous politics of identity. The authors of this book recognise that any change to the Constitution would, for example, require broad support and visionary leadership from a range of groups, including the churches (p. 152). They could have developed this point, I think, a little further: the parties to a legitimate treaty process would eventually need to be signed up group by group – each denomination of the church, for example, and each Indigenous nation.

This book has done all Australians a great service, regardless of our particular identities. A treaty is not the only instrument that could be used to establish the legal recognition and rights due to Indigenous people, but it is perhaps the most appropriate way of reconciling the competing sovereignties that beset our national imagination.

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DEBORAH BIRD ROSE,
Reports from a Wild Country: ethics for decolonization.
Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004.
ISBN 0868407984. Pp. 235. Rrp. \$39.95.

Who are the “we” that Paul Keating referred to in 1992? Remember the launch of the International Year for the World’s Indigenous people at Redfern when he said: “*We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion.*” It was powerful stuff. Words never heard before, or since, from a leader of the Federal Government.

Clearly, the “we” was us, present-day, non-Aboriginal and settler (as opposed to original) Australians. Keating saw no ethical disjunction between the activities of our colonial past and our present. Clearly, many did not agree with what he said. Can one take moral responsibility for what others have done?

This book by Deborah Bird Rose seeks to address those key and complex moral issues by offering a construction of the “now” that stretches across chronological time and geographical space. Her starting point, the pain, voice and vulnerability of Aboriginal people, is both refreshing and pertinent. She challenges a disjunctive understanding of colonisation that leaves its activity and legacy in the past. She argues for a different view, a long transitive moment, where the past is connected to the present. Past violence and injustice continue to inform and engage beliefs and actions. The past exerts a presence and moral claim on us.

She describes a “wilderness” of our personal and collective making. We wreak our own wilderness as we seek economic prosperity over the dangers of global warming. We have created a further wilderness in relation to the destruction we have brought to Aboriginal people. She quotes from one of her friends and mentors: “Captain Cook was the real wild one. He failed to recognise Law, destroyed people and country, lived by damage and promoted cruelty.” Our Australian wilderness has become more than geographical, however much we live on the fringes of the continent and ponder the desert that lies within. Our wilderness is about violence and what we have become.

She addresses the place of Christianity in this space of “wilderness”. She draws on two particular groups that have affected the people she has come to know in the Victoria River country: the Jesuits at Daly River in the 1880s, and the Pentecostals in the 1990s. Between this period of more than 100 years, Rose finds nothing very positive to add about this Christian influence. Her own position in relation to Christianity is disclosed.

In 1991, as she recounts, an Aboriginal friend invited her to attend the local Pentecostal church: “it’s really fun, we sing and drink blood and

take fits". Rose declines the invitation as she becomes aware of a professional and personal dilemma. No longer does she feel free to do anything that takes her interest as a researcher. Attending church, she believes, would oppose the values of an Aboriginal friend who publicly defied the Christian God, as he sought to find a place for his own beliefs and culture. She does not go.

And, while I respect her stance, I believe that this is where her book lets the reader down. She admits she cannot understand why her friend might want to go to a church where they "sing and drink blood and take fits". I am not sure I do either. But I would like to understand. I would like to know how her friend's Christian life shapes her family, relationships and cultural values. I would like to know what difference Christianity makes.

Clearly, there is a very wide range of Aboriginal experience with Christianity. There are Aboriginal people today who choose to walk a more united Christian and cultural path. The reasons and motivations for their choice would seem, at least at times, to be complex. As they adopt their ethical and religious stance for living in this land, their beliefs and commitments cannot be dismissed, nor should they be. On the other hand, some have chosen a Christian path away from that provided by their own culture. How their lives make meaning we do not know, at least from this book.

Despite this disappointment, I found this a most valuable, insightful and challenging book. The ethics of decolonisation continue to raise real and relevant issues for us, the descendants of those who have come more recently to this land. What enlivens the book is the very particular and convincing way that Rose engages with those who have most acutely suffered the pain of colonisation. She offers us the vision of a nation more reconciled when settler Australians engage in serious self-reflection and commitment to change. Such a grand notion of reconciliation, especially as Christians believe it to be, merits serious consideration and attention. For, without reconciliation it is not just our ethics that risk becoming compromised. We risk becoming more unsettled within this land, more "wild", living without a religious and spiritual space to engage and sustain us.

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SYLVIE POIRIER,

A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams, and Events in the Australian Western Desert.

Anthropological Horizons. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. ISBN 0802084141. Pp. 303. Rrp. \$US29.95.

Why an ethnography should be reviewed in a theology journal is perhaps explained by three factors: the focus of this issue of *Pacifica* on Indigenous concerns; the setting of this ethnography in a former mission which is rich both in traditional Aboriginal Law and where most of the indigenous people identify as Christian; and the availability of a reviewer who (to declare my interest) worked in the area as a priest for five years in the mid-1990s and has since dabbled in anthropological theory and its links to theology.

In this book, Sylvie Poirier shares the fruits of her fieldwork among the Kukatja and allied groups now living mainly at Yagga Yagga and Wirrumanu (Balgo). It is a well-written and detailed ethnographic study which covers a range of aspects of Kukatja culture, focussing particularly on ancestrality, sociality, and the links between the Ancestors, the spirit world, the deceased and the living. This is all held together by Poirier's "underlying thread" (p. 6), her analysis of dreams in the Kukatja worldview – how they understand the process of dreaming, especially in relation to the *Tjukurrpa* ("the Dreaming"), how dreams are narrated, shared and interpreted, and how they function in revelatory ways. Highlights of these analyses are narrations of particular dreams in which we hear the voices of the local people most immediately.

Before homing in on one particular point of interest, I would mention two points of concern. First, Poirier is inconsistent in her use of standard Kukatja orthography. While variation in terms of personal and place names is unavoidable, given historical usage, other words should use the standard orthography agreed by the Wirrumanu community in the 1980s. Thus words like *tjarada* and *kirda* should be written *tjarata* and *kirta*. Secondly, Poirier generally uses only subsection terms – eight female and eight male – to identify her informants. This makes it difficult even for those who know the local people and, I presume, for the locals themselves to identify people in the book without reference to other identifying data that she might or might not offer. This facilitates against easy verifiability of her data.

Of particular interest to Poirier are the various forces, including dreams, which work towards change and development within the culture. She notes the ways in which even key mytho-ritual elements are transformed. New songs and dances are dreamed, ritual complexes are received from other tribal groups, songs are forgotten, and contemporary events are incorporated. By offering concrete examples of these processes in action, the author offers a helpful antidote to

simplistic notions of permanence which deny any development within Aboriginal cultures.

What remains, though, is the reality of identifiable changes in ceremonies and *Tjukurrpa* stories in the context of a local discourse in which the predominant values are continuity and stability, grounded in the unchanging, foundational reality of *Tjukurrpa*. Poirier suggests that this tension is ameliorated somewhat if we think in terms of revelation. The Kukatja see new elements in terms of something that has always been the reality but has only just been revealed. For example, further parts of the Ancestors' journeys may come to light between where they were known to have entered the ground and where they were known to have re-emerged. Thus the new story is complementary to the already-known ones; the *Tjukurrpa* does not change, but more of its mystery is revealed to us over time.

This point is further highlighted in that dreams, the usual medium for such revelations, may require discernment by those proficient in knowledge of *Tjukurrpa*, and may be rejected if they "cannot be fitted into any existing mythic or ritual form" or do not "match the forms of permanence" (p. 238). For Poirier, this emphasis involves a denial of the creative aspects of cultural development (p. 240). But it would seem, from the examples she gives, that the Kukatja do not so much deny that new elements come into play as give little weight to that aspect. The key value and the major criterion for discernment of these dreamt elements is continuity with the *Tjukurrpa*, ever-present, constant and continually revealing itself. In this sense, contra Poirier's simplistic understanding of such theological terms, the *Tjukurrpa* needs to be seen not simply as immanent in, but also as transcending, present reality (p. 55).

It is in this sense of the *Tjukurrpa* revealing itself ever more fully that we see interesting parallels with theological discussions. For the tension between evident change and a discourse of continuity is present and well known in Christian theology and, I imagine, in the reflections of any religion grounded in foundational texts or experiences. Does revelation come to an end? Do doctrines develop? If so, what criteria do we use to discern between valid and invalid developments, or between the permanent meaning of dogma and its changeable expression? In answering such questions, interesting parallels could be drawn between the Kukatja understanding of *Tjukurrpa* and the Catholic understanding of Tradition in its fullest sense, embracing Scriptural revelation and the living testimony of the Church through the centuries – a reality grounded in foundational events and yet ever-present as ultimate criterion of authenticity.

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DAVID UNAIPON,
Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines.
Edited and introduced by Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker.
Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, an imprint of Melbourne
University Press, Paperback edition 2006.
ISBN 0522852467. Pp. xlviii + 232. Rrp. \$24.95.

David Unaipon was a remarkable man. The son of the first Christian convert at the Point McLeay Aboriginal mission in southern South Australia, he was a devout Christian, an advocate of Aboriginal rights, an inventor and author. *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, which Angus and Roberston commissioned him to write in the 1920s, was to be his Magnum Opus but, until now, it has never been published under his own name. In their introduction to this paperback edition, Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker unfold the story of how William Ramsay Smith, the State's Chief Medical Officer and amateur anthropologist inveigled his way into the good graces of the publisher and secured the rights to the manuscript. With little more effort beyond editing Unaipon's voice out of the text, Ramsay Smith published it under his own name in 1930. Muecke and Shoemaker deserve credit for recovering the manuscript that has languished in obscurity in the Mitchell Library, and publishing it in its original form under its rightful author.

While there is a degree of over-arching coherence to the work, it is fair to say that the book is essentially a "collection" of Unaipon's writings. Most of the stories told in the volume are drawn from his own Ngarrindjeri community, but he includes some stories collected from other regions of the country. Despite the title, the book is more than a collection of "legendary tales". Quite a few of the chapters endeavour to explain other aspects of Aboriginal cultural life such as fishing and hunting practices, marriage customs and sorcery. It reads as an unfinished work, as indeed it was – Unaipon was still conducting research at the time the manuscript was given into the possession of Ramsay Smith. One can only wonder what form it might have taken had he been given the opportunity to see the project through?

David Unaipon was a conciliator: during the 1920s and 1930s, when he was at the height of his powers, he travelled through southern Australia lecturing from pulpits and in halls to promote a greater understanding of, and respect for, his people. By personal example, and force of personality, he confounded stereotypes; he was a "full-blooded member of [his] race" (p. 3) who could cite scripture, reference the classics and write learnedly about the intellectual threads that united his culture to the other cultures of the world. The issue of his "blood" was no small matter in a time when Aboriginal people of full-descent were

expected to die-out, and the fate of the remainder was absorption into the body of the commonwealth. It is disappointing that Muecke and Shoemaker provide the reader with only the most cursory biographical sketch of Unaipon because the circumstances of his life, a life lived between two worlds, would have helped further clarify the nature of the work.

Unaipon's strategy in promoting conciliation, evident in this book and his other writings, was to blend his Christian faith, his love of science, and the profession of his culture in a way that pointed to the universality of human experience. His efforts at synthesis, however, are often uneasy ones. At times he writes from a first person perspective, professing his culture, while at other times he writes as a scholar, detached, documenting his culture as though from a non-Aboriginal perspective. The style he adopts in most of his stories is that of the European fairy-tale or parable. To the modern reader, well-versed in faithful transcripts of oral traditions, it is a voice that jars, but to understand the adoption of it one must understand the times, and Unaipon's efforts to find ways of building bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. On this point, it is a shame that the editors did not make more of an effort, from a literary perspective, to give the reader a deeper understanding of Unaipon's writing style and the influences upon it.

Putting aside issues of style, the stories Unaipon relates are more than just "quaint" tales. He wants us to understand that the stories his people tell are vehicles for ethics, laws, moral behaviour and spiritual philosophy, and more than that, the messages they carry are not unlike those held dear by the world's other civilisations. They are universal ones. This perspective is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the chapter where he writes of his people's own creator, Narroondarie; "a sacred man" who, "like all Prophets and teachers and Philosophers, found that he was confronted by the great social problems of his race: how was he to overcome the vile nature of the human race?" (pp. 134-5). "Human nature", he observes at the beginning of the chapter, "is the same in the Australian Aboriginal as it is in the white, brown, or yellow man, irrespective of nationality, language, and religion" (p. 134). This is Unaipon's consistent and underlying message. It is his humanity.

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STEPHEN MUECKE,

Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy.

Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004.

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As someone seriously contemplating the study of Philosophy from an Indigenous perspective, this book is a good read. Stephen Muecke creates a book "that will attempt to build an architecture of thought incorporating the ancient and the modern". In reading this book, I felt moved beyond the words on the page, as if I were walking through a landscape of "patterned thinking", making connections across many different aspects, from an interview with an elder (Clarrie) in a coffee shop to the European concepts of more familiar ways of knowing philosophy. This is more than just writing, it is an experience of kinship. Stephen writes, attempting to move away from the "Whitefella" culture of the triangle, that is a hierarchy of bosses and subordinates, to patterns of kinship. These "are a key to Aboriginal ways of being". This is a very creative and organic book, reminding me of walking through a landscape of diverse parts, but yet all inter-related. This interrelating, although often 'messy' and difficult to follow, makes remarkable sense when one walks experiencing rather than abstracting about it, from a distance.

Stephen takes us on a journey of truth through, "Time, Country, Technology and Philosophy", bring us to the place where many Indigenous people find themselves now. "When Aboriginal people speak of truth they are most often speaking locally about country and, in their places, feel the direct effects of the cataclysmic event that has been called genocide. They want their usurpers to recognise the truth of this event, in local terms often full of self contradictions and paradoxes. This truth is not distant, "recognisable from afar, it is immanent in encounters that may involve procedures with words, as well as acts, feelings, hunches". This may be a very difficult walk for those schooled in "traditional" ways of learning and knowing. Paradoxes and contradictions are the way of lived life, rather than philosophy that is "uniform procedures recognisable from afar". As an Indigenous woman I found myself enjoying the wandering through this landscape, so full of life, in and through worlds that fold in and through each other again and across time. *A range of hills is always becoming a woman lying down is always becoming a blue-tongue lizard*, is the multiplicity of movement and growth Stephen brings to this study. To abstract what he has written will be to do a major disservice to this work. It is to be read as if one is walking along a river, flowing with diverse life, feeding its waters through the land, but gathering the whole into its presence.

Stephen challenges us to look again at our history. To ask questions of how and why we know the way we do today. How do we know

truth? What is this truth? Is this truth? This book argues "that indigenous philosophy is a thing of today and that its conceptualisation is a way of recasting contemporary thinking", from the assimilation methods of the past, showing that the teachings of our Aboriginal Elders were and are always here. "That the distinction between 'us and them' is a way of talking that oversimplifies the complex cultural relations within and between cultures." It is this complexity that our author invites us to honour and know ourselves as part of, rather than separate from. He does not simplify the "mess" or explain it away. This is the landscape we are living in now. For those of us who attempt at knowing and understanding this place between places, this book offers an insight by being that itself. This may be a strange review, but I will be walking the landscape of this book for many years yet to come.

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